

MUVE (Museum of Ventriloquial Objects)

Reconfiguring Voice Agency in the Liminality of the Verbal and the Vocal

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I, Laura Malacart confirm that the work presented in the thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

MUVE (Museum of Ventriloquial Objects)

Reconfiguring Voice Agency in the Liminality of the Verbal and the Vocal

This project aims at reconfiguring power and agency in voice representation using the metaphor of ventriloquism. The analysis departs from 'ventriloquial objects', mostly moving image, housed in a fictional museum, MUVE. The museum's architecture is metaphoric and reflects a critical approach couched in liminality. A 'pseudo-fictional' voice precedes and complements the 'theoretical' voice in the main body of work. After the Fiction, an introductory chapter defines the specific role that the trope of ventriloquism is going to fulfill in context.

If the voice is already defined by liminality, between inside and outside the body, equally, a liminal trajectory can be found in the functional distinction between the verbal (emphasis on a semantic message) and the vocal (emphasis on sonorous properties) in the utterance. This liminal trajectory is harnessed along three specific moments corresponding to the three main chapters. They also represent the themes that define the museum rooms journeyed by the fictional visitor. Her encounters with the objects provide a context for the analysis and my practice is fully integrated in the analysis with two films (*Voicings*, *Mi Piace*).

Chapter 1 addresses the chasm between the scripted voice and the utterance using the notion of inner speech, leading into a discussion about the role of the inner voice, not as silent vocalisation but as a fundamental cognitive tool that precedes writing. Chapter 2 discusses hermeneutics in the progressive breakdown of the semantic component in the voice, using translation as the site where politics and economics converge with aesthetics. With performance, the discussion broadens into performativity and the political aspects of agency in speech. With Chapter 3 the analysis shifts towards ventriloquial objects whose vocal component is more prominent than the semantic. Singing is considered from a gender perspective, as well as from the materialistic viewpoint of the recording medium.

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Malacart, Laura (dir)

Voicings, 2007/10

The News Editor, 2009

Mi Piace, 2008

MUVE (Museum of Ventriloquial Objects) Reconfiguring Voice Agency in the Liminality of the Verbal and the Vocal

INTRODUCTION

MUVE is a project about the use of the voice in aesthetic practice. My interest in the intersection of language and sound began with my first video work in which I attempted to illustrate *Voyelles*, a 1871 poem by Arthur Rimbaud about synaesthesia. The difficulty of this task later made me avoid using sound altogether. Avoidance resulted in an ineffectual strategy, possibly because silence does not exist on earth. The soundless eeriness of my short video *Accidents* (2001), where planes and birds appear to collide in slow motion, reverberates to this day in the light of the 9/11 events. I remember the shock generated by this innocent 60-second video, displayed on a small monitor, during the exhibition opening in September 2001 – I blame its silence coupled with the inevitable association with 9/11.

When I began to tackle the use of the voice I realised the voice carried an excess. As a material it was too hard to control in the sense that 'it' always said more than I wanted it to say: I could control the linguistic content but I could not disregard the multiple and complex connotations of a singular, unique utterance. So I abided completely by the 'material' and produced some works in which I avoided linguistic communication altogether. *Aural Mounds* (1999) is a two-screen video installation where a barely decipherable black and white image 'emits' a very visceral sound (one produced masticating ten packets of chewing gum). During that same period I was also researching the voice and experienced a frustration in either a general lack of material or its compartmentalisation in specific disciplines. Aside from Michel Chion's *Audiovision* (published in English in 1994) most writing about the voice in the moving image tended to deal with the soundtrack separately from the picture. Rick Altman's contributions with *Sound Theory and Sound Practice* (1992) falls into this category, while remaining a significant point of reference in shifting the focus onto the soundtrack. Kaja Silverman's work on gender and the voice, *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988) was and still is, influential to practice.

In a sense film theory and aesthetic discourses were dominated by post-structuralist theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis that assumed that there is nothing outside the signifying content of language. It was as if the right kind of theoretical material had to be created by harnessing knowledge from a number of disciplines in which the voice had become trapped, and of course through practice. This is why this project is fuelled by an ethos focusing on the 'voice apparatus', with the intervention of theoretical contributions from materialist philosophy (T. Adorno, W. Benjamin) and structural linguistics (L. Vygotsky) that become fundamentally integrated with the contributions of the mentioned film theorists.

In 2006 I created a performance at the Whitechapel Gallery where I allowed the voice 'to say more than it should have' and deliberately based the work on a strong change of register. The live performance was called *Promotion* and I devised one-to-one encounters with the public where I enticed each participant to join me for a complementary glass of wine so long as they agreed to listen to my marketing message about the event they were participating in. Unbeknownst to the public my voice was pre-recorded, hence the individual attention promoted by marketing was in fact standardised. I mimed my speech into a fake lapel mike that was meant to indicate how my voice was being amplified by the speakers in the room. I initially pretended to read from the publicity sheet I created for the event but then the 'voice' went out of character and started to make inappropriate comments on the content read and it progressively become hysterical in a crescendo of rage asking people to leave the room. At this point my miming had stopped and the guest noticed that it had not been me that addressed them, but a pre-recorded voice. This self-fashioned ventriloquial voice is suitable to introduce MUVE because it is situated in a fine art context and it focuses on the potential of the voice as a material traversed by language and imbued with politics.

MUVE is conceived from the need to formulate a conceptual framework for a critical and applied use of the voice. The utterance has to be conceived by taking into account its political and ideological potential exemplified by the expression 'having a voice'. Of course in the domain of representation the perspective on agency has to shift from a direct to an indirect one: as we see and hear speaking subjects we need to question the construction and role of the utterance. The spoken word has a *mise en scène*. It is constructed, instigated or scripted; the notion of *mise en scène*

in turn is implicated in the diverse discourses connected to the cinematic apparatus and theatrical production.

While this project acknowledges the importance of critical debates on moving image and performance practices in connection with the voice, it is also true that the framework in MUVE engages with these practices without aspiring to be situated within the specifics of each discipline. This is due primarily to the fact that often when particular disciplines focus on the role of sound, like cinema and sound art, they do so by considering the aural component autonomously: MUVE instead takes into account the utterance multi-modally, or audiovisually. In addition, as a context for audiovision shapes up from the 1980s within film theory, this research aspires to bring these considerations of the construction and effect of the utterance beyond the domain of the moving image.

This is where the notion of ventriloquism comes into play to develop a discussion about voice representation and hermeneutics. Ventriloquism, a conceptually and historically rich trope, with religious and theatrical connotations, is transformed in MUVE into a methodology through the 'ventriloquial object' and its attributes. The ventriloquial objects contained in the main body of this project are predominantly examples from moving image: this is a practical move designed to facilitate cross-referencing and access to the material by the readers.

I use liminality in my title because this notion is pertinent to the voice: an utterance leaves the body of the speaker to enter a public space, then to enter the body of the listener; sound turns corners and penetrates walls. The analysis becomes further complicated when considering the presence of an apparatus of production and reproduction. And of course each listening experience is unique: not merely because of the uniqueness of each listener, in terms of their set of values and experiences, but also because of their unique position in space. For these reasons when the voice manifests itself in space, it is problematic to think of it in terms of any fixed or consolidated positioning.

Furthermore, when we consider the voice perspective from an ideological position and think about the notion of a *mise en scène*, it becomes useful to frame it via a 'point of speech' and 'point of audition', both formally and ideologically.

Ventriloquial objects have the critical intention of problematising the artifice of the voice apparatus (and therefore its 'point of speech and audition'). This happens through moments of incongruity, exemplified in less naturalistic choices of how uttering bodies are represented. These moments function as alert mechanisms for the audience to question the source of the utterance (or 'point of speech'). Emblematically, when an audience watches a ventriloquist performance, we are alerted by the intrinsic set up that two voices belong to a unique source. As we 'experience' a synch sound performance by two sources, characteristically in mutual dissent, we may look for clues that reveal the artifice. Ventriloquial objects are constructed to disavow naturalistic speech for the purpose of revealing something about the constructed nature of the utterance.

Liminality pertains to the voice in a number of ways: in how it travels and dies at the point of hearing, in the shifts between specific speaking and listening positions, and in the attempt to classify the voice between speech and sound. While cinema's vococentric tendency tends to equate the voice with speech, therefore to reduce it to linguistic communication, this project will rescue the aspect of the voice that is more concerned with musicality or prosody. My classification of the voice is predicated on a liminality that includes the contiguity between the verbal (voice with the purpose of semantic communication) and the vocal (voice where musical elements are emphasised).

A project on the voice calls for a critical approach couched in liminality, and the structuring of each component in MUVE is orchestrated accordingly. Echoing the reader's subsequent encounter with the ventriloquial objects, a tale featuring the first visit to the Museum provides a context for the analysis that follows. Just as the museum is emblematic of the spatial and ephemeral nature of the aural, the encounter with the objects is organised according to three specific overarching topics (outlined below). These topics have emerged from the overall analysis and represent critical points of intersection between the verbal and the vocal. The movement of the visitor and the reader alike, echoed by that of the building, is signposted by three thematic moments that negotiate the difficulty in structuring liminality.

These 'difficult' moments are those productive moments of incongruity, characteristic of ventriloquial objects, where it becomes possible to problematise 'point of speech and audition'. I have identified three moments in an hypothetical continuum of verbal and vocal, but others are possible. These three topics correspond to the thematic sub-divisions that organise the space in MUVE; at the same time they are the themes organising the enquiry in the three main chapters. The sub-divisions in the space are:

1. The incongruous relationship of the voice to a scripted text. (Emphasis on the verbal).
2. The degrading of semantic communication through performance and translation.
3. The status and communicative role of the singing voice. (Emphasis on the vocal).

The fictional tale is organized in five sections: its internal construction and overall significance invoke a relationship of fiction-facticity that is one of contiguity and complementarity. Since this is a practice-related project, the tale is for me necessary starting point and it acknowledges the need for a more comprehensive mode of experiencing and interpreting the artworks. It complements the academic narrative and in a sense it can be seen to unsettle it. In addition, the adoption of a writing mode in two 'voices' echoes the ventriloquial model.

The writing is integrated organically with and through my practice, exemplified by three key recent moving image works (*Voicings*, *The News Editor*, *Mi Piace*) that participate by framing the discussion from within. *Voicings* and *Mi Piace* are encountered in the *Fiction* (25, 27-28); the introductory chapter *Ventriloquisms and the Ventriloquial Object* references all three films (41, 59-60). *Voicings* is discussed in relation to the problematisation of the script in chapter I (66); its conceptual framework is described in the same chapter (102-08) in connection with theoretical questions raised by linguistics and the political agency in the voice. Because of its breadth and complexity *Voicings* is used to introduce the problematics of mis-translation in chapter II (109, 110, 118); it is referenced in the same chapter when considering the role of the affect of the performer (127) and the problematisation of a point of speech (139, 155). The same work returns briefly in chapter III (202) and

of course in the conclusion, as do all three films. The production background of *The News Editor* is discussed in chapter II and integrated with the discussion of the representation (as translation) of an original text via the voice (113, 122, 128, 130, 154). Finally, in chapter III *Mi Piace* contributes to a discussion on gender, power and spectatorship through the singing voice (161, 167, 184, 185-88).

The structural organisation of the main body of the thesis via objects, fiction and theory, takes the objects as catalysts for the discussion to open and develop in the writing, which is organised according to the three overarching themes and exemplified by the curatorial slant of the museum.

The Fiction

The project begins with a *Fiction* set in an undetermined future. *Part I* of the pseudo-fictional account describes the recent coming into being of a museum (MUVE). The architecture of the museum (rotating structure; semi-opaque partitions and flooring; light sensitive exterior walls; no furnishings or contextual information) is suggestive and undermining of a fixed taxonomy, the classification is provisional and fluid. The descriptions and narrative provide the metaphors of the research. Within MUVE, all sound-related artefacts (such as films, sculptures, performances, literature and videos) have been reclassified as 'ventriloquial objects' and they have been selected because they challenge the dominant role of the visual axis through an aural component.

As the space gives way to privilege the encounter with the objects, a fundamental premise is liminality. As described earlier, liminality is inherent in the aural dimension by virtue of how sound interacts in the physical space and it is unavoidable when one tries to classify it. Whereas a visit or a reading must privilege a linear trajectory, the symbolic framing of this journey is structured according to a three dimensional circular environment that moves (MUVE). In its provision of a symbolic structural framework, *Part I* is populated with literary citations (J.G. Ballard; Oliver Sacks) alongside real events that reference the aural.

Part II of the fiction (which had the working title *The Dinner. Critical Voices, Political Lies*) stages the political context behind the curatorial setting of MUVE. Starting from the idea that culture is subject to material conditions of production and distribution, this section describes a situation where curatorial research is surreptitiously appropriated by institutional powers, using illicit technologies and covert manoeuvring. The fictional characters are based on the critics and writers who have written about ventriloquism and are featured in the following chapter devoted to the formulation of the ventriloquial object as methodology. The setting is loosely based on specific areas of the University College London campus and their historical anecdotal background.

The following three parts stage the impromptu visit to the museum by a female visitor who is unaware of being the first to visit MUVE. *Part III* stages her encounter with a man, whose role is initially ambiguous (performer or staff). Her being the first visitor is emblematic of a fresh approach; she is unencumbered by the knowledge of that type of experience (whether first or second hand) and the fact that she is unaware of that serves the same purpose. The man's character is based on actor John Hurt in Atom Egoyan's film *Krapp's Last Tapes* (2000) and on his desk I placed Marcel Duchamp's sculpture *With Hidden Noise* (1916). John is revealed to be a member of staff and he shares his experience of the moving museum and its displays.

Part IV stages the encounter with another group of ventriloquial objects, on the ground floor. The aim of this short chapter is to dramatize the visitor's collusion with objects showing that the linguistic register of the verbal has become corrupted; the experience is disconcerting. The chapter opens with a quotation of expletives uttered by a man lying on the floor and the visitor finds the room distressful and alienating. The self-deprecating man is a performer (Matt Mullican) and the visitor's response to his performance is based on my own experience. Distracted by a Ballardian character, the visitor finds soothing the prosodic rhythm of the Italian film (*Sicilia!*). *Part V* abruptly stages a detailed commentary on the experience of my film *Mi Piace* where the register shifts from the verbal to the vocal mode - just like it does in the main body of writing at the point where this work is discussed. Here the female visitor, writer and filmmaker symbolically conflate along a tense affective narrative thread.

Ventriloquisms and Ventriloquial Objects

Prior to 'entering' the museum of ventriloquial objects, *Ventriloquisms and Ventriloquial Objects* considers specific examples where the metaphor of ventriloquism has been used as a tool for critical enquiry across a range of contemporary arts disciplines. Having acknowledged a revival of ventriloquism in a number of distinct projects located in philosophy, cultural history and sculpture, the comparative analysis leads into the particular definition of the ventriloquial object as a framework - hence the role of the objects in MUVE. A significant distinguishing element is my interpretation that the artifice of ventriloquism *displays* the conflict that takes place within the object rather than concealing it. It therefore can be used as a positive term rather than emphasising the nature of deceit that the artifice conventionally is seen to set into play. In addition the adjectivisation of ventriloquism into 'ventriloquial' means that the trope is transformed into a quality pertaining to the object that in turn defines the framework.

In this way the use of ventriloquism is opened to a number of *applied* possibilities that accommodate the complexity offered by this trope across media. It is important to consider that one of my core motivating intentions behind this project was born out of the dissatisfaction of locating the aural in a number of specific disciplines that consider it as a distinct modality. Instead, I wanted to propose a model that prioritized sound but in a multimodal or audiovisual way, regardless of the media: after all this is how we experience sound in the world.

Some attention is devoted to questions around the uncanny and magic of sound: these notions pertain to the phenomenology of sound but also are closely tied to the history of ventriloquism. Ventriloquial objects are located in a part naturalistic domain, they also 'disturb' it by making the apparatus evident - this occurs via a number of formal techniques, which will be found by journeying through the main body of writing.

Having discussed the discerning features of ventriloquial objects, I consider a number of articles where ventriloquism has been used in contemporary critical analysis. This reading is designed to perform a number of roles: to emphasise the 'bottom up' approach of a critical discussion that in this practice-related thesis

stems from the objects as catalysts; to define the framework of the ventriloquial object as rigorous but also open to a number of specific configurations and media; to further develop the distinction between uses of ventriloquism (ventriloquisms) and the ventriloquial object, and identify aspects that will be useful for an applied critical practice of the voice in the main body.

The critical reading of ventriloquisms begins with *The Voice and its Invisible Apparatus* and Rick Altman's article devoted to a critique of the 'spoken' soundtrack. In spite of proposing a deceitful example of ventriloquism, Altman's piece is very relevant since it raises the question of the ideological implications of the spoken word in cinema and its obliteration as a practice and therefore its absolution from an ideological position or responsibility. Another key point raised by Altman consists in noting that a scripted utterance becomes naturalised and masks itself as 'spontaneous' speech. This is identified as one of the 'problematic' moments explored in Chapter I.

Tony Conrad discusses the work of Tony Oursler in *Magic and the Voice Beyond the Frame* and considers how the sculptor succeeds in imbuing his speaking figures with a sense of magic, long lost by the contemporary moving image. His genealogy of the hermeneutics of magic is useful for this discussion in that it informs later considerations on how the inception of cinema has affected perception and the evolution of the notion of the inner voice. In *Myth, Past Voices and Present Bodies*, Eleanor Margolies discusses the ventriloquism of playwright Tadeusz Kantor and performer Fiona Templeton. These practitioners have been singled out because their ventriloquism relates to the notion of living bodies channelling dead voices. Margolies is concerned with issues to do with the apparatus and the notion of uncanny voices inhabiting live bodies and imbued with a mythology from the Yiddish tradition to the classics. The richness of the issues brought by these practitioners has a relevance for ventriloquial objects beyond the domain of theatre.

The Sentient Voice and the Machine flags Joseph Auner's contribution on the ventriloquial voice and his use of the postmodern notion of the cyborg in the context of the voice in popular music. The critic's contribution is useful in the context of ideas around emotionality, distributed cognition and techniques of voice repetition – devices that will feature in the main body of writing – and how these tools can be

read and deployed in the context of ventriloquial objects. *Repetition and the Emotional Voice* shifts the topic of voice repetition from music to theatre and references emotionality in the context of a linguistic analysis. The work considered is Anna Gaskell's *Acting Lessons* (2007) that fits the model of the ventriloquial object, and whose strategies would locate it in Chapter II of MUVE.

The section to follow, *Voice, Subtitling and Cultural Ventriloquism*, considers the politics of dubbing and subtitling. They are not simply interesting formal questions for a cinematic work, but they have ideological repercussions in what message is eventually proposed with the translation. They are also tied to economic issues in that these practices implicate different costs and therefore the distribution choices become bound by such economic rather than aesthetic choices. These issues reverberate further in the main body of writing dealing with translation and mistranslation in Chapter II.

To conclude this section, *Ventriloquial Objects as Audiovisual Objects* makes reference to a sculpture exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute: *With Hidden Noise* (2004). The show is named by a Duchamp's sculpture that can be seen to emblemise the ventriloquial object in that its 'voice' is problematised at the level of production and consumption. The ethos of this show proposes that sculpture is far from silent and my choice to close with examples from this collection is a reminder that the ventriloquial object (as multimodal or audiovisual) is a model that potentially spans across media and aesthetic fields.

Chapter I

Sounding Out Thoughts: of Lying Fathers, Autistic Football and Infantilisation

Chapter I sets off the analysis starting from the first set of ventriloquial objects. The thematic focus is the problematic relationship between a voice that is made to appear spontaneous and its scripted nature. The *Premise* introduces the notion of a 'voice apparatus' that is implicated in the politics of representation. In the 1970s, film theory questioned the ideological role of the cinematic apparatus, crucially hijacking its ideological function via the axis of visibility. Here instead, the emphasis is on the aural. More specifically, the analysis addresses the discrepancy inherent

between text and utterance (a scripted dialogue contradicts the very notion of an interaction based upon unpredictability).

In *Close Ups* two ventriloquial objects undergo a scrutiny: *ME/WE* is a 90-second film by Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Zidane *a 21st Century Portrait*, a feature length by Douglas Gordon. These two works have been selected since they problematise the film script in complementary ways. They also offer the opportunity for an analysis of masculinity incorporated within a critique of standard commercial media. *ME/WE* opens and expands upon previous considerations of the uncanny voice of ventriloquial objects with a reference to Margaret Iversen's reading of Freud's uncanny. This film's voice mismatches throws into question the conventional isomorphic relationships between body and voice from a gender perspective (Kaja Silverman) as well as opening a discussion on the hermeneutics of silent film (*Singin' in the Rain*).

In *Whose Voice Am I?* the lack of audible speech in silent film and the silent textual rendition of Zidane's voice will be used as cue to begin to undermine the role of language in thought process. The theoretical ground is provided by Silverman's overarching argument calling into question sound and the voice in relation to 1970s theory, along with structural linguistic positions (Emile Benveniste). Consequently it will be theorised how voice, thought process and the making and hermeneutics of artworks, share a common ground where language has only a partial role. (My argument against the pre-eminence of language underscores the whole project where I argue against thought process depending on language exclusively or the fact that voice is more than language).

Contributions by Roland Barthes emphasising the material and political nature of the voice will punctuate this section and the following one, *Thought as Artwork, Artwork as Inner Speech* developing the argument through the contribution of 1930s formalist poetics (Boris Eikhenbaum; Lev Vygotsky) along with contemporary readings (Ron Levaco; Paul Willemen) that use this tool to articulate film hermeneutics with psycholinguistic considerations on the nature of thought process and the inner voice. The contribution of the psychologists and linguists in relation to the inner voice, in turn mirrored by the making and hermeneutics of the artwork, are

designed to argue for the syncretic nature of cognitive processes that are not defined or limited by language alone.

Further considerations of speech agency return in *Incongruence & Infantilisation as Critique* when more ventriloquial objects reiterate the chasm between speaker and script. More formal strategies are discussed with *The Arbor* (Cleo Barnard) adopting verbatim theatre techniques but in particular with my own film *Voicings* that not only operates formally in the gap in between author and utterer, but where its content of language 'unlearning' can be read as a politically deconstructive message. The productive moments of incongruity proposed by ventriloquial objects in this chapter and reviewed in this final section offer a critical survey of (the verbal) emphasis in the script masquerading as voice. They also anticipate a different incongruity in the verbal addressed in the next chapter, which considers the productive inadequacy of languages and translation.

Chapter II

Translated Voices, the Sense that Cannot Utter its Name

Chapter II puts forward more ventriloquial objects to address another problematic moment in the collusion of the verbal and the vocal: the breakdown of the semantic component via translation and mis-translation. The *Premise* asserts the context for the enquiry that is liminally connected to the discussion in Chapter I: further considerations of *Voicings* acknowledge that an unorthodox form of translation here produces a political outcome. Translation and mis-translation become the focus for a discussion on the aesthetic potential of these methodologies to offer a more 'truthful' position about language, or its limitations; they also reinforce the hypothesis that thinking is considered to be a syncretic process and not exclusively language based.

The enquiry is framed by the role of translation proposed by Walter Benjamin and refers to contemporary sources that stem from his paradigm (Gabriel Rockhill). Another theoretical framework is provided by the critique of the apparatus anticipated by Bertolt Brecht's estrangement principle and adopted by materialist filmmakers such as Straub/Huillet, whose work *Sicilia!* is the first ventriloquial object

scrutinised in the section *Outside One's Language: Suffering the Language*. Barton Byg develops a critique of Straub/Huillet's German films according to a Brechtian framework and I, in turn, consider Byg's framework for my analysis of *Sicilia!* an Italian film by Straub/Huillet; I selected this film since my native knowledge of Italian enables me to test Byg's propositions by listening accurately for its use of prosody.

Since what drives the voice here is prosody, and it is seen to affect meaning, we could say that the power of the verbal is undermined by the intervention of the vocal. These considerations on translation informed the making of my short film *The News Editor* opening the next section *The Music, the Voice, its Accent and the Machine*. Both *The News Editor* and Xiaopeng Huang's *Murder Was the Case* are assessed against the paradigm set out through Straub/Huillet, Brecht and Adorno, along with contemporary readings of Brecht from Barton Byg and Patrick Primavesi. Both ventriloquial objects offer a digitally mediated and unorthodox translation, operating as a critique of the source text; the original language becomes deterritorialised and the new content is brought forward by calling to task its spectatorship.

A reading of *Boomerang* by Nancy Holt and Richard Serra concludes this section testing out this 1974 work in the light of a materialist reading of its televisual apparatus. The time discrepancy between Straub/Huillet and Holt's works and the more contemporary works discussed is mirrored by two critical readings of *Boomerang*: one by Rosalind Krauss from the 1970s, the other by Anna M. Wagner is contemporary with the other works discussed.

The following four sections in Chapter II are devoted to a number of readings of Matt Mullican's work. His work is very important because operates in two languages: his language under hypnosis and his conscious interpretations of the cognitive processes he explores. It is useful to look at Mullican's work because it harnesses different strands of this discussion, and it also accommodates different theoretical paradigms. His performances under hypnosis are especially significant in this chapter devoted to the breakdown of verbal communication, and set up an unprecedented resource for a discussion around cognition of the role of language. *The Disorder of Language and the Music of Thought* considers the alienation inherent in language (Benjamin) and links it to the notion of suffering in the struggle

to articulate within Mullican's performances. Mullican describes these struggles as a temporary entry into the state of mental illness. The artist's attempt to understand consciousness by stepping out of it, or through the objectification of the self, are going to be read against a philosophical paradigm with two essays on the voice by Giorgio Agamben in the following two sections (*Vocation and the Body* and *Sightless Seer*), and later on against a neuropsychological reading of the role of the aural in the brain and thought process (Bob Synder) in the final section *Body of Evidence*.

The harnessing of these discussions is significant for two reasons. Mullican demonstrates how aesthetic practice has the ability to make productive discursive connections between apparently incompatible areas of research, and corroborate, from the perspective of a voice driven research, the overarching notion that thought process is not confined to a linguistic paradigm. Given that for Synder thinking has a strong connection with kinaesthetics and with musical apprehension, this undermining of the linguistic dimension (the verbal) opens the way for the final main section focused on the singing voice.

Chapter III

The Unbearable Pleasure of Listening as the Record of Sin

Chapter III focuses on another problematic encounter between the verbal and the vocal. The emphasis has now shifted to the vocal: *The Unbearable Pleasure of Listening as the Record of Sin* draws on a number of examples from the moving image and the visual arts, which addresses the singing voice as an unsettling catalyst. When the vocal component of the voice becomes more prominent than its linguistic content, the voice can be seen to acquire another status: how can the vocal critically interfere with signification?

What is important to remember is that ventriloquial objects perform a subversive role by undermining not only the linguistic code, but also music. Music can be challenged on two fronts: as form, or as an established set of conventions just like language, but also in terms of its symbolic role. As a way of introducing this large area for speculation, the *Premise* (working title *Burning Questions*) 'plays' a clip

from Terence Malick's *Badlands*. I chose this sequence because in this short span the spectator has an opportunity to experience several distinct roles fulfilled by music and singing. This showcase, featuring both diegetic and non-diegetic examples, strongly articulates how much the aural is invested in questions of normativity.

The first section, *Historicism Vanguard and Resistance* considers the work by Jacques Attali, *Noise*, in order to embrace the problematic territory of a singing voice caught in the domains of ritual, ideology and economics; its potential as counterculture, or noise, has to be celebrated - in this sense we can say that ventriloquial objects are 'noisy'. Attali's work is important in framing this chapter not only because he brings ideological and political implications to the critique of the aural, but also because his narrative very boldly delinearises history (Jameson). His framework departs from traditional diachronic notions of historiography: it gains an affinity with a Foucauldian approach, where synchronic paradigms are tested through the grid of material practices and the bodies traversed by them. This approach connects with the very foundations underpinning my project. By questioning how to formulate the present, we are forced to identify our perspective as audience, or our 'point of audition' in relation to the 'point of speech'. The objects included in this chapter have a breadth that spans from the beginnings of recording technology to the present; the historicism addressed here is concerned with problematising questions of memory, spectatorship and ideology.

Opera acquires a significant focus in this discussion because of its particular configuration of speech and music. Caroline Abbate proposes a reading of opera where music can take the role of the utterance: she rejects Catherine Clement's feminist critique about the universal diegetic annihilation of women in operatic plots. We can see how a discussion on opera must soon become entrenched in issues of gender and economics. Silverman's question about the gender isomorphism of body and voice comes back in this chapter and is further addressed later through my film *Mi Piace*. Michel Poizat's approach to opera is brought in to emblematises the elitism associated with opera.

In the section *The Problem with Fitzcarraldo*, Herzog's eponymous film is discussed at length for his author's conscious and unconscious interpretation of the operatic

voice in a complex historical and economic milieu. This conversation interweaves a number of contributions: e.g. concerning the role of opera in the history of South America (Dolkart), or taking a cue from the role of the gramophone in the film that is used to explore the relationship of memory and the brain (Guyau, Freud, Kittler). Artists' films are also integrated in this discussion, firstly with Aura Satz's short film *Silent Seams* referred to for its material and historical connotations. Then, more importantly with a ventriloquial object that was created in a critical response to *Fitzcarraldo*: Sharon Lockhart's film *Teatro Amazonas* is the subject of the section to follow in *Monotone and Difference*.

In *Live Recording, Repetition and Gender Fetishism* I use *Diva* by Jean Jacques Beneix to introduce a discussion on gender and the operatic voice that develops with my film *Mi Piace*. The opera extract (*O Mio Babbino Caro*) used in this ventriloquial object features a daughter challenging her father's authority; his veto over her choice of lover is opposed with a threat of suicide sung in jest. The film focuses on a very small fragment of this song ('Mi piace bello bello', 'it pleases me to') obsessively repeated by the singer; the practice evidences the uniqueness of each sung utterance and defies the idea of a 'technically mastered' performance. The film is told mostly through its soundscape and forces questions around the central role of spectatorship and interpretation.

With Vito Acconci's *Theme Song* the operatic voice gives way to 'bad singing' as a strategy that implicates the construction of a gendered spectator. This section, entitled *Bad Singing & Impossible Love: The Law That Cannot Tell Its Name*, aligns Acconci with artist John Baldessari performing *Baldessari Sings LeWitt. Theme Song* is a video work that problematises the gender construction of the spectator. At this point I reintroduce a discussion on the uncanny, this time via a reading of the mythological tale of the sirens reinterpreted by Kafka and discussed by Mladen Dolar. I use Dolar because the critic integrates psychoanalysis with Marxism, but more specifically, because in this piece he reinterprets Todorov's uncanny through Lacan (Todorov's position was introduced at the beginning of this writing when it was established that ventriloquial objects are invested in a form of uncanny).

In another male, and strategically unflattering singing performance, Baldessari deploys singing to 'pay a tribute' to the laws establishing the foundation of

conceptual art. I interpret this gesture as a polemical statement and recontextualise it in the polarised aesthetic debates between the East and West coasts of the USA. Baldessari individual gesture against the norm leads to the final section featuring a hesitant choir lacking a leader. *Undisciplined Choir* brings together a video work featuring an amateur chorus with a Foucauldian reading of the discipline of choral singing (Garnett). I consider how *Everything's Gonna Be* (Zdjelar) partakes in the discussion that deconstructs the normative role of choir performance. This work also develops a conversation that reconsiders the notion of history and memory, an integral topic of this chapter (Korsten) that ultimately translates to the ideological question of what constitutes our present - or 'point of audition'.

ii. MUVE (MUSEUM OF VENTRILOQUIAL OBJECTS) A FICTION

I

The museum is of cylindrical shape on two floors. The first floor rotates over the ground floor in real time, in synch with the 24-hour clock. Access to the galleries is via a lift located in the middle core of the building. Each floor is divided in three rooms, whose walls depart at 120-degree angle from the core structure. The three rooms on each floor correspond thematically, but each experience of the content relies on the time-based nature of the building. The material of the external walls is light sensitive and opaque in daylight and transparent in the night. MUVE is open 24 hours a day.

The entrance is via a door on the opposite street, leading underground to the base of the lift. This precaution was created for acoustic purposes to keep the structure protected from sonorous interference from the surroundings. Oxygen is absorbed through the walls via specifically designed porous polyurethane developed for this building in view of its original function. In fact, the museum was meant to house a large collection of living statues, which had been in danger of extinction, and were in the course of being rescued from a variety of sites.

One of these was identified about twenty miles from Chiraquito, where the highway forks to Red Beach and Vermillion Sands. Other abstract sculptures were located by the roadside in these proximities, by following a hazardous gravel track that once had been a well-kept private road. The rescuers were too late, as, what once were sonic statues, responding to the slipstream of the passing cars with a series of warning vibratos, had already expired. The two inanimate specimens are kept in the underground archive of the museum, available to specialised researchers upon application. The basement archive also houses a specimen of a sonic scorpion that was reported disturbing the livestock in the proximity of the area. It is about the size of a lobster, its frequencies so high, producing a thin tremolo quaver almost inaudible to humans.

Relatively recently the fate of the museum had been uncertain and the premises empty for an interim period, due to some conflict over the curatorial strategy on

behalf of the board of trustees. Their internal conflicts had been exploited by the MRC,¹ who in turn had succumbed to the pressure of the MOD², who took presidency over one third of the space and made it ‘temporarily’ inaccessible to visitors and trustees alike. Internal rumours spread that A and A1 (ground and first floor galleries) were employed for sonic warfare development: signs of activity were present with sporadic vibrations and occasional sightings of personnel.

MUVE has now been open to the public for a few days, even if no inauguration took place, nor any marketing and press operations seem to have been organised. It could be speculated that this is because the collections are still incomplete and because there are some concerns over the acoustic environmental design.

One of its most prestigious trustees is former opera singer Dame Gioconda, who is also involved in the advisory panel of the new opera theatre in St. Petersburg. It was in such location that the Russian singer met her flamboyant architect friend Matteo during some testing in situ. Matteo worked on the inner ceiling of the opera theatre that was designed to adjust at each performance to create acoustic effects ad hoc. It was during the Russian consultancy period that Dame Gioconda was enlisted in the Board of Trustees, despite some controversy on behalf of the established members. It was not simply the status and musical competence of the former diva that qualified her for the role, but her disturbed sense of hearing.

Thanks to the diagnosis of Prof. Sacks, whose recent studies had focussed on aural hallucinations of various guises, it was decreed that Dame Gioconda was of a particular sensitive aural disposition. Her condition, which had bothered her for years with a by-product of chronic daily headaches, meant that she was able to perceive, alas too clearly, the sonic resonance in buildings. Her illness became an asset for the museum, whose construction had to be calibrated to the highest level of sonic ecology.

Given that sonic resonance in buildings has reached alarming proportions, to the point of alleging to it the cause of last earthquake on February 26th, extreme

¹ Ministry for Research and Culture.

² Ministry of Defense.

cautionary measures have been taken for this project. It would be inefficient to deal with the problem simply by eliminating the consequences of the pollution. This seems to be the fate of older existing buildings, where regular cleaning using the range of sonovacs available, allows to barely keep abreast of the problem. The sound trucks where the discards are disposed of have a progressive knock-on effect on the environment at large, and privatisation of the suppliers has jeopardised their efficiency. Hence the preventive role fulfilled by Dame Gioconda during the structural development of the museum. As a cautionary measure to ensure that the achieved standards are preserved, speaking devices, such as mobile phones, radios and Dictaphones, are banned from a 500mt. radius from the building.

Inside the museum traditional furnishings are obsolete. Sounds and projections simply appear unencumbered thanks to the new range of air density projection screens. Where antique sculptural objects are present, these are floated by air jets and remain exposed and unlabelled. A further curatorial tease has been introduced as a suggestion on behalf of Dame Gioconda, in keeping with her playful spirit: periodically one item randomly selected amongst the collection is displaced and the visitor who is able to identify the item receives a complimentary recording of the diva.

To the visitor, the museum has a different feel from the traditional archaic cumbersome institutions housing a plethora of carefully documented objects. The tripartite room division is extremely ephemeral, since the partitioning walls are made respectively of non-reflective glass and one-way mirrors and the same applies to the floors. Given the rotation of the first floor, and the nature of the partitions, the structural composition of each room continuously changes in look and feel. Such a design tallies with the conceptual curatorial concerns, where each thematic grouping remains open to internal re-contextualisation. In turn, this arrangement practically and metaphorically reflects the need for overlaps in the conceptual and physical boundaries that is typical of sound.

The installation does not concern itself with chronology but is conceptually organised to orchestrate an experience of aural ambivalence according to themes that are reciprocally liminal. The thematic distinctions are indicatively based around two elements of the voice that help maintain its ambivalence: the verbal and the

vocal, in other words, depending if the emphasis lay on semantics or musicality.
MUVE's six galleries at a glance:

Ground floor A/1 st Floor A:	Voice in Spaces ('Temporarily Unavailable')
Ground floor B/1 st Floor B:	Voice as Verbal
Ground floor C/1 st Floor C:	Voice as Vocal

The final conceptual resolution in MUVE was achieved through the 'covert research' machinated by the MRC, who in order not to commission academic research, bated the specialists into meeting in a convivial situation, then elaborated on the proceeds recorded through surveillance equipment. These academics are unaware of their contribution to the project.

II

'Should you wish to accept to attend the dinner, you are urged to register by filling the attached form and enclose the requested documentation by no later than 20th July'.

Rick held the paper a little longer, lingering with a heightened feeling between his fingertips. As he hesitated to fold the letter, anonymously signed by the MRC, his fingertips pressed onto the smooth paper with its creamy off-white tinge. He was fighting a sense of smugness that went against his political bias and his feelings towards governmental policies. This was his first gleeful moment in a long succession of mildly depressive days and it was due to the opportunity of an academic dinner in a sought location in the CNS.³

The Old Refectory was renown for its acoustic properties and had been closed to the public for some years; it was located in an old university campus that had been abandoned since the last coup, when it was briefly turned into a penal complex. Only the campus libraries were still operational, as they had been taken over by an independent body of volunteers. The Old Refectory, on the other hand, had just ceased to appear in the headlines: its anomalous occurrences could not be

³ Confederation of Natural States.

contained by the institution and eventually spilled into the public domain. Global audiences were made privy of the near death experience of a team of workers who had been hired to remove the paintings from The Old Refectory and whose testimonies did not cohere. After much legal prodding and a malfunctioning surveillance system, no official version of the events had yet been released by the authorities.

Rick had followed the case and knew he was going to accept the dinner invitation. Displeased at the awareness of being bated, he faked hesitation by moving slowly, placing down the paperwork and looking out of the window with his feet firmly on the ground. He suddenly realised he needed allies, as his feelings of being led by a conspiracy escalated. In fact, it was not at all clear why a group of academics were being invited to fly to a foreign continent to dine at the Old Refectory care of the MRC. And, who exactly were the 'specialists' mentioned? He called Michel, who was still in the Department dealing with a spurious funding application: 'Did you get a letter from the MRC?' 'No, why? What about?' 'You better come to my office'. The receiver clicked to silent and few moments later Michel opened the door with an expression of irritation around his mouth and an excited gaze.

The men shared a feeling of surprise at Michel not being enlisted, he himself experienced disappointment but did not admit in spite of, or because of, his closeness to Rick. But the intrigue was infectious as to who had received the letter. Rick phoned Eleanor: she was still in the office, indeed holding the same letter and had already heard from Tony and Nancy, who also had (Nancy being very surprised). Everyone was eager to attend but it was unclear to what avail: '... as a reward to a very particular and specialist field of research, the MRC yearly dinner event is designed to celebrate the achievement of these unique individuals... with the opportunity for them to confer on their latest findings in an attractive and purposeful environment...' The event was going to be soon, so soon that Eleanor and Rick would have met without the opportunity to clarify some ambiguities experienced the previous month at a post-conference dinner, when someone made a pass and chose not act on it.

They had all seen images of the Old Refectory. Whether they had all the seen the same images is debatable, yet still images leave a trail in one's mind. They were all

aware of its technical spec and physical properties. All of them had written papers, listened and sampled recordings of the space, but no one had actually been to it. It had always been inaccessible either through distance or policy. What the sound historians did not know, was the fact that in a distant past that very room was the favourite of a German dictator who had made provisions for the building to remain intact during his otherwise indiscriminate bombardment of the city.

Rick set off on the day with minimal luggage and more apprehension than he expected. His last visit to the CNS took place eight years previously, in a different context for different reasons. The novel annoyance he had experienced at the time with security measures, was part of the trail of excitement left by the experience. Now, in those ambiguous circumstances, he did not know how his nerves were going to cope.

He met Eleanor in the concourse. Her feelings were different from Rick's: she was euphoric about the dinner and the venue, but less about the company. She wanted to be in the space, she brought recording equipment with her, but was almost resigned to the idea that it would be confiscated. This space was incredibly important to her research, which had been theoretically endorsed; now that the Old Refectory suddenly became a reality, her hypothesis could be empirically tested.

When they arrived, a table was set in the middle of the room, laid with beautiful crockery and long white candles but no flowers. The chandeliers were dimmed to minimum glow and, in the semi-darkness, the portraits around the room gleamed, their presence even more prominent in the shade. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the room, nothing visibly remarkable. The guests shuffled in their places and speculations about Adriana attending were confirmed as her name featured prominently at the head of table. Individual microphones were supplied to suggest a round table discussion that felt like an oddity with the lack of an audience.

III

The museum opening had been so understated that the first visitor did not realise she was the first. The trustees embraced this strategy in order to test the

technology. And, at night time, approximately 48 hours from the opening of the doors, V found herself diverting on the way home and fingered the flyer in her pocket. The map was schematic and the caption stated: 'MUVE is open 24 hours'. Surveillance in the block was tight; it was undoubtedly safe. She found the green door very easily, took the tunnel and lift, she walked into B1 a first floor gallery, where she saw a middle aged man with a moustache sitting at a grey metal desk.

He was wearing an open white shirt and black waistcoat. His hair was salt and pepper, his expression impishly pensive. On his laminated desktop were a number of books and a piece of equipment, which she recognised to be an old Nagra tape player. Even though she was making her way steadily towards him, he did not seem to perceive her and she wondered if he was an exhibit. She stopped.

He got up to search in one of the drawers, extracted a banana, peeled it and inserted it in his mouth. With his body erect and head upright, he held the banana with his mouth alone, then with his right hand, caressed its contour to reach the end, on which he hesitated, and, only at that point, he bit into the fruit and ate it. He turned to sit at the desk but slipped on the discarded peel. Cursing, panting, huffing, he turned back and dived into another drawer, extracted another banana and repeated the ritual in the same sombre reverie. He then made it back to his desk and sat searching in some old register, squinting, he then looked up and did not see her.

Her astonishment had left her lingering for longer than she thought, as she watched him adjust the objects on his desk. He moved a paperweight off the books and placed it rather carefully on the other side of the desk. 'Carefully' was her subconscious qualifier, as later she realised that the paperweight was nothing but a Duchamp piece, an insight triggered by the man's action of rattling the object and trying to discern its sound. Eventually, he gazed in her direction, she moved towards him and he stood up. Reciprocally uncertain of their roles, they had to find a mutual sense of spatial grounding, and then slipped into conversation.

His name was John. His manager was a man called Atom, whom he mainly heard. He occupied the museum on the basis of an 8-hour shift, split over B1 and B ground; in fact, he was on his way downstairs. He explained no one day was the same, because of the floor revolutions the environments always changed. On that

day though, he was feeling a little vexed by the menacing voice from a piece below. It sounded like a man in distress, not a film.

The rooms that day had been aligned with B1 exactly over B ground and he had not recognised the sound coming from B ground. In addition, as the shifts always started on a different composite alignment, he had never experienced that configuration before. A time slippage had occurred due to some maintenance malfunctions, that later transpired to have been due to his neglect.

As he spoke, she thought he was afflicted with nostalgia. She was reminded of a retired Virgil, somewhat left to deal with the burden of his travel memories. Or maybe, he had never left the city and his affliction was the memory of a lost love. All this was her conjecture, while he was sketchily illustrating elements of the displays. His advice was not specialised and he was generous in personal feedback.

There were a number of projections that appeared periodically onto air screens, the latter being immaterial, at each inception, they caused sudden jolt in the viewer, like an exuberant ghost bolting into the space. The images were of assorted sizes and were displayed at various intervals; an appreciation of the overall display would depend on the positioning of the visitor, who was otherwise left with the sounds. John recommended roaming very slowly to gain sensory awareness, this was no prescription but a mere suggestion.

Me/We, a 90-second film, was playing on a loop at regular intervals as small projection floating approximately one and a half meter off the floor. Its rapid rhythmic unfolding displeased John, who was more attuned with slower works, like the talking heads in *Voicings*, of which three of the six projections occupied discrete spaces. They did not need the monumental presentation that *Sicilia!* for instance was granted downstairs, and even though he admitted that it was a beautiful and beguiling piece to watch, he lamented the lack of subtitling.

John waived his hand towards a warning display alerting on a disturbing image a child in uniform, it was the area for *Come and See*, which had not arrived yet. He had spent a lot of time with *Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait*, only to end up in utter frustration. He also confessed that, earlier that week, while absorbed in the football

game, he neglected to raise the alarm for a piece that had failed to display. It was not until night time that the fault became apparent to the surveillance system, whose remote cameras picked up the lumina deficiency through the transparency of the building. Smirking, he admitted being mesmerised by images of Louise Brooks dancing in a compilation that was not a display as such. Then John abruptly left.

She stayed for a long time with the black and white short featuring a man negotiating a garden full of hanging washing. His fast pacing and direct speech to camera was aggressive yet compelling and so were the movements in the shots. So much else was speaking that it took her a while to note that the man was speaking a Slavic language. She watched it over and over until his aggression became sadness and a cursing voice resonated from the floor below.

IV

'This is fucking shhhhhhhhhhit. Shhhhhhhhhhit. Shit. Shitshitshitshitshitshitshitshitshit.' A man laying face down onto the floor was banging his fists in distress. She felt uncomfortable but recognized that she was witnessing a performance. There was a space delimitation between her and this man and he belonged to that space. A line made of masking tape defined 'the stage' where a table and chair plus a bed were arranged on the foreground. On the table there was a cup of coffee. The stage background had a large piece of paper and a bucket of paint. She sat on the edge of the line, while he was absorbed in his routine. His half-shut eyes and the scrunching of his face indicated an altered semi-conscious state. She empathised with the distressed self-deprecating man and imagined an audience made of the people she knew, and what their reactions would be. There would be sceptics who would not 'believe' in the integrity of the hypnotized performer, who in the meantime had got up and was painting with large gestures on the background sheet of paper. He was writing in an undulated outline reminiscent of a large flower, he seemed content this time, so she got up and nearly tripped over a book on the floor.

She picked it up, a Dostoevsky, with a page identified by a bookmark, and before she even read one word, a woman in a metallic hat who had appeared out of nowhere was congratulating her: 'Well done my dear, you have won a prize, you

must come and see me in the singing gallery next door'. And just as she had arrived, the woman was gone. V did go to the singers' gallery but only after she spent a considerable amount of time with the mother and son monologue, in heavily accented Sicilian. Something off in the speech pattern made it more regular and therefore more compelling. In the barren rural interior the mother was cooking fish on the stove and speaking feistily to her son. Her name was Concezione.

V

The sinister image of two red shoes caught her attention. Barely visible in the low-resolution background, the image emitted an unnerving silence, screaming muteness. The intensity was to do with a kind of cycle, as if her gaze was being expelled by the image and returned by the real-time flickering of the video; it felt like audible noise. 'How long is this gonna go on for?' begged her inner voice.

Then the silence was pierced by song. An operatic aria in the naked voice was hanging in mid air, unconstrained by music it begun to forge its own relaxed pace. She recognized the aria immediately, a favourite with her estranged father. She accepted the uncertain journey of an experience fraught with beguiling discomfort: the feminine tone and the skirt of a woman, whose breath was relayed by the subtle undulation of the material, sealed a reciprocal alienation between subject and viewer. Her childhood memory and the woman's breath, trapped in the flickering pixellation, belonged to the same paradoxical space. Then a nervous gesture of the woman's hand propelled them further into the journey.

Only a short portion of the aria kept repeating. The monotony tuned her hearing into perceiving all the different nuances of each enunciation. Each witnessed the singularity of each attempt, distinct and unique like the breath that engendered it. Unlike with Pinkie's finite and perennial repetition, these attempts foreground hope in the assurance that the resolution will never come.

A still image of a woman in black and white. Her unusual pose, like the breath, begged to be freed from the status of object in order to complete the simple action of touching her eye. Probably the make up itching slightly or a detached eyelash in the way. By this time, the 'ce-ee' of 'mi piace' indicates to the Italian listener a

foreign accent in the singing, Anglo Saxon for sure. Image and sound in counterpoint. After the next 'looo' overextended as if to comment on the frustration of the still image, another image, this time frontal and black and white. The woman looks down wistfully, one arm across the chest reaches for her neck as if releasing some mild pain, but her downcast gaze is not concerned with pain. The repetitions now sound higher in tone and the aural impatience conflicts with the wistfulness of the downcast gaze.

The tension in the neck and in the viewing is released by a short clip of the woman, this time in colour and scaled down, massaging her neck lightly and looking relaxed. She is in the right bottom corner of the screen in the same position as the translator for the aurally impaired. Skirt and silence return but then the woman is covering her eyes in a black and white close up. What is she afraid of?

The following sections are faster. Collectively totalling a collage of an expressive hand gesture of the presumed singer. Her repetitions now overlap and can be identified as coming via a number of different devices. She is simultaneously fashioned and freed in directly proportional increments. The overlaps now emphasise their differences in a slightly hysterical dissonance. Pause. She is still again and looks up at something. Offering her neck in a nervous animation sequence, she avoids the gaze of the viewer, while a scraping sound reveals some actions offstage.

Band, the red waistband, stares back like the shoes, the blurred hands of the woman are hovering in a strange protracted movement. Suddenly she remembers, there was a billboard advertising a film on the streets of Trieste last September, it was the same woman. The repetitions become shorter and escalating in pitch.

Eyes. Extreme close-up on big dark moist eyes. The head sways, total silence, cut to black. Intimate distance. Foreboding. She reappears to clap her hands once. Clamour. Synchronisation. Smirk. Crackling, rustling, there is a woman interposed in the still images doing something to her while she surrenders. The interposed woman's bra strap is twisted making the viewer displeased at the aesthetic sloppiness of the image. More stills of indecipherable interactions, limbs intertwined at the unspecified preparation. A second bra strap is twisted.

The narrative complicates as her voice insinuates in the soundscape and overlaps to her singing. The chirpy Australian 'oh I just get going, the next time, mi piaaa-ce beeee-llo beeee-llo' behind the back of the head and the fatal bra straps interact. 'Don't talk to me for a second but mute me'. Rustling, limbs, repetitions. What does that mean? I know her mouth is closed, can she hear herself sing? Preparations. Too much headroom. Then pause. She stops with her arms folded and a disgruntled expression. How long again?

Too long, but then a relief at the image in synch with a singing body, only to deceive her again with a sound mismatch in the edit. The singer also realises and she is furious. She pauses in black and white scornfully listening to her voice sing. She pauses with her chin on her black and white clasped hands while her voice sings. The same happens while her voice sings.

'And just give me directions, tell me whatever you want, I am an actor, I'll take it'. Fine. Extreme close up of her fleshy moist mouth, singing in synch for the first time and the aria is unstuck from the repetitions and continues on, but does she have pins and needles? 'Si, si, and I would just get going. E se l'ama-ssi, ehi, I just wanted to do this one, tan-too. I want to sing muted. I want to sing muted. I want to sing muted. Mute me'.

'Andr-oooo sul pon-te ve-cchio,' struggling and straining, the breast is panting in black and white. Now it's real. Si strugge e si tormenta, sincronizzata e in lacrime. Ripping sounds, pushing out the voice, it's heavy to watch. 'O Diio', my God. 'I wanted you to do it this one, I want to sing muted'. There are no options. Mute me and the black and white wistful woman returns, her lips are sealed. Her voice excited as the ripping continues. She likes it, singing muted. Angry face, 'Can you do my arms?'

The finale. Emancipation. Muffled singing. Elision.

iii. VENTRILOQUISMS AND THE VENTRILOQUIAL OBJECT

This project uses the metaphor of ventriloquism to develop a critical framework for a practice about the voice. This chapter elaborates on how ventriloquism, with its structural complexity and versatility, and with its depth of connotations, resonating from the sacred to the profane, is ideal for this task. Ventriloquism, therefore, is the functional starting point that evolves into the framework defined by my neologism 'ventriloquial objects'. The investigation in the main body of writing develops through examples of ventriloquial objects that, for the purpose of this project, are predominantly moving image works.

In the following sections I will elaborate on the structural complexity that ventriloquism provides, as demonstrated by the sets of relations that can be conceptualized through it. I will define my framework through the notion of ventriloquial objects and introduce the neologism with the characteristics that distinguish it from current notions of ventriloquism. The close reading of current applied uses of ventriloquism, will then serve the purpose of refining the context for ventriloquial objects in applied terms, while at the same time defining the potential breadth of conceptual uses across aesthetic fields.

With the recent surge of scholarly interest in the aural, the term ventriloquism has enjoyed a revival in a number of writing and curatorial projects. For instance, with the stunningly vivid cultural history by Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck*⁴ published in 2000. This text has inspired the opening and multiplying of the functional symbolic roles of this trope, its cultural history spanning from oracles to the gramophone. *Dumbstruck*, along with more classical histories of ventriloquism like Douglas Houlden's,⁵ has informed my thinking around voice agency vis-à-vis the model of ventriloquism, opening up potential differentiated hierarchies beyond the human/puppet model.

⁴ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck, a Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵ Douglas Houlden, *Ventriloquism for Boys and Girls* (London: Kaye, 1958).

In 2006 David Goldblatt published *Art and Ventriloquism*;⁶ here my stance matches the author's, in redeeming the term from its deceitful connotations and asserting that ventriloquism stands for illusion with no deception - since otherwise the device would not attract attention to itself. Yet, Goldblatt's project is distinct because located in a philosophical context. Specifically, on the one hand it utilises the self-dialogical notion of ventriloquism to address the work of some classical and contemporary philosophers, on the other it uses ventriloquism as a way of thinking about deconstructive architecture and other dislocating processes and practices such as the idea of self-plagiarism in art.

Articulate Objects (2009) edited by Aura Satz and Jon Wood is another project stemming from the notion of ventriloquism⁷. Here, the notion of 'articulate object' (as opposed to my 'ventriloquial object') is defined to encompass a number of varied artefacts that combine two aspects: one is of being ventriloquially performative, the other of being sculpturally performative. In other words it is the *extrinsic* quality of the voice in the puppet (or statue, marionette, etc.) which constitutes the focus of this project, which resulted as a collection of essays following from the Association of Art Historians Conference (AAH) at Birkbeck College and UCL in 2003. The variety of the contributions in the collection bridges theory and practice and acknowledges the role of a number of significant sound related exhibitions including *With Hidden Noise: Sculpture Video and Ventriloquism* at the Henry Moore Institute in 2004, also curated by Jon Wood.

The projects mentioned have a clear identity and direction as well as a defined context: cultural history, philosophy and sculpture. In this discussion, instead, ventriloquism becomes the starting point for a working metaphor that focuses on the audiovisual properties of 'ventriloquial objects' and insists on a more politicised critique of the utterance. I will therefore outline some distinguishing characteristics of my framework, and integrate it with a critical reading of a number of contributions, where critics from a range of contemporary journal articles, and from a number of aesthetic disciplines, which have applied the trope of ventriloquism in their analysis.

⁶ David Goldblatt, *Art and Ventriloquism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁷ Aura Satz and Jon Wood ed., *Articulate Objects. Voice, Sculpture and Performance* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

The variety in the contexts and approaches of this collection of articles demonstrates the versatility of this trope: while each critic uses ventriloquism by assuming a given definition for this metaphor, all applied uses differ in approach, medium and outcome. On the other hand, the range and span of these strategies, not only confirm the extent of the richness and vibrancy of this trope, more importantly, they inform the formal and contextual domain of the ventriloquial object, with a range of methodologies and aesthetic practices.

Ventriloquism is an apt trope for a practice-related project because of its applied nature. Its ambiguity reverberates with the fluidity assumed in a material like the voice that is defined through liminality. I align the two ventriloquial voices with two writing modes: from the opening fictional tale, to the academic writing of the main body; I also draw a parallel with my conceptualisation of the two overlapping functions of the voice: 'the verbal' and 'the vocal'.⁸ I define the former as the communicative aspect of the voice pertaining to language, and the latter as encompassing all aspects of the voice independently from linguistic communication. The investigation through ventriloquial objects is concerned with the practices oscillating between these two poles, and particularly where the overlapping is made problematic. In ventriloquial objects the formal balance between these components is deliberately offset, in order to reveal the apparatus to the 'naked ear', and therefore instigates a critical approach to the content.

The basic premise of ventriloquism is to assume that voices are fashioned: they may be scripted or improvised according to a formal framework. As an applied trope in the ventriloquial object, ventriloquism is ideally located to problematise source, deployment and consumption of the spoken contents. Following from this we can ask, how can this metaphor provide a starting point to develop a practice-led methodology about the voice that engages with critical discourses across aesthetic fields? Why is the utterance the anchoring point for a critical practice that assumes liminality as its most productive space for discussion?

⁸ Their naming is designed to maintain a playful alliteration with voice and ventriloquisms. I subsequently discovered that medievalist Paul Zumthor had coined 'the order of the vocal' exactly to distinguish it from 'the whole of the activities and values that belong to the voice as such, independently from language' Paul Zumthor (1990) cit. in Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 12.

In general, scholarly elaborations on the aural are plurally distributed across a number of specialised disciplines and these approaches tend to consider sound as a distinct modality. In the framework of the ventriloquial object, sound and the utterance are instead considered multi-modally, or at least audiovisually. This framework challenges the tendency of film theory to distinguish between picture and sound: visuality and the gaze have predominated over the aural due to the visual bias in Western aesthetic and epistemology. Similarly, when soundscape studies, acoustic ecology (R. Murray Schafer) and sonic arts emerge and consolidate in the 1960s and 1970s, they need to force a bias on the aural at the expense of the visual. Electronic music and experimental composition (L. Berio), contemporary to this period, also contribute to breaking the formal canon with voice and electronics: their significant contribution is found within musicology.⁹

The point of departure here acknowledges the subversive power of the aural, and the notion that the voice is the ultimate destabilising locus, where language (abstract form) meets the body (transient materiality). Its subversive power is emphasised by a linguistic inadequacy: when it comes to describe sound events one finds an underdeveloped vocabulary coupled with highly subjective responses: to an extent, this indeterminacy in naming reinforces the power of sound.

Another unsettling inadequacy comes into play when considering the constructed nature of sound representation. If we consider the subversive, almost magical, power of sound, as an invisible affective medium that can turn corners and penetrate walls, and to this we add the relatively recent introduction of recording technology, then the blurring of a distinction between sound event and sound representation becomes plausible. Consequently, the 'sound apparatus' (to paraphrase a notion from film theory) dangerously disappears, and the idea of the constructed nature of sound is erased with it.

This situation is almost inconceivable when considering its visual counterpart, in spite of the immersive qualities of cinema, or the realistic depiction of photographic images, the distinction between the real, and a photograph or a movie, is conceptually accepted even if naturalisation occurs at the level of the spectator. In

⁹ Italy with its strong tradition that includes opera, also witnesses the impact of the sonority of Futurist poetry, in itself a literary mode that encompasses a range of media and subsequently impacts outside Italy, in Eastern Europe and via Portugal into Brazil.

the case of the aural, and the lack of acknowledgment of its apparatus, the consequences are particularly dangerous to any critical approach. In fact, like for the visual counterpart, once the apparatus is erased, the audience identifies with a *vraisemblable* event rather than considering it as a construction.

Ventriloquial objects invoke such distancing and are thus invested in the notion of a 'speaking apparatus', where visibility is nevertheless implicated. From here, a 'point of speech' needs to be deconstructed in terms of how the utterance comes into being and for what purpose, therefore how its effects, ideological or affective, are manifested to its audience/s located at the 'point of listening'. Since the emphasis in this research is practice driven, the critical debates about the aural and its related discourses will be tested against the close reading of actual artefacts fulfilling the ventriloquial model.

Ventriloquial objects do insist on form (voice construction), but they consider form and content with equal priority. In other words, they present a denaturalised audiovisual experience to make the apparatus somewhat available, yet they nevertheless display a narrative content that communicates to a viewer and relies on his/her (audio)listening. Since, as we have seen, the utterance can be considered as a compound of verbal and vocal elements, ventriloquial objects do not simply rely on the linguistic or communicative power of the voice as speech. They instead consider the utterance along a continuum between the verbal and the vocal. It follows that the experience generated by the voice utterance (rather than speech) will simultaneously compound a communicative and affective message - a kind of 'intellectual affect'.

The affective and intellectual components conveyed by the voice are much like all liminal categories considered so far, fluid, unquantifiable and overlapping. My strategy to address elements located in a liminal continuum, is to find instances where one element is more apparent, in other words to locate points where these balances are slightly offset. I consolidate three 'problematic' moments, when liminality becomes harder to negotiate, in the overarching themes of the three main chapters, also reflected by the curated rooms in MUVE.

One defining characteristic of ventriloquial objects is to upset the balance of its constituents: the voice is the emblematic site where form and materiality (quietly) coexist, as language (form) and body (vocality). All formally standardized

languages, such as verbal communication, cinematic form, or musical convention, will naturalize form to the extent of performing a normative role on the, inherently less compliant, singular, material and transient body. These moments of 'upset' of the liminal constituents are negotiated by the specific artworks as ventriloquial objects, and may feature, as we will witness later, the speaker of a non-native language, for example, or an actor upsetting the standard prosody of speech.

The ambiguous play of the two components of the voice (verbal and vocal) in turn, perform a significant role in undermining the all encompassing role of language predicated by post-structuralist theory, that with linguistic and psychoanalytical tenets, has been vastly influential in the visual arts and film theory. Ventriloquial objects, which include the 'vocal' and the 'verbal', symbolically undermine the position that assumes that subjectivity is constituted and contained within a linguistic paradigm, and therefore, that the subject is implicitly alienated, since it is assumed to be *a priori* 'spoken for by language'. In this sense I will reference speculative territories that use alternative paradigms, like kinesthetics and associationism, to explore the nature of cognitive processes.

As seen, ventriloquial objects operate at a formal level by being grounded in naturalistic representation, where appearance is somewhat upset by a sense of incoherence. When it comes to elaborating this sense of incoherence, a number of terms come to the foreground, such as uncanny, magical and 'logic of the Impossible'. Of course such terms are articulated in complex historical and theoretical trajectories of their own, but they also appear in the writings of those critics who refer to ventriloquism. Equally, there are contemporary practitioners, as in the case of The Centre for Tactical Magic, who ignore the conventionally anachronistic connotations of 'magic' to deploy this strategy in collective interventionist actions. Their manifesto proposes 'magic, art and social engagement'¹⁰ with actions that are deployed trans-nationally and eschewing individual authorship.

To consider the uncanny via critical literary theory and through the perspective of Tzvetan Todorov, is to stake out mutually exclusive definitions amongst fantastic, uncanny and marvellous, that become useful in context, not for their claim to scientific accuracy, but rather as a mapping device. Where Todorov's structuralist analysis painstakingly must insist on tight classifications and taxonomies,

¹⁰ See www.tacticalmagic.org

ventriloquial objects operate liminally, and in Todorov's classification they would be located between the fantastic and the uncanny.

In fact, for Todorov the uncanny represents the mode of hesitation before the end of the tale, when the reader must reconcile the nature of the experience of the diegesis. He/she is therefore forced to 'make a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous.'¹¹

Of course Todorov's analysis pertains to literature and, when it comes to the experience of sound and audiovisuality, the modalities change. To this extent, I would speculate that affective elements (or intellectually affective elements) of sound, might allow for contradictory elements to co-exist, without resorting to an interpretation based on supernatural causes. Ventriloquial objects thus rely on forms of audiovisual uncanny whose specifics will be discussed in context.

If the term ventriloquism has a directness that never fails to evoke an instant 'picture', there is a conceptual complexity that can be derived from it. Not only does ventriloquism challenge agency and hermeneutics through an unconventional formal set up, it also has a remarkable historical breadth, where it metamorphoses into a diverse range of practices, classically referenced between the medianic seer and the variety act performer. Therefore it is not surprising how most writers who apply this term do so assertively, while addressing different problematics: the applied nature of this trope is the concern of ventriloquial objects.

From these considerations about the formal set up of ventriloquism, when it comes to the ventriloquial object, a number of critical conceptual constructions are possible: the dismantling of voice agency; the collusion of animate/inanimate; shortfalls in visual perception; the simultaneity of rational/irrational aural communication; temporal disruptions; the coexistence of incoherent narratives and reference

¹¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973), 41.

systems; the transgression of the voice as individual or embodied; the conflation of the specifics of contingency and repetition etc. These dynamics witness the variety that the framework of the ventriloquial object can accommodate, in spite of its core discriminatory elements.

The discussion that follows from here is concerned with a range of positions amongst writers and critics who apply the term ventriloquism to aesthetic objects across aesthetic fields (such as cinema, theatre, music, performance and visual arts). The critical reading is designed align itself with the notion of the ventriloquial object, and to enrich and preface the potential scope of this framework through the discussion of a range of practice-related methodologies.

A fundamental distinction between these applied uses of ventriloquism and my framework of the ventriloquial object, is a consequence of the adjectivisation of the substantive: when ventriloquism becomes 'ventriloquial' it qualifies as a strategy. Also, ventriloquial objects are plural; while the examples surveyed in the next sections feature the trope univocally, the main body of the analysis will operate through a plurality of 'ventriloquial objects'.

Another core feature assumed by ventriloquial objects is a subversion of the 'negative' reading of ventriloquism. As we will note from the survey to follow, in spite of its multiple applications, ventriloquism conveys an overall negative connotation of deceit. In other words, the duplicity or trickery inherent in a generally accepted take on ventriloquism is associated with a fraud of communication at the expense of the receiver. In my view, this happens because of formal challenges presented by the object that interfere with speaking agency. Whereas the expectations are for a naturalistic type of communication, when the outcome presents an 'unnatural' utterance (e.g. an object made to speak) of an undeclared speaker, what follows is the recipient's outrage at an experience of 'inauthentic' communication.

The danger here is that deception assumes authenticity as its premise; I would like to return to the aforementioned idea of a general lack of perceived distinction between a sound event and sound representation (if sound is always an event it is also always authentic and the production artifice has disappeared). Furthermore, even when the apparatus is acknowledged, in the context of aesthetic production

and analysis, authenticity is not a given, but the consequence of a constructed set of criteria. In my view, validity assessments belong to an ethical domain that negotiates the sets of relationships between who represents what is being represented, rather than being ascribed to a true or false paradigm.

As stated, with ventriloquism, and ventriloquial objects alike, both apparatus and artifice are not only implicated but 'on display', hence rather than being deceitful, the ventriloquist's performance is nothing but 'honest'. This is why in the main body of the research the negative connotations of this practice are reclaimed as positive.

If one refers to the classic ventriloquist variety act, there is no 'cheating' aspect as we 'know' exactly who is speaking on whose behalf and the routine aspect of the display is consistent in its codification. The 'spoken for' character is an inanimate object, a dummy, presides with the role of an unruly youth. By splitting his/her utterance between the sensible adult and the disorderly youth, the performer 'comes out' in an ambiguous transgressive display.¹² A Freudian reading would identify in this process the dramatisation of the conflict between Id and Superego, completed and experienced by, the Ego of the viewer.

It is worthy to note in the classic variety act, the static nature of the script, which remains constant over time.¹³ The script becomes a fixed device, like a myth, unaffected by cultural trends. On the other hand, the focus is less on the content of the timeless script, but rather in the ritualistic performance and its teasing or disturbing of the *vraisemblable*. The surrender to a fixed formal ritual can be seen to echo religious practices (transmutation of substance and supernatural embodiment) or bearing affinities with sexual transgressive practices against normative behaviour (such as with S&M or queer performance), where the ritualised behaviour has the purpose to contain and express transgression in a safe way. The display of ventriloquism is predictable, non-hazardous, transgressive, ritualised and ambiguous – but mostly, uncensored.

¹² This motivating agency could be seen as central to a range of modes of aesthetic productions.

¹³ In 2007 I contacted a London ventriloquist, Len Belmont, who invited me to his performance at a public garden party in Dalston: the dialogue of his routine was identical to that of the pioneers of the craft.

As stated, with the adjectivisation of ventriloquism into ventriloquial objects, the trope becomes a quality manifested *within* the economy of an object. There are no ventriloquists, there can only be ventriloquial objects, manufactured and perceived. In addition, while a distinguishing quality for ventriloquial objects consists in a positive interpretation of ventriloquism, for now we will focus on a range of mostly deceitful ventriloquisms: a strong case of ventriloquial deceit is evident in the following critique by Rick Altman, who uses ventriloquism to dismantle preconceived ideas about the film soundtrack.

The Voice and Its Invisible Apparatus

This section considers Rick Altman's contribution to the audiovisual debate in *Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism*,¹⁴ an article where the critic uses the trope of ventriloquism to question the role of the sound apparatus. I will discuss Altman's input in line with the notion of the ventriloquial object, and highlight some key ideas that inform my critical practice pursued through this trope, such as the revindication of the politics of the scripted utterance and its naturalisation via a script.

Altman is a film theorist, whose work for decades has redeemed the role of sound and readdressed the bias on visuality, and who also has tackled the potential fallacies in a range of critical approaches in sound film.¹⁵ His article from 1980 utilizes the notion of ventriloquism to put forward a radical claim in the audiovisual debate in the context of classical Hollywood cinema, with some references to French *auteurs*.

Altman proposes to demonstrate the idea that in cinema the image is ventriloquised by the soundtrack, suggesting that 'the soundtrack is a ventriloquist who, by moving his dummy (the image) in time with the words he secretly speaks, creates the

¹⁴ Rick Altman, "Moving Lips, Cinema as Ventriloquism", *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 67-69.

¹⁵ Rick, Altman, *Sound Theory Sound Practice* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992).

illusion that the words are produced by the dummy/image whereas in fact the dummy/image is actually created in order to disguise the source of sound'.¹⁶

The critic launches his argument on the redundancy of the image, echoing a past and contentious argument by cinema purists, who maintained that cinema is strictly moving pictures, and thus justify a golden era prior to the advent of film sound: 'theoreticians have warned against the mixing of cinema's pure image orientation with the degraded language and practices of the theatre'.¹⁷ From a predicament that acknowledges classical cinema's connection to theatre, it follows that classical cinema is eminently verbocentric; for Altman this inherent theatricality of cinema is clearly 'repressed', as demonstrated by the erasure of the role of the scriptwriter.

The neglect for the practice of scriptwriting is emphasised by Altman as follows: 'With the *auteur* "theory" the screenwriter was finally done away with all together, and the scandal of language dominance over and independence from the image further repressed'.¹⁸ Altman's argument that the practice of scriptwriting is not acknowledged is very interesting where its consequences are concerned, i.e. in 'the (unacknowledged) scandal of language dominance'. On the other hand, I would argue that an *auteur* such as Jean-Luc Godard¹⁹ for example, focuses very specifically on the voice and its textual origin, from a political and ideological perspective. In addition, as moving image practices develop and differentiate outside the cinema industry, scriptwriting may take different forms, or merge with directorship - one of the fundamental roles of ventriloquial objects is to question and critique the textual origin of the spoken utterance, regardless of the type of aesthetic practice.

In turn Altman's emphasis on the discursively neglected domain of the script is a significant point for this research. The script comes laden with political and ideological implications, and yet, this is routinely unacknowledged by film critics. Altman argues that the script is in fact responsible for the *discours* of the film

¹⁶ Altman, "Moving Lips", 67.

¹⁷ Altman, "Moving Lips", 70.

¹⁸ Altman, "Moving Lips", 70.

¹⁹ The examples are many including *Le Gay Savoir* (1968), *Le Week-End* (1967) and *Numéro deux* (1975).

apparatus received by the ear of the viewer, as opposed to the visual reception of the *histoire* of the diegesis. In his Saussurian paraphrasing, we understand that the political locus of production is right at the beginning with the proverbial word. Altman does not provide case studies from this hypothesis, on the other hand, several ventriloquial objects in this body of work can be seen to elaborate on this point, starting from *ME/WE* by Eija-Liisa Ahtila discussed in the first chapter. Also, echoed in the above comment is the influence of linguistics in the hermeneutics of the scripted utterance; grammar and syntax can be brought to resonate with political implications for the uttering subjects, as we will see in my project *Voicings*.

Following from Altman's analysis, we find another significant observation that pertains to the role of ventriloquial objects. This is the fact that in film the written script becomes naturalised as speech and therefore disguised in the 'spontaneous' manifestation of the utterance. Clearly, writing and utterance diverge as two distinct modes. Their deployment overlaps in practices that feature a scripted performance, like theatre and narrative cinema: another primary role of the ventriloquial object is to problematise the scripted nature of the utterance.

As we are aware, theatre delivers immanent vocal performances and is therefore unique at each event. The audience in this instance is strongly aware of the connection of the dramaturgic utterance to a literary format. Cinema's apparatus instead, by developing illusory spatial technologies of representation, transposes the vocal and aural range accordingly. For instance, a 'close up' is able to convey powerful narrative messages via extremely subtle movements: consequently with cinematics the role of a textual script becomes subordinate or is integrated in context. It follows that cinema can afford to disguise its connection to the written word, especially when its language departs from the format of the theatrical play typical of classical Hollywood.

Also, within theatre the emphasis is on a literary genre (drama) and the 'script' (play) is a text in its own right and is likely to be read and assessed for its literary attributes. The same cannot be said for the script in cinema: despite it being a crafted form, it is nevertheless part of a spatial *mis en scène*. Cinema scriptwriting cannot sustain itself as an independent literary genre, is not widely available to audiences, and especially, audiences would not read it as a substitute to attending

the auditorium. In this latter statement there is a reminder of the connection of cinema to the leisure industry that does not have an equivalent in theatre.²⁰

Clearly, these broad distinctions are generic, yet when it comes to the construction of the utterance, the implications for the loss of focus on the political structuring power of language is a significant issue that must be addressed. Three lines of enquiry will be formulated in the following chapters, and reasoned 'bottom up' through the specifics of the ventriloquial objects selected for this purpose.

When we consider Altman's use of ventriloquism, we find the idea that a text laden with ideological implications drives the dummy image to pursue its questionable goals, hence his use of ventriloquism imbues it with an insidious role. He notes that, if in the political world speech conveys power, in the narrative world speech conveys narrative power, and that 'by convention it carries with it a secondary right, the right to appear in the image,'²¹ he then paraphrases Kant in the aphorism: *I speak therefore I am seen*, thus subverting the hierarchy of the senses engaged in cognition.²²

From this we can comment that the two contexts of politics and narrative are far from being mutually exclusive, and that demagogic discourses of power can be conveyed independently of the image. As suggested by Friedrich A. Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, the large re-emergence of an interest in orality in intellectuals publishing in Europe in the 1960s can be justified by the fact that these generations experienced the war over radio bulletins and loudspeakers. Kittler's recollections as a Canadian child (and writer to be) in front of a loudspeaker propelling the staccato of Hitler's voice, generates a very poignant 'image'. In turn, Altman duly flags the evocative power of the aural inherent in the phenomenology of sound, and reminds us that sound always demands a picture, while a picture does not demand a sound: we can sit still and contemplate a scene without needing to complement the image with a soundtrack.

²⁰ With the exception of the musical.

²¹ Altman, "Moving Lips", 68.

²² Interesting to note Lacan's paraphrasing of the same in relation to the process of signification 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think' in "Agency of the letter in the unconscious," *Écrits: a Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977), 166.

Altman subsequently questions the persistency of synchronised speech in classical narrative cinema, when often sound and image call for a dynamic based on counterpoint. He observes that sound film becomes sanctioned with the appearance of synchronised dialogue (*The Jazz Singer*) despite previous achievements in the field of audiovisual reproduction. This instance supports his thesis that film sound 'originates' with a script: historically, the primary cinematic distinction between silent narrative film and the 'talkies' happens to coincide with the shift of emphasis onto people speaking.

Altman's position is significant in context, since it foregrounds a critique of the apparatus. In fact, while synchronised speech sanctions the role of speaking subject, Altman follows the logic of cinema consumption in the auditorium, by observing that while the camera 'shows' a speaking subject, it is the loudspeaker that 'speaks'. The fact that the loudspeaker is concealed serves for the critic the purpose of displacing the viewer's attention on the one hand from the industrial status of cinema, and on the other, from the 'scandalous' fact that at the origin of sound cinema lies the screenwriter's text and not the image, as sanctioned by film theory.

I find his move to incriminate the exhibiting apparatus somewhat inconclusive. In open-air cinemas the speakers are not concealed, as they are not in many other instances with gallery installations. On the other hand, the audience's identification with the audiovisual display may derive from the prior internalisation of the mode of cinematic consumption. Furthermore, the speakers' visibility does not automatically reveal the connection of speech to a written text, but only possibly with the notion of an apparatus of sound reproduction.

Altman's use of the trope of ventriloquism claims that the image as a speaking dummy stands for an invisible ventriloquist in the script. If we refer to the craft of the ventriloquist, it is a misrepresentation to focus on invisibility, since it is the *visible* sealed mouth of the ventriloquist to guarantee the success of the performance. On the other hand, if the analogy is considered in relation to the immersive quality of cinema, with its disavowal of the real, Altman's reference to ventriloquism is

comparable to the medianic divinatory practice, where the speaking God does remain invisible, and the voice is thrown via a 'medium'.

To add a further point on the hermeneutics of sound cinema, Altman comments on the historical polarisation between the pro-vision and the pro-sound camps, each respectively maintaining the primacy of one element and the redundancy of the other. He resolves this dilemma by attacking this notion of redundancy altogether. In fact, his argument follows that, if the image were used merely to prove sounds exists *a priori*, then the opposite can be true and both positions concur in the erasure of the apparatus. The illusion of the speaking subject is sustained by a double redundancy: diegetic moving lips and spoken words reiterate both the same information and corroborate each other's lie. The final movement is completed by the mirroring *in* the spectator: 'who knows there is no contradiction between seeing and hearing – [the spectator] serves as cinema's mirror, the *speculum* in which the film synchronises its motor skills, establishes its own identity, and thus accedes to the Symbolic realm of language.'²³

The hermeneutics of sound corroborate the distinct modes of perceiving image and sound on screen. As widely established, the primary difference consists in the fact that light travels in a straight line, while sound, as compressed air, is perceived as 'turning round the corners'. The implication for Altman is the potentially mysterious and threatening power of sound, widely deployed in cinema, where the individual is without fail compelled to respond by seeking the source. This mode is discussed by Michel Chion in *Audiovision*, as the primary but not unique mode for listening and is termed *causal* (the others being *semantic* and *reduced*). In fact Chion's notion of audiovision is a productive way in which to resolve the question of pre-eminence, as the connubium of the two creates the nature of the perception in the viewer.

A final point for consideration in Altman's *exposé* concerns the history of ventriloquism and the distinction between the 'body voice' and the 'head voice'. Historically, the *engastrimanteis* (belly-prophets) of ancient Greece were taken to emit their predicaments from the belly, for Altman *locus classicus* 'uncensored and

²³ Altman, "Moving Lips", 71.

associated with sexuality, eating and excretion'.²⁴ He posits the 'censored and normative' head voice against the 'subconscious and subversive' belly voice, and in this light cinema's ventriloquism 'is the product of an effort to overcome the sound-image gap, to mask the sound's technological origin, and to permit the film's production personnel to speak their sub-conscious mind – their belly – without fear of discovery.'²⁵

This distinction between the 'two voices' is radical. Why is the voice the site of such chasm compounding norm and transgression? With the voice comes the incommensurability of body and language, in turn couched in an essentialist gendered Western canon that identifies Woman as Body and Man as Reason. Clearly there are not two voices, instead, one locum of attributed polarized functionalities operating liminally, echoed here by the verbal and the vocal.

Altman's critique of the vocal apparatus and its naturalisation are crucial for ventriloquial objects. In the next section, I will build on these ideas by considering aspects touched upon by Altman, like the phenomenology of sound, the history of ventriloquism and the notion of moving image as entertainment, and develop these strands via the writing on the audiovisual ventriloquism of Tony Oursler. Altman's hermeneutics of concealment (the hidden speakers) contradict the sculptural examples that follow, opening the breath of the ventriloquial object beyond classical cinema.

Magic and the Voice Beyond the Frame

Tony Conrad explores the ventriloquism of Tony Oursler's audiovisual sculptures;²⁶ Conrad states that in spite of having their technique on display, these figures are able to convey a sense of magic, the very magic that infused the moving image at its inception and that is now lost. The critic's historical referencing travels via a quixotic journey from Dante, across the Old Testament, via the Enlightenment and

²⁴ Altman, "Moving Lips", 78.

²⁵ Altman, "Moving Lips", 79.

²⁶ Tony Conrad, "Who Will Give an Answer to the Call of My Voice? Sound in the Work of Tony Oursler", *Grey Room* (Spring 2003): 44-57.

beyond, to arrive at the televisual present: his voyage is functional to a contextualization of the evolution of the hermeneutics of magic, and to showing how these ideas bind both ventriloquism and the moving image.

When Conrad tells the tale of the Witch of Endor, one of the early 'official' ventriloquists, we learn that ventriloquism's divinatory role was often the domain of women; this observation is relevant to the gender deconstruction often tackled by ventriloquial objects. In the Witch's days, the body of the seer was unaided by props and sufficed, by projecting the voice, to displace its origin. Subsequently, this practice would fall into disrepute and become banned, at the expense of the lives of the oracles.²⁷ Conrad's digression is useful in that he shows how magic undergoes a drastic change post Enlightenment, since 'The Impossible' undergoes a reassessment, due to a philosophical paradigm shift. What follows, is that these phenomena become either 'natural', and therefore, filed in the domain of accountable sciences, or they simply remain 'impossible', in which case they join the unproblematic realm of entertainment.

At this point we apprehend the shared history of ventriloquism and the moving image. Not only do both practices originate in fairgrounds as popular entertainment, subsequently, in an uncanny way, the ventriloquist dummy becomes instrumental to the invention of the television set. Scottish inventor, John Logie Baird (1888-1946) is reputed to have resorted to a ventriloquist dummy's head in his demonstration of the 'televisor', because at the crucial point of testing the transmission process, he was faced with the problem of an extremely high light exposure, which was, however, necessary to guarantee the 'transmission'. Since this exposure was too high for a human being to stand, he turned to a ventriloquist dummy's head instead, who would therefore have featured in the first televisual transmission.

Artist David Hall in 1990 made a 4 minute film called *Stooky Bill TV* for the Channel 4 TV commission for the series *19:4:90 Television Interventions*. In the film he dramatised the hypothetical dialogue between John Logie Baird and the eponymous dummy used for the experiment at the time of the first successful

²⁷ Such was the case of the Witch during the realm of Saul, only, the king broke his own dictum to consult her, and the predicted outcome was his imminent death at the hands of the Philistine army.

transmission in 1925. The dialogue set by the artist between the inventor and the dummy cements the correlation between ventriloquism and the invention of television (further connotations around the notion of a 'dummy TV' pertain to critical speculation).

As upheld by early cinema historians like Erik Barnouw,²⁸ both cinema and ventriloquism originally belonged to the magic repertoire of street entertainers, who eventually were to accept that the new technology was to supplant their craft to unprecedented pinnacles of popularity and longevity. With modernity the triumph of the machine manages to elevate the apparatus above the 'lower' contexts of performance as entertainment. Yet, the machine will feature more pervasively than as a purveyor of entertainment: with modernity, mechanisation is deployed in the automation of the workforce.

Yet, it is interesting to note that, when we consider the philosophy of leisure of the time, we witness a shift from a model of entertainment based on moral education, to the validation and promotion of an escapist and more lascivious model. The reason for this shift was that, while originally the bourgeoisie controlled people's productivity via a moral and didactic prescription of their leisure time, once Taylorism was in place, productivity was 'automatically' under control, and therefore leisure became escapist: 'once these systems of control were in place the policing of leisure time activities of ordinary people, such as moviegoing, became less important'²⁹ - Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) is a popular critical illustration of the systems of control.

Scientists and intellectuals, like psychologist and aesthetic philosopher Prof. Hugo Münsterberg³⁰ (1863-1916), play an instrumental role in validating cinema and lending respectability to this new form of entertainment. The Professor prescribes escapism for the wellbeing of the general public subject to alienating work

²⁸ Eric Barnouw, *The Magician and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

²⁹ George Mitchell, "The Movies and Münsterberg", *Jump Cut* 27 (July 1982): 56.

³⁰ In 1916 he publishes *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*.

conditions; he justifies the 'passive'³¹ mode of cinema consumption as a valid aesthetic approach because, with its parallel edits and time lapses, it 'mirrors' the subject's perception and the working of the mind. Only, as in Münsterberg's case, opinions and assessment are not neutral and dispassionate but subservient to capital: 'his film aesthetic remains consistent with his earlier work in industrial psychology, particularly that part of it which sought to find ways in which psychology could "secure the greatest and the most satisfactory output of work from every man."³²

These considerations on the psychological impact of the moving image and its instrumentalisation are relevant for the notion of a constructed voice in the ventriloquial objects, and anticipate later debates on the ideology of the culture industries with Adorno. They also relate to the ideas pursued in Chapter I that deal with the notion of the inner voice in psychology, developed in connection with the 'new' perceptual syntax introduced by film.

In Münsterberg's day many joined in an encomium of cinema's narcotic properties. Over half a century later Conrad attributes the demise of the wonders of magic to the technological evolution of the cinematic apparatus: 'new technologies of illusion irrevocably domesticated the imagery of the Impossible, first using stop action and double exposures, then optical effects and models, and finally by using computer animation and morphing'³³ eventually and inevitably producing a contemporary jaded spectator. For Conrad,³⁴ magic can be generally seen to survive tenuously *outside the televisual* frame: in his opinion, Oursler's practice restores the antics of magic by means of formal innovation. For the critic, Oursler's audiovisual strategy achieves an uncanny quality through blurring of the (video) frame and the use of voice reproduction.

³¹ Traditionally the bourgeois classes disapproved of cinema because of its passive mode of consumption; instead they favoured more stimulating and edifying forms of entertainment.

³² Mitchell, 58.

³³ Conrad, 49.

³⁴ Conrad locates magic, or the Logic of the Impossible, outside any ethnographic socio-religious domain.

Oursler's signature sculptures feature small dummies on whose disproportionately large heads are projected speaking faces. Instead of relying on the concealment of artifice (Altman), all components are on display: speakers and projectors form part of the exhibit along with modest props such as household objects. For Conrad, their technical simplicity heightens their ambiguity, and as ghostly dummies, they awaken the long lost sense of magic. This unassuming microcosm obeys the logic of the ventriloquist act, with a speaking dummy and mechanisms on display and for Conrad it succeeds because of its anachronism.

Conrad sets out to investigate the effects of this strategy and speculates on the phenomenology of sound with an alternative model from the aforementioned one by Altman. He directs our attention to the evolutionary development of the senses across species, to emphasise the fact that amongst earlier creatures, hearing as a navigational tool in the landscape, precedes binocular vision with unprecedented sophistication. More widespread and established theories use a parallel argument to make powerful claims about the sense of hearing, namely the fact that hearing is the first sense to be developed by the foetus prior to birth. This view feeds into psychoanalytical theories attributing to sound its ominous power associated with the pre-Symbolic.³⁵

The debates as to why sound is powerful are seductive, and to an extent, very speculative. The exploratory nature of the territory is confirmed by the oppositional views expressed by Altman and Conrad. Altman states that the power of sound is due to the concealment of its source, whereas for Conrad, it comes from the display of its source and from the blurring of the video frame. Can we speculate that the effect of sound is dependent on different aesthetic contexts with different modes of display and reception?

There may be moments where cinema and sculpture invoke divergent sensorial and cognitive responses, or cinema already exists as a category influencing the viewer's response; for ventriloquial objects the specifics are important, and are to be harnessed in a broader conversation that takes into account the politics of the utterance across contexts and aesthetic domains. One must remember that, when

³⁵ See Chion and Rosolato amongst others.

artists take on the moving image in the 1960s and 1970s, be it with expanded cinema or with monitor installations, they inevitably do so with a sculptural approach because of the spatial context of the gallery and the cumbersome nature of analogue media.

On the other hand, more recently, the evolution of digital moving image technology presents a consolidation and hybridisation of moving image practices. A shift in tendencies is acknowledged in 2003 by critic Maeve Connolly: 'several contributors comment upon the turn towards an immersive, or "cinematic", mode of installation in the 1990s ... Hal Foster, for example, notes the emergence of an overtly pictorialist mode of exhibition in which the apparatus of projection is often obscured'.³⁶

This digression serves the purpose of flagging up the need for an integration of theoretical approaches and their inter-dependence with material conditions of production. Historically, one can see how cinema's critical approach is dependent on the set up of the darkened auditorium, but the same cannot be valid for contemporary generations of viewers, who nevertheless are hooked, perhaps on the not so magic spell of the audiovisual via the TV set or the computer screen.

What kind of ventriloquism we do encounter in Oursler's work? Pieces such as *Insomnia* (1998) or *Troubler* (1997) disarm the viewer with their freakish intimacy. The puppets exist as three-dimensional objects, their heads are animated by a projection and they speak. While sound in the moving image can be seen to provide the third dimension to the pictorial, in this sculptural context the impact of the sculptures goes undisputed and is sedimented by repetition and looping. The video image is thrown onto the effigy in the same way the voice emits back from them.

Conrad's claim is that the demise of the frame forces the sound to act as a substitute to 'demarcate a certain boundary of the image's "reality". That is, the physical system of video projection...demands a new suspension of disbelief'.³⁷ Conrad's project is set to resurrect the realm of the Impossible thanks to the lack of video frame. According to this logic, the viewer is caught in a web of paradoxes,

³⁶ Maeve Connolly, "Of Other Worlds: Nature and the Supernatural in the Moving Image Installations of Jaki Irvine", *Screen* 49, 2 (Summer 2008): 207.

³⁷ Connolly, 52.

and is forced to redefine what constitutes illusion and the real; this reasoning echoes with earlier discussions on the uncanny nature of the ventriloquial object.

Oursler's figures invoke vulnerability through size and disproportion: enlarged (animated and speaking) heads, and irrelevant minute bodies, hurriedly approximated and unsubstantial, echo the configuration of an underdeveloped foetus. Conrad suggests that Oursler's ventriloquism problematises the Cartesian model of mind (voice) versus body (image) and that 'normalcy' is at stake through the voice of possession, conceptualised by the critic as inverted ventriloquism, because the messages are channelled and not thrown. Of course, the disproportionate heads in Oursler's medianic figures do not reinforce a rational and reassuring *cogito*, yet neither is the voice easily equated to the mind in Descartes, where thinking occurs prior to the utterance.

Descartes divorces subjective being from materiality and that which is not *cogito*, which would therefore exclude the voice per se: 'I saw that I could conceive that I had no body...On the contrary, I saw from the very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it very evidently and certainly followed that I was; on the other hand, if I had only ceased from thinking, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined had really existed, I should have no reason for thinking that I had existed. From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence of nature of which is to think... so that this 'me'...the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body...' ³⁸

Oursler's work, via Conrad's commentary opens up a complex domain around materiality, consciousness and subjectivity. Western metaphysics assumes a transcendental subject and attributes to the voice the role of immanent presence: the next interpretation of ventriloquism deals with a voice that defies immanence.

³⁸ Descartes, René, *Key Philosophical Writings* (Kent: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997): 92.

Myth, Past Voices and Present Bodies

Critic Eleanor Margolies articulates a ventriloquism located in the domain of theatre, through the work of playwright Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990) and director/performer Fiona Templeton³⁹. The elaboration of the ventriloquial elements, namely in the voice apparatus, sense of uncanny, and effect, stake a different territory from those explored via the previous cinematic and sculptural examples.

Margolies' main thesis focuses on a ventriloquism that must give voice to the dead, but where the sensuality of live physical bodies, as performers, as well as audience, is essential to this process. In this context, as we will see later in the section, Margolies explicitly dismisses the efficacy of photographic and video techniques; I instead integrate my comments on these theatrical works using the logic of ventriloquial objects that is not medium specific, but considers their audiovisual construction and impact.

At the core of Margolies' analysis is the concept of time and the paradox developed (on stage) with the notion of 'past' voices inhabiting living bodies. If Altman sought to vindicate the position of the theatrical repressed in cinema, by emphasising the ventriloquism of a written dramaturgy, Margolies privileges the live performance in a way that paradoxically reminds us of cinema, as the *mis en scène* of voices and performances of past, or often dead people.

Voice throwing and frame blurring have so far conveyed the 'magic' or 'uncanny' of the voice, now the options open further with contributions from mythology and folklore and the idea of dead people returning into the present. Phenomenological illusionism is here supplanted by the mystical folkloristic tradition of pre-war Poland that was the milieu of Kantor's oeuvre. A powerful folkloristic Jewish myth used by Kantor is the *dybbuk*; this Hebrew word meaning 'attachment' consists in a figure inhabited by a dead soul that has failed to fulfil its role during its life and therefore gets another chance in such form. In the eponymous play 1914 by S. Ansky, a bride is possessed by a malicious dybbuk the night before her wedding.

³⁹ Eleanor Margolies, "Ventriloquism: Kantor, Templeton, and the Voices of the Dead", *Theatre Quarterly* 16, no. 63 (2000).

Margolies flags up another reference from the Yiddish literary tradition, this time from Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-1991), which emphasises the uncanny power of sound linked to the realm of the dead. Interestingly located between actual and inanimate bodies, Singer's story of the two dead geese⁴⁰ does not fail to exemplify its point. Margolies insists that, despite the rational explanation of the event as a physical phenomenon, the fact remains that the episode of the geese does not fail to stir. The dead geese in Singer's story are ventriloquial: they may display the set up of the voice apparatus, but cannot justify its lingering affect.

Another myth introduced by Margolies, and in an elegant association with the windpipes of the geese, is the story of Pan and Syrinx from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.⁴¹ According to the myth, Syrinx is a nymph, who in order to escape the god's advances transmutes herself into reeds that in turn become sonorous in the wind. They cause the god to be seduced by the music and instigate the habit of collecting more reeds to regenerate her sweet voice, from then on known as Pan pipes.

Margolies flags up the power of an inanimate object to create affective sounds (metaphorically as a musical instrument) in this case via the transmutation of the female voice into music, resulting in purely affective communication. Pan is appeased, as he has found a mode (or medium) of communication with his bodiless 'object' of desire. The simile that collapses woman into music is problematic, yet canonical: just as the verbal and the vocal must operate through liminality, rather than reinforce polarized positions, as we will see later, many ventriloquial objects do address gender politics by interfering with this canonical tradition that collapses musicality, vocality, the body and femininity.

Several aspects here relate to the question of the apparatus; Chion's notion of causal listening (also referenced in Altman) reverberates with the dictum: 'the sound

⁴⁰ In short, the mystery of sound emitting dead geese is eventually rationally explained by a female character through elementary physics: the phenomenon is due to air trapped in the animals' wind pipes.

⁴¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Translated by David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004): 39.

asks where? And the image responds *here!*⁴² In that respect Margolies is unsatisfied with representations of theatrical performances to camera, as they reproduce a disorientating feel in the viewer, denying the eminently spatial quality of sound consumption. (I would comment that this situation is primarily confined to amateur recordings of theatre performances).

What Margolies ultimately emphasises in relation to both Kantor and Templeton, is the failure of the photographic and video medium respectively: 'both video and photography fail to make present the absent because they cannot give them a body. She claims that by lending bodies to the dead, Kantor and Templeton both transmit a sensual understanding of the past to the audience, the sound of the past is diffuse, undetectable, induced through the mute matter of the audience's bodies'.⁴³

Yet, in terms of the economy of ventriloquial objects, it is interesting to consider how these practitioners implement their form of ventriloquism, in other words, how are these medianic bodies constructed and to what avail. Kantor, for example seems to expose the fiction of the performance while infusing it with the notion of mystical beliefs, as seen in the example of the dybbuk. The playwright seeks jarring outcomes and affects via the hybridizations of people and objects, twin characterisations, including his own position as actor and auteur and cross-gendered performances. This logic of paradox overtly problematises agency in the construction of the voice. Kantor's philosophy is couched in the notion of Time set against the immanence of individual finite existence; in such space the live and the dead cohabit, and as Margolies states: 'the actor is imagined as being "inhabited" by the words of the dead; Kantor describes the words used in performance as being like found objects.'⁴⁴

Since in Kantor's conceptual and philosophical assumption it is for the dead to author the speech of the performance, this de-naturalisation of the theatrical utterance becomes a fundamental aspect in his oeuvre. Kantor's emphasis on the 'external' nature of the actor's speech is not dissimilar to Altman's in spite of the

⁴² Margolies, 204.

⁴³ Margolies, 210.

⁴⁴ Margolies, 208.

contextual disparity. If in Altman ventriloquial speech is politically loaded and its source disguised by the apparatus, in Kantor the notion of individual verbal agency is undermined, the individual becomes the 'medium' signifier of a past dimension, enfolded but equally irretrievable. The message in Kantor is not divinatory, since live beings lend their bodies to the articulation of a dead past – similar issues will be explored in Chapter III with Katarina Zdjelar's work for instance.

Similarly to *The Dybbuk*, in the performance of Fiona Templeton the body of a woman is inhabited by presence that of a dead man: the female performer interacts on the live stage with a videotape of the late Michael Ratomski. In *Recognition* (1996) Templeton is on stage reading, speaking and addressing the audience (as 'you') and the deceased man (as 'him' and 'you'), in her words: 'In the speech of influence/I feel you all through me'.⁴⁵ Later in the performance, Templeton interacts with his video image inhabiting a space similarly furnished to her stage environment and the levels of interactions and juxtapositions become more and more layered. Her voice 'multiplies' by adopting a range of pitches and accents. The intimacy evoked by the consolation of the video and its replay possibilities is exacerbated on the one hand by the precipitation of the man into illness and thwarted by the distance of the two incommensurable spaces.

Margolis' analysis provides a kind of reversed ventriloquism, where the live body is lent to the dead: the emphasis appears modelled on the divinatory tradition. If Kantor's practice lends itself to a ventriloquial reading, with Templeton, to an extent, the shortfall of the photographic image recalls both Altman's critique and the transgression of the televisual frame suggested by Conrad. Ultimately, the voice has a weight, a body, a political message, presence, materiality, and a temporality that seems to be denied to the visual alone. On the other hand, as Kantor implies, the body alone is not enough and, if it is too wide a leap to align Kantor's 'bio-object' with the digital cyborg, on the other hand, the next example contributes to supplement the framework against which body and voice can be conceptualised.

⁴⁵ Templeton in Margolis, 208.

The Sentient Voice of the Machine

Joseph Auner develops his concept of ventriloquism through the postmodern notion of the cyborg; his argument subverts the stereotypical attribution of rationality to the machine and sentimentality to the human. Instead, via the voice, emotionality becomes aligned with the machine. While he introduces his argument with two moving image examples, his analysis focuses on the aural and is set in contemporary pop music: his ventriloquism is therefore concerned with the aural mode alone.

At first glance, I would comment that Auner's ventriloquism, in spite of the subverting intent, reiterates and reinforces the oppositional dualism body/machine - which in turn reflects other binaries, such as man/woman, speech/music and of course order/chaos. Later in the text, his reference to theories of decentred cognition, performing a temporary dissolving of these dichotomies, have more of an affinity with the contiguity and overlaps of ventriloquial objects.

For Auner sentimentality is aligned in contemporary pop music with the machine (with some referencing to XVIII century automata, futurist military fantasies and Weimar's 'vogue for mechanical art'), the introduction to his thesis comes from an example from Stanley Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey*. HAL 9000, Kubrick's sentient robot, illustrates the fact that the role reversal between Dave and HAL is epitomized by the human's gesture of euthanasia against the machine; this in turn, is met by the hypersentimental response of the robot, who bursts into song with *Daisy Bell*, a 1892 romantic tune about a bicycle built for two. Auner states that: 'Nothing in the film has prepared us for his last words to be a sentimental song from long-lost times'.⁴⁶ However surprising, I would suggest that the intent behind this song is less to do with creating a hyperbole into a sentimental past, but rather it is a question of citation. In fact, *Daisy Bell* is known to be the first song to have ever been sung by a computer (IBM 7094, 1961) and Kubrick had for many years carried out substantial business with IBM. In this sense my argument makes a case for citation: in the same way that David Hall in his film *Stooky Bill* TV was making

⁴⁶ Joseph Auner, "Sing it for Me: Posthuman Ventriloquism in Recent Popular Music", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128, no. 1 (2003): 99.

references to the history of television, in *2001 Space Odyssey* Kubrick was quoting the history of computing.

Auner follows with a second example of a posthumous Kubrick, produced by Spielberg: *A.I.* (Artificial Intelligence). Here, the theme of the sentient android materialises in the case of a boy robot who needs to become a real boy to re-gain the love of his adoptive mother. This narrative line is very similar to that of *Pinocchio*, a fairy tale of a wooden dummy boy, who aspires to be en fleshed to gain the love of his carpenter father. The classical reference to the Pinocchio, closely references ventriloquism and an identification of what Auner terms as 'locum of expression' with the machine/dummy that after all is not exclusive to the postmodern context.

After these examples, the bulk of Auner's argument is mainly circumscribed to the domain of the aural and specifically that of contemporary pop music: 'in no aspect of our lives has the penetration of the human by machines been more complete than in music'.⁴⁷ The semantic choice of 'penetration' reads very deliberate as phallic engendering and Symbolic overpowering. It appears that the phallic equation of music and technology has not only irrevocably demoted the status of the musical instrument but ultimately triumphs by subjecting the human body to be processed into music material. Californian band Matmos, who perform via mixing sounds of surgery (*California Rhinoplasty*) is emblematic of this tendency.

With the contamination of the body by technology, and the interspersing of our daily lives by artificially generated voices, comes the role of the modulator in pop music. For Auner, vocoders, autotuners, and similar processing technology, ventriloquize the singer's voice into a guarantee of chart success. The aspiration of the culture industries to a winning formula in the light of market profits, is compatible with the issue of the ideological implications of the script raised (Altman), and with the general ethos of questioning the voice apparatus underlying ventriloquial objects.

In addition Auner's argument insists on the hierarchical overturning of this cross-fertilisation: 'it is the technological sphere that is made the locus of expression,

⁴⁷ Auner, 99.

while the human voices are mechanised, drained of subjectivity, turned into signs that circulate as subroutines of a larger system'.⁴⁸ His statement places the question of agency in a prominent place yet it is somewhat depoliticised: 'the collusion of human loops and sad machines is a staged narrative'⁴⁹ or simply resolved with a camp visual simile of the image of the *Wizard of Oz*.

If the core of the argument insists on the contemporary cross-fertilisation of human and machine, Auner's argument follows a historical strand via an earlier modernist genealogy of the development of voice reproduction technology (a legitimate move especially since the song *Daisy Bell* is dated 1892). Yet, in this article there are a number of references that are indirectly relevant in this context. One is the citation of corporate technological development by AT&T who 'announced its "Natural Voices" software, claiming it to be capable of reproducing any voice, even of bringing 'the voices of long-dead celebrities back to life'.⁵⁰ This element is interesting in the context previously raised by Margolies, albeit through its dissonance. One of my own ventriloquial objects, the short film *The News Editor* (2009), references the use of synthetic voices as we will see in Chapter II.

Auner also references Katherine Hayles' posthuman model (*How We Became Posthuman*, 1999) and extracts some thoughts on the notion of distributed cognition, which considers consciousness as an epiphenomenon, as only one of the countless systems that regulate body interactions, therefore disavowing the idea of a liberal humanist subjectivity: 'cybernetics simulation renders experience, and the real itself problematic'.⁵¹ Ventriloquial objects, by placing the emphasis on the speaking objects, also disavow a discourse that privileges more traditional notions of subjectivity and the subject object dichotomy; we will find in Chapter I references to alternative paradigms of cognition, and in Chapter II the work of Matt Mullican challenging consciousness through an alternative hypnotic voice.

In Auner, the question of hybridising is addressed with dance music: the human drummer becomes the precursor of the machine, liminally conceived between

⁴⁸ Auner, 100.

⁴⁹ Auner, 100.

⁵⁰ Lisa Guernsey cited in Auner, 100.

⁵¹ Bill Nichols cited in Auner, 104.

human and automated performance; Moby, for example, explores this hybridisation through the sampling and layering of voices. This fashioning of repetition provides for Auner an application of Hayles' notion of distributed cognition, because the listener can feel gratified at many points by identifying with multiple personas: 'the ideal of the "machine soul" in dance music relates to Hayles' view of the cyborg not as a station on the path towards disembodiment, but as a way of reconfiguring embodiment'.⁵² Given the premises of this discussion, it is no coincidence to find in the voice the locus of decentering and embodiment given the premises of this discussion.

Aside from hybridisation, repetition becomes a discriminatory factor between human and machine output: Auner, via Simon Frith, reminds us that even though the microphone introduces a sense of closeness and intimacy in the performance, with repetition this becomes invalidated: 'but when the recording of the voice repeats, when it is placed into the looping system we associate with the mechanical, all is lost – just as a record getting stuck was always a traumatic moment, shattering the sense of immediacy and authenticity promised by the recording'.⁵³ This 'traumatic' element of repetition in voice recording is significant for ventriloquial objects: it can be conceptualised as the disconcerting element disturbing the naturalisation of speech. Repetition is also potentially a powerful discriminator between sound event and sound representation, as we will see in another of my ventriloquial objects featuring the singing voice, *Mi Piace* (2008).

Further considerations on repetition and music lead Auner to consider *musique concrète*, with repetition as its main strategy for the transformation of sounds. He cites Palombini's claim that music is produced and constituted via the repetition of the same sonic fragment, and observes that the implications are very different if the sonic event repeated is the sound of the human voice. Auner's take on emotionality and repetition in the ventriloquised voice, leads to a different take in the following example.

⁵² Auner, 117.

⁵³ Auner, 112.

Repetition and the Emotional Voice

Repetition, particularly when used in connection with recording, provides a rich territory for voice experimentation. It can be used to emphasise the distinctions between sound event and representation, thus making the artifice or apparatus available. We leave Auner's musical context, to enter a more theatrical one, with an example of voice repetition in a monologue; be it live or recorded, Mladen Dolar's statement considering the staged repetition seems fitting in context: 'theatre is the ultimate practical laboratory of endowing the same text with the shades of intonation and thereby bringing it to life, empirically testing this every evening with the audience'⁵⁴.

The work by Anna Gaskell is singled out here, as for the critic Nancy Princenthal it exemplifies a form of emotional ventriloquism. In Gaskell's film performance *Acting Lessons* (2007) an actress is being led by a male voice off-screen. Her monologue tells of an average day, during which her character's perception of her boyfriend Tommy has been altered. The performance is frequently interrupted by a male coach, who is occasionally visible on a mirror, or in front of the camera. The staged directorial emphasis is on delivery, and on the affective qualities of the voice to embody emotion. Gaskell's authoring and casting, place her emphasis on a critique of voice prosody and gender stereotypes, and as we will see these motifs are central to ventriloquial objects: questions of prosody and the voice will be address in Chapter II, gender construction underlies many considerations throughout the project; in fact Gaskell's work could have featured in Chapter II, exemplifying the open and potentially expanding nature of this framework.

When in the voice the 'verbal' is neglected and the emphasis shifts to the 'vocal', aspects such as timbre, accent and intonation become core. These elements are not only functional to evidence emotionality, as in Gaskell's piece, they can be connected with other crucial aspects for ventriloquial objects, like the deployment of regional or foreign accents as social markers in non-standardised voice deliveries – as in the case of my work *Voicings* (2007-2010).

⁵⁴ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT Press, 2006): 21.

We must remember that the makeshift distinction between ‘verbal’ and ‘vocal’ in the voice is non-binary, liminal and unscientific, and is designed to allow for the objects to articulate their own specificities in context. The ventriloquial strategy is intended not to fix practice within theoretical frameworks; objects may be compatible with specific frameworks but not defined or contained by them.

For example, when considering the emotional quality against which Gaskell’s work has been critiqued, one could reference Roman Jakobson’s scientific linguistic model of communication⁵⁵ that features the emotional along with five other specific functions. The remaining five are: referential (contextual information), poetic (autotelic), conative (imperative), phatic (checking the channel is working) and metalingual (checking the code is working). According to Jakobson they can overlap, but one of these functions is always destined to prevail.

Ventriloquial objects, may be problematised through the ambiguity of the sender, or through the phatic function, however, this analysis, unlike the ethos behind structuralist linguistics, will avoid a teleological or taxonomic intent. Instead, since this analysis and framework must privilege a liminal and politicised analysis of the voice, it will be necessary to consider in the next example, the voice in a socio-economic context.

Voice, Subtitling and Cultural Ventriloquism

A final consideration before journeying through MUVE must address the political implications of voice translation in film, through either subtitling or dubbing. Subtitling is significant as a nodal point between speech and the utterance on the one hand, but also in relation to economic aspects related to the industrial production of cinema and the question of strategies of dissemination played out by distributors. Antje Ascheid⁵⁶ flags the notion of cultural ventriloquism by considering the voice as cultural and political locus of production and consumption.

⁵⁵ Roman Jakobson, *Fundamentals of Language* (Gravenhage: Mouton, 1956).

⁵⁶ Antje Ascheid, “Speaking Tongues: Voice Dubbing as Cultural Ventriloquism”, *Velvet Light Trap* 40 (1997).

Dubbing and subtitling produce radically different experiences and contribute to ideological positions that must be acknowledged. Ascheid is against subtitling, as this is seen to provide a mere approximation of the film text,⁵⁷ as well as interfering with the identification of the audiovisual experience. Subtitling is negatively evaluated because ultimately the spectator is deprived of the pleasure inherent in the immersive cinematic experience. The ethos behind MUVÉ is instead against the idea of an immersive cinematic experience, and more akin to materialist view of cinema, where the apparatus must be made available (and which makes dubbing undesirable). It has also to be noted that dubbing precludes access to the actors' voices, thus depleting the value of their acting, while depriving the audience of the sound of the original language.

Although Ascheid does acknowledge some advantages in experiencing the sound of the original languages, her overall verdict on subtitling is negative because subtitling is ultimately seen as a reminder of cultural inferiority. In fact, as dubbing is a considerably more expensive production process, dubbing is a possible reminder of the nation's lack of economic resources.

On the other hand, for Ascheid, dubbing radically transforms the film text instigating a cultural ventriloquism: 'it foregrounds its function, ceasing to be a "foreign" film in order to become just a film. Just as the game computer, the car, or the shirt must be perceived through their function primarily and only secondarily connoted with the unstable images of the countries which produce them, the to-be-dubbed motion picture or television program suppresses its cultural specificity to emphasise its transnational use value.'⁵⁸

It appears to be a vast leap to consider film's functionality as equivalent to that of a shirt; unlike the shirt, film has a discursive role, and even if one of its scopes is entertainment, the function of entertainment is still eminently responsible for the propagation of cultural values. Yet, for the critic, there is some kind of 'neutral' potentiality for film: 'it becomes the raw material that is to be re-inscribed into the

⁵⁷ Here the author interprets text as linguistic text, while film theory refers to the film as text.

⁵⁸ Ascheid, 40.

different cultural contexts of the consumer nations through the use of dubbing'.⁵⁹ The hypothesis of what a 'deculturalised' object might be, calls for a more complex debate about cultural imperialism and the usurpation of value systems. A pertinent case (discussed with a different slant in the main body of writing) is artist/filmmaker Eija-Liisa Ahtila, who uses her native Finnish language with English subtitling as a conscious socio-political statement in her work.

Ventriloquial Objects as Audiovisual Objects

As sampled in the above collection, ventriloquism pertains to the whole spectrum of media, with video, film, theatre and performance - this study will mostly focus on ventriloquial objects in moving image, in order to facilitate access to the (experience of the) referenced material for the reader.

A final consideration must flag a recent sculpture exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute. *With Hidden Noise* (2004) not only acknowledges its connection with ventriloquism, but it challenges the notion that sculpture is a silent art. Amongst this collection, aside from the pieces that fall within the time-based category, one finds sculptures like Marcel Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise* (1916) – that for art critic Martin Herbert is the blueprint for video art - or Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of its own Making* (1965).

When Duchamp made *With Hidden Noise*, he gave it to Walter Arensberg asking him to hide an object inside the ball of wire and screw the holding plates back together. Nobody knows what rattles inside the piece, and the mysterious voice that 'could be a coin or a diamond' in the core of the sculpture, will always remain a secret. For me, Duchamp's piece is a fully-fledged ventriloquial object; medium and message will always remain subject to a formal artifice, its voice is uncanny and its activation is reliant, and specific to, active audience participation. Duchamp makes a political gesture in asking his patron to actively, yet invisibly create the voice for the object - this is why I choose to feature this work, in disguise, in my fictional tale.

⁵⁹ Ascheid, 40.

Morris' piece, on the other hand, is also a ventriloquial object, less political, and is candid about the origin of its voice; yet it challenges temporality with its coherent yet 'impossible' dubbing. Ironically this piece could be read as a faithful illustration of cinematic post-production, yet sculpturally 'impossible', just as it is Beckett's poetic message in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1972), another work featured in the fictional tale via its reference to Atom Egoyan's version of the play.

These further examples serve to emphasise the possibility for a critical framework about the voice that is rigorous and nevertheless spans across disciplines, just as the voice inherently can be seen to challenge the boundaries of specific subjects. In addition, the aural must be, for this framework, considered multimodally: hearing alone will not do, as we experience the world multimodally, when considering ventriloquial objects, sound and vision take effect simultaneously, as the sculptures of *Hidden Noise* have demonstrated.

Having explored a number of strategies opened by ventriloquism and defined a territory for ventriloquial objects, a fictional tale will feature the *mis en scène* of the inception of the museum; this will be interwoven with references to sound works as literary texts, actual references to critics featured in this section, real events and artworks. Then the main analysis will be organised according to three moments along the liminal continuum of the verbal and the vocal; in order to evidence these components, I have hypothesized three moments where such liminality is problematic.

Echoed by the architecture of MUVE, the three chapters will consider first, a problematisation of the relationship of the voice to writing, as in the naturalisation of a film script or in the attempt to theorize the inner voice (emphasis on the verbal). In the second, I will consider linguistic shortfalls in the voice, such as mistranslation and miscommunication, that affect verbal communication through elements belonging to the vocal register, in a move towards the third chapter devoted to alternative, political and subversive roles of singing (emphasis on the vocal). These nodal positions are speculative and further 'problematic' moments of overlapping could be identified along the continuum of the verbal and the vocal to extend the criticality of a practice on the voice.

Chapter I

OF LYING FATHERS, AUTISTIC FOOTBALL AND INFANTILISATION: VOICE AS WRITING, INNER VOICE AND THINKING

Premise

One of the virtues of ventriloquial objects is that of 'showing' that the relationship between a sound event and sound as representation is not one of equivalence. Yet this aspect is not relegated to questions of ontology, rather, it addresses the politics of representation assumed to be operating at the two levels of form and content. This is where the investigation begins.

Considering that ventriloquial objects implicate the voice via a representational mode, they are ideally located to flag the incongruence between language as form and the contingency of speaking bodies. However, the overarching argument takes such incongruence as a cue to free the speaking body from the assumed dependence upon subjectivisation within a linguistic paradigm. Voices, inner voices and thought processes will not be contained by language alone or determined by the lack of it.

When it comes to the mechanization of representation, Walter Benjamin was and remains of the most influential exponents. In the 1970s, the ideological operation of the 'cinematic apparatus' was much discussed, its apparent transparency and indexicality revealed as highly constructed and problematic, not least in gender terms, but also more broadly in terms of the politics of representation. Yet these discussions have consolidated around the axis of visibility, hence of the 'gaze' (possibly because of their origin in the photographic image), and if these debates have evolved since the inception of the photographic image, the study of sound reproduction has not attained the same rigour and attention. On the other hand, 'to speak out' is synonymous with a subjective agency or its attribution on behalf of the object of representation. Ventriloquial objects reveal the opacity of the apparatus in order to problematise their contents.

This chapter will begin the critique of the apparatus by considering the notion of scripted speech. This mode is seen to prioritize ‘the verbal’ over ‘the vocal’ in the voice and is also a problematic moment when thinking about speech in relation to agency. In fact, the naturalization of scripted speech is contradictory when it comes to speaking subjects: the notions of utterance and dialogue are based on the premise that those engaged in it are not aware of what they or their interlocutor are going to say. As referenced in the previous chapter (Altman), classical and commercial narrative films naturalize this oxymoronic proposition by disguising the script as the manifestation of the spontaneous utterance.

From a linguistic perspective, one of the consequences of attributing speaking agency to subjects/objects of representation consists in merging the speaking subject with the subject of speech, or in other words, the singular speaking body with the generic structure. Here ventriloquial objects offer an opportunity for reconsideration on the ideological implications found in the notion of speaking agency, as we will see in the following analysis and especially with the example of my film *Voicings*.

The following elaboration will map out a close reading of several ventriloquial objects that have been singled out because they problematise the script. In some of these objects the script is not concealed (*ME/WE*, *Voicings*), the voice is conveyed visually as text (*Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait*), or it is constructed derivatively (*The Arbor*, *Voicings*).

The analysis of these unconventional voices will take into account the complex relationship of aural, visual and writing modes. This syncretic mode, that describes the complex communicative process of an artwork, will, in turn, be aligned with the notion of the inner voice. In addition, investigations of the inner voice bring together psycholinguistics to the inception of film; I therefore integrate the discussion with a popular case study that dramatizes the introduction of film recording in Hollywood (*Singin’ in the Rain*).

The first two works under scrutiny are paired up because they feature oppositional and analogical qualities. The first is *ME/WE* (Fin., 1993) by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, the second is *Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait* (Fr., 2005) by Douglas Gordon. These

films problematise speech representation from a gender perspective: both films feature a male performing a confessional monologue. Both works bring into comparison their relationship to commercial formats of standard media representation: *ME/WE* is designed to fulfill an advertisement slot, while *Zidane* is the filming of an actual football game. Also, both works must abide to the fixed duration imposed by these formats: the first piece is 90 seconds, the second 90 minutes. Another analogy evident from the titles is their relationship to portraiture: in both films the protagonist's 'voice' is used to construct a psychological portrait couched in a social context, respectively, the family and the job.

While the time discrepancy that separates the production of the two pieces reveals a difference in artists' practices, the evolution in media trends that reverberates through the two works emphasises the gap. For example, Ahtila's critique of masculinity by intervening in the advertising slot is obviously less contemporary, firstly because of the evolution of new media, secondly because of a broader and widespread understanding of semiotics amongst the public and advertisers alike. Conversely, in Gordon's piece, we identify the current media obsession with the cult of celebrities with its insistence on the scopophilic proliferation of camera gazes, (echoed by the burgeoning of video surveillance devices) along with an obsession with the immediacy of live coverage.

I acknowledge these trends because they will not constitute the focus of the analysis. Instead, the investigation will consider the politics and use of the voice as this is implicitly hijacked by its relationship to the written word. Using Kaja Silverman's arch-argument that calls upon structuralist theories of the 1970s (R. Barthes, E. Benveniste), the discussion will evolve using linguistic theories of language formation and inner speech and their historical connection with cinema's hermeneutics, through primary (L. Vygotski, B. Eikhenbaum) and secondary (P. Willemsen, R. Levako) sources. The ventriloquial objects will be used as a cue to discuss formal strategies that problematise speech and their poetic and ideological impact. In a parallel and integrated strand, the discussion will participate in undermining the all-encompassing role of language assumed by post-structuralist theories - one that began with my introduction of a framework that distinguishes between the verbal and vocal components in the voice.

Close Ups

This section features a close reading of two films that insists on the impact of their scripted voices. In order to achieve this, the 90 second film *ME/WE* will be 'paused and slowed down', while the 90 minute *Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait* will be considered through a textual display of its subtitled voice. The analysis of the first film will contribute to the uncanny voice of ventriloquial objects, along with a critique of commercial media as dictated by the standard format of these films. Questions around the presumed isomorphism of gendered voices (Silverman) will be integrated with references to the hermeneutics of silent film. Gordon's film will be read as a commentary, based on the construction of the voice of the footballer that in turn will lead to the problematisation of the speaking subject in the following section.

In 1993 Ahtila's experiments with formats of story telling in the time constraints and mode of display of the advertising spot (a 90 second duration) resulted in a film trilogy of which *ME/WE* is the first film. While plainly echoing its referent genre of advertising, the work dramatically departs from it, to achieve a narrative complexity that anticipates what will be the artist's stylised and dynamic cinematographic approach: 'making films and installations became a matter of identifying the links between images, sounds, rhythms, light, characters and words, and using them to approach and construct the story.'⁶⁰

'The story' in Ahtila's work always resonates with ideological issues; her work tends to be issue based and painstakingly researched using documentary strategies; it is a place where artifice and reality meet in a very sophisticated conjunction of form and content. In the specific instance of *ME/WE*, Ahtila not only invades the space of the commercial spot, turning it into a non-profit exhibition space, but she addresses its context through the deconstruction and critique of the ubiquitous trope of the nuclear family as represented by commercial media, and brands it with her specific aesthetic approach to negotiating reality and fictionality.

⁶⁰ Eija-Lisa Ahtila, *The Cinematic Works*, (London: BFI, 2006), 7.

ME/WE features a father speaking a direct and emotive monologue whilst moving in a garden where he and his family are hanging the washing. This *mise en scène* blatantly sets family life into a stereotypical collage of advertising gloss, only to ironically denounce its paradox in the lack of nuclear cohesion, in fact, in a cross-cultural pun, the father is: 'washing the dirty linen in public'. At the same time, the washing powder commercial is the ultimate cliché in advertising, and is matched to the direct pseudo-aggressive address to camera, also stereotypically located in this commercial genre.

There is already evidence of the potential density and richness of formal and contextual devices in this short: at the level of shot variations, sound synchronization, poetic narrative and knowledge of commercial media strategies. Because of the pacing and sophistication of the piece, all the subversive movements it contains cannot be simultaneously decoded on a single viewing (which is how the films were intended to be experienced), therefore, it could be speculated that the work generates in the viewer an uncanny afterimage. Consequently, the mode of the advertising spot is itself hijacked and its effect subverted in relation to the one sought by the market.

As noted in the previous chapter, ventriloquial voices often have a connection with the uncanny; there is a sense in which this feeling emanates from the whole film, but it is literally embodied by the character of the father, who at the very end splits into his own double. In this sense, the uncanny is no longer a quality that serves the ventriloquial voice to subvert the apparatus, it is featured in the diegesis with the visible split of the protagonist. It is interesting to note that a 1990s trend in art practice deals with death, loss and the uncanny, and that can be seen to be epitomized by Saatchi's *Sensation* show at The Royal Academy in 1997 and which subsequently traveled across major world venues.

The exhibition was destined to generate a trail of controversy: Damian Hirst's shark suspended in formaldehyde, Marcus Harvey's depiction of killer Myra Hindley and Ofili's black Madonna fashioned in elephant dung, still resonate with clamour in the popular imaginary. In the same show, we find the poignant hyperreal sculpture by Ron Mueck of his deceased father: *Dead Dad* features the man's corpse reproduced in two-thirds its original size. Mueck's lifeless and minute father figure

haunts the viewer with its poetic uncanny, while in *ME/WE* we watch the demise of the assertive father as he stares into his own double.

The following year, theorist Margaret Iversen reinterprets the uncanny by letting go of castration and favouring another one of Freud's significant essays. Using *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, she rethinks the return of the repressed via the death drive, and according to this model, the banality of the everyday becomes charged with unbidden memories that return to haunt the viewer - or in this instance, the male subject of *ME/WE*.

Towards the end of the film, a playful interaction with the mother behind the sheets, reveals instead the doubling up of the main character of the father: as he pulls back the sheets he finds his own double while commenting on his own split: 'someone is looking over my shoulder - maybe it's me - and saying, go back...' He is now in a chasm, face to face with his unbidden memories - paraphrasing Iversen's commentary (referring to Freud): 'by awakening in himself the possibility of experiencing them'.⁶¹ The ending leaves a productive confusion aggravated by the brevity of the film and the 'familiar' template of the scenario.

The complexity of form in this brief piece leaves a kind of 'intellectual affect' in the viewer, a sense of confusion that is nevertheless intelligibly located in a context of gender dislocation and patriarchal deconstruction. The dense pacing is the result of the simultaneous interaction of a number of formal techniques that foreground a non-naturalistic script. A more detailed analysis can disclose the formal strategies at play, that are not accessible to the single viewing for which the piece was conceived, as a pseudo-advert. The overall feeling for this ventriloquial object is that the character is trying to inhabit his own voice.

ME/WE opens with a fast and intense pace: a moving subject is followed by a moving camera at the rhythm of an assertive narration delivered to camera. It starts with a 3 second aerial shot of the father, followed by a 6 second medium shot, that cuts into a 3 second long shot, during which a fast narrative is delivered. At 19

⁶¹ Margaret Iversen, "In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny", *Art History* 21, no.3, (September 1998): 414.

seconds the wife appears, 3 seconds later the daughter and 3 seconds later the son. The 3 seconds editing rhythm is a feature invisibly reinforced by the pacing of actions and speech: with the son uttering 'Father! Father! Father!,' followed by the sound produced by the son and daughter shaking the linen three times. Then, after 3 seconds the voice of the father is mouthed by the daughter to camera; this image suggests the inevitable alienation inherent in film dubbing and in context, symbolically, in their relationship.

The literal ventriloquising or voice juxtaposition in the latter example punctuates a single moment of rupture, yet Ahtila's ventriloquising technique is far more complex and belongs to the overall architecture of the piece. The impact and coarseness of the outcome seems to point ahead of formal considerations around dubbing and to suggest the possibility of pushing the reading further, beyond the diegesis of this 90 second film.

If at this point the characterisation is destabilised and if the unidentified voice betrays agency, how does the viewer negotiate his/her relationship to the narrative? I would suggest that the formal strategy of resisting the anchoring of the narrative to a stable characterisation, along with the consistent presiding of a rhythmic speech pattern, emphasises the leading role of language in the structuring and production of the work, and therefore alerts the viewer to the existence and status of a carefully crafted script.

In experiencing this piece, the impact and charge suggest that the utterance existed prior to the speakers. Consequently they all appear to struggle to dub themselves into the spoken action, as if the resulting tension is built up through their attempt to lip-synch themselves into existence. Ahtila's outcome may usefully be understood as gesture towards revealing the cinematic apparatus, only the apparatus is not a mechanical device but a script. Since her project foregrounds a gender subversive agenda, here one witnesses the family being 'spoken by' the patriarchal script/discourse of the father as it disintegrates, revealing and resulting in a dissolution of the patriarchal symbolic order.

Along with the barrage of spatial temporal naturalisation that the cinematic illusion achieves, the scripted utterance is perhaps the most overlooked and absurd of all

deceits. Writing 'masked' as utterance is dangerous on two levels: firstly it prevents thinking and usurps subjective cognitive activities in the uttering subject; secondly, it misrepresents (naturalistic) speech by unnaturally crafting it into controlled, at times regularly patterned manifestations (in the vein of music or poetic language) hence affecting its otherwise more irregular pacing. In other words, by operating at the ontological level and by altering the phenomenology of the utterance, the way is open for inherent broader misappropriations and misrepresentations.

This mode of address is to an extent typical of theatre, where it is more or less consciously accepted because it falls under the remit and conventions of a literary genre and one that depends of the suspension on disbelief. Not only does the suspension of disbelief in theatre come with the awareness of the mechanism of production and performance, but also the script 'comes out' as written dialogue available in print. Yet, when considering the scripted utterance in cinema, these considerations become lost, even if in the beginning was the (written) word.

This position is consistent with Altman's notion of cinema as ventriloquism, with the visual puppet subjugated to the master word. My take differs from Altman's in that I rescue ventriloquism as a tool that can be used to unmask the artifice instead of being the standard practice of the perpetrator, on the grounds that ventriloquism promises a problematic experience of incoherence that will never be naturalized. It is the unease embedded in the form of ventriloquial objects, like Ahtila's piece, that warrants analysis in the present context.

Having paused *ME/WE* at 19 seconds, I would like to continue with more considerations brought about by the close reading of this piece and its devices. Alerted now to the three-time pattern repetition that is embedded in both picture and sound editing, we can flag that this is itself an established emphatic device in speech rhetoric. The conflicting juxtaposition of visual and aural messages is a method that adds intensity to the narrative line, and we find this device deployed three times: when we hear 'I don't know what my wife really wants' (20 seconds) we see the wife cocking her head and smiling at the husband; at the words '...We more or less had an ethical crisis...'; (30 seconds) father and daughter hug; and when the husband utters 'someone not loving her anymore' (57 seconds) the wife kisses the husband.

Athila combines linguistic puns with cinematics with a sophisticated sense of play. The following is an interpretation that assumes in the audience a level of knowledge of shooting conventions. At the point when the wife dashes to the husband to kiss him, this gesture takes place over the washing *line* and the image cuts immediately to a medium shot to a different camera across the space. This generates a jump cut due to the camera 'crossing the *line*' – which, in conventional video production manuals, is a 'rule' regarding camera positioning that the diligent filmmaker must avoid to achieve smooth cuts and continuity. The viewer can easily elaborate the metaphoric associations engendered by this trope.

The dislocation between picture and sound (and therefore text and picture) made obvious in this example recalls the constructed nature of film, of sound and picture editing, counterpoints and synching. It will be useful to weave into this discussion, along with the close analysis of the short film, a number of considerations pertaining to the inception of film and of sound film, from the perspective of production and perceptual hermeneutics as theorized in the 1920s. In fact, the jarring inconsistencies noted earlier between dialogue and image, coupled with the fact that the film is shot in black and white, warrants a comparison with the silent era.

It is interesting to note that in silent movies the actors did mouth words during the shoot, which however could not be heard. As the celluloid was not equipped to carry sound, the narrative line was being taken care of by acting, editing and inter-titles. Ironically, anything could have been mouthed during the shoot and the retrieval of these utterances could be attempted with the help of lip readers.

In fact, it is more than plausible that in silent movies frequently the content of the utterances was inconsistent with the content of the narrative. And in another ironical twist, it is as if the 'freedom of speech' of the performers was destined to extinction with the introduction of sound recording technology. This seems the proposition narrativised in the shooting of the film within the film in *Singin' in the Rain*, a film that dramatises and problematises the advent of sound reproduction technology in Hollywood.

In the first thirty minutes of the film certain aspects are established through the main

four characters, such as the emphasis on seeing rather than hearing:

DON We've had fun making it, I hope you have had fun *seeing* it tonight...we, screen actors, are not much good at speaking in public, so we'll just act out our thanks...

The importance of dignity is a sought value in performance, and a reminder of the tenacious snobbery between theatre as an art form and the moving image as mass entertainment: again, the craft/artifice of language becomes the discriminatory element between the two:

KATHY At least it's got dignity, you're nothing like a shadow on film, a shadow, not flesh and blood.

DON Which of my pictures have you seen?

KATHY I don't remember, I saw one once - Seen one, you've seen them all – the movies are entertaining for the masses but the personalities on the screen just don't impress me – they don't talk, they don't act and they make a lot of damn show.

Having established the hierarchy between silent film and theatre, twenty minutes into the film, a demonstration of the *talking image* has been displayed to an unimpressed audience. Shortly after that the impact of the coming of the talkies is acknowledged when Cosmos reads out the newspaper headline: '*The Jazz Singer*, All Time Smash in the First Week'. At the same time, the inadequacy of the Bronx shriek of the all time favourite silent diva has been established: when she is repeatedly prevented from speaking directly to her fans, the star (Lina Lamont) finally protests:

LINA Can I not say a word? What's wrong with my voice?

The expectations of a voice 'matching' her glamorous appearance are simply not met. This point is emphasised by Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror*: 'Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) violates this expectation of smooth complementarity whenever she opens her mouth; she speaks shrilly and ungrammatically, with a heavy Bronx accent. The studio for which she works, Monumental Pictures,

attempts to conceal the seeming heterogeneity of her voice to her body by having others speak for her'.⁶² This element is exemplary of Silverman's thesis that in classical cinema the female voice must be anchored (in other words fetishised) to an embodied screen image; since Lina's natural voice does not 'match' her appearance, the consequence must be that 'a voice which seems to 'belong' to the body from which it issues will be easily recorded, but that one which does not will resist assimilation into sound cinema'.⁶³

Following from this point, Silverman interprets Lina's difficulties in coming to grips with sound recording equipment during the shoots as the failure of assimilation of the unsuitable and unattractive voice. The unsuitable 'natural' utterance becomes ventriloquial in that, it shows the natural through the artifice and problematises the question of the natural utterance in the context of the cinematic apparatus. Meanwhile, the historical materialist dimension is reflected in the film diegesis, in its insistence that the advent of synch-sound is simply a phenomenon that must be acknowledged by the studios. If Lina and Don lag behind by still working on a silent production, things will have to drastically change.

It should be added that the conflict in their personal relationship, seemingly because of Lina's jealousy at Don's new love interest, has an instrumental role. Here, to the amusement of the viewer, the two colleagues can afford to be verbally rowing during a shoot, because their words will not be recorded in the film. The ultimate paradox is sealed when they are shown acting a love scene, whilst verbally rowing.

Such incompatibility between the visual and the aural is designed to problematise the undermined role of the voice in silent movie acting, and ultimately challenge its integrity. In fact, the two actors are expressing verbally the exact opposite feelings required by the silent performance, thus demonstrating that the outcome is nevertheless successful. As the shot cuts on their kiss and embrace, Don spouts that he would rather kiss a tarantula than Lina, which makes him the greatest actor in the world.

⁶² Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 45.

⁶³ Silverman, 46.

In the 1920s linguist Boris Eikhenbaum, as a prequel to his introduction of the application of the concept of inner speech to cinema, gave a history and interpretation of the significance of the advent of (silent) cinema as a new artform. As his writing refers to cinema prior to the introduction of synch-sound recording, he suggests a reframing of the relationship between words and images: 'it would be incorrect to call film a "mute" art; muteness is not important here, but rather the absence of the *audible* word, and a new interrelationship between word and object. A theatrical interrelationship, in which mimicry and gesture accompany the word, is precluded; but the word maintains its function as articulated mimicry. The film actor speaks during shooting, and this has its effect on the screen.'⁶⁴

He goes on to suggest that the viewer is placed in the position of a deaf person: that is to say, that the function of the word is still central to the diegesis, yet only reconfigured. He recalls an instance during which a group of deaf-mutes were presented a screening in an English cinema and notes their reaction of displeasure at the words mouthed by the actors – this was because they could lip read and interpret words, which, just as in the example of *Singin' in the Rain*, did not coincide with the narrative represented on screen. Paradoxically, Eikhenbaum notes, film became even more of a verbal art form than theatre because of the ability to lip-read of this group of viewers.

Just as in *Singin' in the Rain*, in Ahtila's piece the discrepancies between the visual and the verbal display a dissonance between the feelings of the characters and what is represented: namely the (spoken) declared feelings of inadequacy, crisis and lack of love are matched to the (visual) actions of smiling, kissing and embracing. The distinction in the two cases is in the emphasis, therefore the accentual resolution of each proposition.

Where in the musical, the dissonance dramatises the status of the image against the irrelevance of the spoken word, in *ME/WE*, the spoken word is at the foreground as the carrier of the narrative against an image that is little but the currency of a stereotypical hypocrisy. In other words, a similar process occurs in the two

⁶⁴ Boris Eikhenbaum, "Problems of Film Stylistics", *Screen* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 13. Originally published 1927.

examples but the intention is different: the couple's conflict and the sound/image disjuncture is staged in *Singin' in the Rain* as mere entertainment, while in *Athila* it is problematised.

We are reliant on the narrative line carried by the father's monologue, 'carried' or held ephemerally in place, because of the non-naturalistic tone of the soundtrack and his delivery against the counterpoint of other formal devices. This tension created by contradictory modes of expression is also present in the character's ultimate confession of self-inadequacy, resulting through his aggressive misogynistic delivery:

FATHER The first thing she did wrong
was in choosing her friends. I tried to help her,
but the attempt was doomed to failure from the
outset. There was nothing to be done...

...then, gradually, she forgot the entire thing.
everything has gone well except for
one or two odd impulses.

The script owns his inadequacy:

Even so, it sometimes seems to me
that I don't know what my wife really wants
in the end. My daughter...

Then he admits his position as outsider with a touch of incoherence:

...on the other hand,
she has always got on well with her mother.
but doesn't have any close relationships
with people outside the family.

(V/O) I want to keep my privacy, she says.
Of course, I have to ask myself whether something

Should have been done differently with her...

... We more or less had an ethical crisis...

... However, in my view it pays to stand firm on decisions once they're made.

The incoherence increases to become more lucid and honest, to reveal his own breakdown and total isolation:

SON Father, father, father!

(V/O) I know what could be causing this.

It is probably only about someone not loving her anymore.

It is stupid of them to try and hide their feelings from me...

His split self suggests a different outcome from the inception:

Someone is looking over my shoulder

'maybe it's me – and saying, 'Go back...

... In time to the day you sat your university entrance exams. 'Yes but this time, I intend to fail'

Ahtila's script is distinct from that of classical cinema in that the focus is not on conventional diegetic narrative, nor on a realism of identification of the voice and character; in her work, voices and identities are to an extent free-floating as they resist being anchored to the narrative.

The 'text' becomes a poetic and rhythmically intense narrative script, less concerned with narrative and more with a poignant gender critique rooted in family psychology. The sound of the original language (Finnish) is an essential component of the orchestrations of elements, with subtitling adding a further layer of complexity for apprehension in foreign speakers. Ahtila explicitly opts out from the choice of a 'lingua franca' such as English, instead she is consciously political in rooting her

work within its cultural origin and therefore a 'minority' language, as opposed to aspiring to the international target audience of mass media.

It is already apparent how such a short a piece carries a complexity of form and content that on the one hand may mimic the surreptitious cunning of advertising - where a car must be sold in seven seconds and therefore the layering of semiotic modes can be seen to manipulate, hence deter communication – yet where, on the other hand, Athila's ethical position could not be more distant from the logic of corporate gains, demanding a different approach.

The 1950s (the time of the making of *Singin' in the Rain*) mark the inception of TV advertising, which operates with a strategy that insists the private sphere, specifically targeting the homemaker. Blatantly 'speaking' to the housewife, the latter benefits from the patronizing advice of TV commercials, amongst which the washing powder advertisements is highly prominent. Unsurprisingly, two decades later feminists take issue by critiquing this mode as disempowering.

Broadcasters' strategies have clearly changed in addressing target audiences since the 1950s, and since the diffusion of the medium and capital pressures on behalf of the corporations, the aim is global and multi-targeted. This exacerbated process becomes particularly evident when corporations battle to ensure exclusivity rights for high profile sporting events, as for instance with football games, where the logic of multinational capital endows its protagonists a celebrity status.

Such is the context for Douglas Gordon's film, *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait* (2006). The artist intervenes again quite subtly in a popular context through an iconic subject (the footballer Zidane). If we also consider his manipulation of *Psycho*, he exploited another iconic element (the film by Hitchcock) by interfering with the apparatus of dissemination (the screening over 24 hours); a similar strategy is at play by manipulating different forms of moving image propagation, like the televisual and the cinematic, along with the confessional mode of popular factual television.

My analysis of the 'voice' of Zidane, this time conveyed as text, will problematise the point of speech and audition. As Zidane's voice in the film appears as subtitling,

in my scrutiny of Gordon's work I will deploy a 'reading' aimed at emphasizing the role of the time-based nature of this film against the text/voice. This method will facilitate the analysis by enabling the reader to reflect on the confession of the footballer as if freeze-framing onto his words; I will display the timecode that locates the individual 'utterances' on the film and display the text by reflecting the time lapse between statements via line spacing (the numerical values in the timecode displays seconds and minutes).

The insidiously intimate voice in the text made me sensitive and responsive to its nuances, just as whispering causes an involuntary enhanced perception in the listener. I was whispered to and my retort became a running commentary of everything but tangible elements. Who is implicated in what seems a shared monologue?

Global intimacy is not an oxymoron but the complicity sought by mass communication. Douglas Gordon insinuated himself into this context not only via the work, but in playing the media game in the marketing of his theatrical release: *Zidane* was preceded by an epic aura of grand proportions. Prior to watching the film, we already know that this is the portrait of an international football star, whose movements are being recorded by 17 cameras. The production mimics the same hyperbolic hype that pervades the world of international football. The viewer's expectations are confirmed by the ominous opening captions, translating ninety minutes into an era:

FROM THE FIRST KICK OF THE BALL T/C 00:04

(fade to black)

UNTIL THE FINAL WHISTLE 00:06/9

As the second line of text lingers on screen, the epic tone is reiterated and at the same time subverted: here the use of the Universal Pictures logo, with its prophetic sun rays, is subverted by the texture of the TV screen, since it has been filmed, hence mediated, through the televisual medium. The relationship between the cinematic (the logo and the position of the spectator) and the televisual (the form

and the spectator's identification with that format in terms of spectatorship) is destabilized. Television, as the media portal for football broadcasting *par excellence*, is placed in between the monolithic sophistication of the big screen and the domestic couch of entertainment.

The construction of the spatial-temporal anchoring of the event is followed by an enigmatic predicament suggesting ephemerality, in an oscillating movement that refuses to inscribe this film within a fixed context. The captions are couched in the image in sans serif white capitals; they are precisely edited into a pace that is confident of their role as text, or even more, as inscription, and that therefore eschews an exclusive semantic function. Its distillation suggests a poetic rhythm that reverberates in the mind of the 'viewer', who will experience it as inner voice. The editing imposes a careful pacing to the text, introducing subliminal pauses and rhythms evocative of speech, song and thought.

MADRID, SAT, APRIL 23 RD , 2005	00:32
WHO COULD HAVE IMAGINED THAT IN THE FUTURE	00:39
AN ORDINARY DAY LIKE THIS	00:41
MIGHT BE FORGOTTEN OR REMEMBERED	00:43
AS ANYTHING MORE OR LESS SIGNIFICANT	00:45
THAN A WALK IN THE PARK	00:47

This enigmatic or foreboding comment will return as refrain: at approximately forty-two minutes its poetic song-like role will be established. It is plausible that this structural bracketing is used to indicate a sense of the repetition inherent in the formulaic structure of a football game, its cyclical returns, along the habitual routine of a gesture like a walk in the park, or simply the unfolding of an ordinary day (emblematised and demystified at the same time by the televisual image of the Universal ident of sun rays, at the 'dawn' of the film).

Immediately after setting the tone, the subject is unequivocally established: 'FACE' appears in the middle of the frame, followed by a title animation with varying font size introducing ZIDANE and in his grandiosity as the protagonist of this 21ST CENTURY PORTRAIT, majestically followed by a long list of credits (the hype again precedes 'content' delivery). The formal devices that subtly manipulate the viewer into the celebrity building already demonstrate a savvy authorship. Next to the animation that superimposes the 'Z I D A N E' characters Gordon edits the canonical icon of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. The French footballer and the exemplary universal male, portrayed, measured and defined by the enlightened renaissance artist, have merged.

The music composed by the Scottish band Mogwai has a hypnotic appeal and punctually prefaces with a long low tone the appearance of text/subtitles on screen: its role performing an empathetic and monolithic score to the confessional tone of the text.

What is essential to keep in mind is that the text *is a representation* of Zidane's voice: the subtitles are in fact extracts from the directors' interview with the footballer, where his words have been edited and sparingly dispensed as text along a musical score. An aesthetic of white capital lettering, with carefully timed and orchestrated pauses, stands *in lieu* of a Marsellian Frenchman's voice.

Clinically dematerialised, Zidane's voice has lost its grain: the processing is evident and the viewer may justifiably asks if the text been translated or if Zidane spoke in English, adding another material layering between speaker and receiver. Either option implicates radical levels of mediation both in the writing and in the listening. Here instead, the distance is collapsed: an ephemeral text, free from the corporeal fingerprinting eloquently described in Barthes,⁶⁵ spellbinding in its rhythmic delivery, 'reconstitutes' itself in the inner voice of the listener creating an epitome of intimacy between speaker and receiver.

It is accepted as empirically verifiable, that language has a structuring role in the

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1984).

hermeneutics of the moving image. Michel Chion eloquently demonstrates it with an anecdote about a 1984 TV broadcast of an air show in England, anchored by a known French commentator for French audiences: ‘Visibly thrown by these images coming to him on the wire with no explanation and no special order, the valiant anchor nevertheless does his job as well as he can. At a certain point, he affirms ‘Here are three small airplanes’, as we see an image with, yes, three little airplanes against a blue sky [...] Zitrone could just as well have said, ‘The weather is magnificent today’, and that’s what we would have seen in the image.’⁶⁶

The viewer in *Zidane*, already embedded in the text narrative after twenty-two minutes into the screening, becomes now privy to a confessional tone: the involvement deepens insidiously towards an otherwise elusive figure. The atmosphere darkens, the camera turns upwards to the lights of the football ground, and a deep continuous music tone announces the confession. The emphasis is in the lingering on the first line, gently merging with the viewer’s inner voice:

AS A CHILD,	22:20
I HAD A RUNNING COMMENTARY IN MY HEAD	22:29
WHEN I WAS PLAYING.	22:31
IT WASN’T REALLY MY OWN VOICE.	22:34
IT WAS THE VOICE OF PIERRE CANGIONI	22:38
A TELEVISION ANCHOR FROM THE 1970s	22:40
EVERY TIME I HEARD HIS VOICE	22:43

⁶⁶ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 6-7.

I WOULD RUN TOWARDS THE TV 22:48
(Close up of Zidane, walking towards the camera).

AS CLOSE AS I COULD GET 22:55

FOR AS LONG AS I COULD. 22:58

The pacing of the sentences is designed to nostalgically punctuate his semi-divine 'call' to the vocation of football. He 'heard a voice': the pseudo-religious undertone is emphasised by the mise en scène of this text, only the message reads more like a possession. The 1970s anchor's spell parallels a media boom that would have kept the public at large under its enchantment and, in turn, the reader of the text becomes implicated in this love affair through the mode of delivery as described.

IT WASN'T THAT HIS WORDS 23:12

WERE SO IMPORTANT 23:14

BUT THE TONE, 23:17

THE ACCENT, 23:19

THE ATMOSPHERE, 23:21

WAS EVERYTHING 23:24

The text-image and music orchestration continue in a disavowal of the power of the verbal content of speech in favour of its rhythmic and musical components. In fact, this text openly declares and paradoxically (verbally) demonstrates the power of the vocal element at the expense of the semantic component in shaping Zidane's destiny, all in favour of the grain and musicality of the utterance.

As the words are dispensed sparingly to the viewer, through poetic undertones and subdued rhythms, they escalate to ATMOSPHERE framed by Zidane's tackles and laced by the sound of a breath and a cough. The climax of EVERYTHING is embedded in the image of the hero's tackle, closing with a back flip on the pitch.

As extra time is granted the viewer to 'take in' the shared confession, the hero's 'voice' comfortably slips into a colloquial 'you' (more problematic to represent or justify in French, but seamless in English). The message contains an affective content, reverberating with sound and reiterated in an oxymoron:

WHEN YOU STEP ONTO THE FIELD, 24:40

YOU CAN HEAR AND FEEL, 24:44

THE PRESENCE OF THE CROWD. 24:47

THERE IS SOUND. 24:51/4

THE SOUND OF NOISE. 24:56

As we are inducted into a particular type of hearing in the narrative, we are in turn performing a kind of hearing agency, instigated into active creative listening. The points of speech and audition are almost unified and the pace of sentences alternates between text to text edits, text to image and again image to text.

WHEN YOU ARE IMMERSSED IN THE GAME, 26:18

YOU DON'T HEAR THE CROWD. 26:19

YOU CAN ALMOST DECIDE FOR YOURSELF 26:22

WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR. 26:24

YOU ARE NEVER ALONE. 26:27

The sense of diffusion, loss of boundaries or even psychological confusion induced by the experience of being in the pitch alongside Zidane, is truncated by a blanket of reassurance: YOU ARE NEVER ALONE. The comfort unfolds onto its antithesis, via the destabilising double-edged undertones of surveillance and oppression, which, by virtue of being internalised, invite a shared paranoia:

I CAN HEAR 26:37

SOMEONE SHIFT AROUND IN THEIR CHAIR. 26:39

I CAN HEAR 26:45

SOMEONE COUGHING. 26:47

I CAN HEAR SOMONE WHISPER 26:49

IN THE EAR OF THE PERSON NEXT TO THEM. 26:51/55

I CAN IMAGINE 26:55

THAT I CAN HEAR THE TICKING OF A WATCH. 26:57

The intensity or the experience is rewarded by a heightened aural perception that appears plausible, until the reality of the fantasy is delivered, lingering on screen for a little longer (IN THE PERSON NEXT TO THEM), strangely chilling as the viewer has already experienced a complicity with the narrating 'I'. With the fiction brutally revealed, the verb IMAGINE is introduced, yet the haunting of the ticking watch reverberates, at the same time partially masking the flutter of the advertisement boards from the field, ironically displaying Quattro (the number four not casually

edited next to the idea of a ticking clock).

The familiar foreboding single tone that previously introduced the confession, reappears along a field recording of a presumed vocalisation by Zidane, calling the players (or viewers?) to attention 28:14 'ALLÍ! ALLÍ!' (There! There!).

At this point the shared affect turns into emotive solidarity, building into the tragedy and despair that comes with the disappointment of expectations that do not come to fruition on the field: empathy with 'our' hero is restored:

MAYBE IF THINGS ARE GOING BADLY, 29:28

YOU BECOME CONSCIOUS 29:32

OF PEOPLE'S REACTION. 29:34

WHEN IT'S NOT GOING WELL... 29:42

YOU FEEL LESS INVOLVED 29:45

AND MORE LIKELY TO HEAR THE INSULTS, 29:48

THE WHISTLES. 29:51

YOU START TO HAVE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS... 29:53

SOMETIMES YOU WANT TO FORGET. 29:56

Back to the subjective assessment on behalf of the player, which inevitably recalls technologies of representation:

THE GAME, THE EVENT, IS NOT NECESSARILY 30:09

EXPERIENCED OR REMEMBERED IN 'REAL TIME'. 30:14

MY MEMORIES OF GAMES AND EVENTS ARE FRAGMENTED. 30:26

A plausible description of common shifts in states of consciousness, and the way they affect experience, is followed by a sinister message feeding, yet again, into the narrative strands of socio-political oppression merging with pseudo-religious undertones.

SOMETIMES WHEN YOU ARRIVE IN THE STADIUM, 30:38

YOU FEEL THAT EVERYTHING 30:42

HAS ALREADY BEEN DECIDED. 30:45/9

THE SCRIPT HAS ALREADY BEEN WRITTEN. 30:51

What has already been decided? That text lingers leading the viewer into a yearning for more information, that eventually only comes as a tautology. Does a penalty whistle accent this dramatic moment? Visual corroboration is unavailable as the cameras are elsewhere. The crowds boo, while the ubiquitous subversive cameras show a smiling Zidane in a close up. A short chasm of silence follows, then voices and then the familiar music motif returns, cue for the confessional mode (34:58).

The magical returns, from the heightened sense of perception perhaps, fashioned as an intoxicating prediction that unfolds slowly, its outcome savored by the fable teller. The magic of course takes place in some unspecified place and time:

I REMEMBER PLAYING IN ANOTHER PLACE, 36:53

AT ANOTHER TIME, 36:56

WHEN SOMETHING AMAZING HAPPENED. 36:57/00

The tease gains momentum, the last garment is still on in the presence of many titillated minds:

SOMEONE PASSED THE BALL TO ME, 37:07

AND BEFORE EVEN TOUCHING IT, 37:08

I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. 37:11

Cut to image followed by the revelation:

I KNEW I WAS GOING TO SCORE. 37:16/19

The spell is never to be repeated:

IT WAS THE FIRST AND LAST TIME 37:21

IT EVER HAPPENED. 37:25

The lack of music underlines the disconcerting reality of a failed goal attempt. This aural rupture also introduces the 'zooming out' required by the imminent interval. The reality check extends beyond the maneuverings around the field, into a consideration of synchronous time, resonating in a sequential battery of events, democratically or irreverently presented as a list: here the same subtitling produces a very different experience: its ceases to be the voice of the narrator and becomes mere news listings. It is as if the sequence of events that follows had originated by googling the date in question.

The date anchors a heterogeneous amount of events, indiscriminately drawn from news to trivia, unfolding over an extended period in the narrative. Among these are an Ipanema puppet show and the floods in Serbia-Montenegro, along with political summits and quirky details in the natural world. Just as disruptively, images unfold

including some gruesome war images from Iraq. The interlude deliberately plays on a disparity of registers, where the author interposes statements about his son having a fever that morning, to the announcement of the death of Sir John Mill. Then, the referee's whistle summons a return to the game and the initial refrain returns to the rescue, calling upon time and the reassuring verdict of cyclicity.

WHO COULD HAVE IMAGINED THAT IN THE FUTURE 41:47
(Screen to black)

AN ORDINARY DAY LIKE THIS 41:50

MIGHT BE FORGOTTEN OR REMEMBERED 41:53

AS ANYTHING MORE OR LESS SIGNIFICANT 41:55

THAN A WALK IN THE PARK 41:58

The magnified interference that evokes an interval laden with commercial spots has ceased in order to seamlessly rejoin to the specific event in Madrid. The familiar musical tone is back, and so is the focus on the task ahead, yet the earlier experience lingers:

THE GAME, THE EVENT, IS NOT NECESSARILY 42:58

EXPERIENCED OR REMEMBERED IN 'REAL TIME'. 43:02

The continuous tone empathizes with subjective time and experience:

MEMORIES OF GAMES AND EVENTS ARE FRAGMENTED. 44:55

Loss of perception is illustrated pictorially by an extreme loss of definition, withdrawing deep into the pixilation of the image. A crisis follows, with an adversary on the ground: is it a foul, a red card for Zidane? (1:25:00). The lack of commentary is felt and the unorthodox camerawork makes the events too ambivalent. Yet, what is to be gained by this?

Something does become very clear, a principal truth about filmmaking: to frame means to censor. To show means to choose not to show something else. This message is dispensed by the fact that there are 17 cameras available and yet the viewer is denied information. We, the viewers, cannot bear witness to what is happening elsewhere at this moment in time, because the cameras are pointing at (an idling) celebrity. This ephemeral movement in the film could be seen to parody the methods of mass media broadcast.

Is the end pointing to disillusionment, demystification and ultimately to loss? With Zidane, we return to Z.

MAGIC IS SOMETIMES VERY CLOSE	1:25:16/21
TO NOTHING AT ALL.	1:25:21
(Cut to picture)	
NOTHING AT ALL.	1:25:28/30
(Cut to picture)	
WHEN I RETIRE	1:25:33
I'LL MISS THE GREEN OF THE FIELD.	1:25:36
“LE CARRE’ VERT”	1:25:39

Whose Voice Am I?

In my reading of Douglas Gordon’s film, I engaged in a mode that emphasised the pacing of the scripted voice in order to insist on the would-be experience of the audience – one that is of course dictated by the specifics and time-based nature of the film, orchestrating very precisely the (textual) voice of Zidane with its audiovisual context (music and picture). The emphasis on the experience is important in the light of broader considerations about the hermeneutics of the artwork and the position and role of the spectator.

Gordon’s example of an utterance that lacks audible speech, is a cue to begin to think about the internalised nature of the experience of an artwork, and to speculate

that the 'language' of thought has (like ventriloquial objects) a syncretic nature exceeding the limitations of a linguistic paradigm.

The focus of this section is the chasm between language as structure and the body, and the key role played by the voice in orchestrating this conflict. I integrate considerations on the danger of effacing the voice apparatus by collapsing voices with linguistic structures, with notions from structuralist and post-structuralist linguists and theorists (E. Benveniste, R. Barthes, K. Silverman).

In Gordon's film, as speech is rendered through the subtitles, Zidane's voice is not only experienced in the mind of the viewer, but the 'I' of Zidane merges with the I of the subject reading the text. The omniscient first person narration, external to the diegesis, is a device commonly used in classical cinema in connection with a confessional flashback narrative.⁶⁷ Here, with the lack of audible speech, the 'I' of the narration experienced through reading appears as if unmediated, or as if on the written page of a novel or a poem. Yet, reading this text is unlike reading a book, its experience is also different from that of reading subtitling in foreign films, where text is clearly an addition, a functional aid to facilitate comprehension. Here instead the text is *in* the image, it belongs organically to the film, and in turn, at the hermeneutic level, the film script is collapsed with the viewer's inner voice.

What constitutes inner speech psycho-linguistically will be discussed in more in detail in the next section, but at this point it will be significant to draw attention to this idea of the internalization (of a script) and how thought process and inner voice are (internal functions) implicated in the making and consumption of an artwork.

We could say at its most simplistic level that art objects are experienced 'internally' as thoughts and that a thought incorporates simultaneous affective and intellectual elements. An artwork can overwhelm a subject and become a significant part of the recipient's imaginary in spite of lacking of a linguistic component. In addition, the experience of a painting will differ from that of a time-based work, in that the immersive nature of the audiovisual stimuli assimilated in time can strongly impact on with the individual's independent thought process. Consequently, duration and the specific time-based nature of these two films, will impact the audience in very

⁶⁷ Many examples range from *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *Citizen Kane* to *Taxi Driver*.

different ways.

A film like *ME/WE*, because of its brief, intense and formally complex composition, is likely to temporarily disarm the viewer and leave a mental afterimage to be elaborated - the title ironically exemplifies this merging of subjectivities, as linguistic pronouns, and therefore in a sense emphasises the hermeneutic process. On the other hand, the generous expanse of time in *Zidane*, with the dilution of elements dispensed rhythmically and hypnotically, encourage immersion in the film, captivating and directing the viewer's inner voice. The process is made efficient by the soothing and spellbinding music, aided by the intimate address of the text content and the aural quiet created by the lack of spoken dialogue. Here the linguistic 'I' collapses the body of the footballer with the inner voice of the viewer and disguises the authorial input. Subject identification, extensively deconstructed via the notion of gazes in film theory, must be considered by focusing on the relationship between voice, silence and text.

Ahtila's film, with its overt ideological and political agenda, and in keeping with its advertisement genre, has an aggressive formal address that nevertheless acknowledges its 'scriptedness'; it does emphasise the gap between utterances and bodies, and in doing so the viewer is brought to question the textual origin of the film. Gordon's film performs the loss and blurring of these elements by merging the point of speech and textual origin with the listening point of the audience – this results in viewer's identification, in true mainstream fashion, but it is achieved exclusively via the scripted voice instead of via naturalized dialogue.

A common trait between the films is of course the fact that it is an artist who fashions the subject's voice, and that such voice is a monologue proffered by a man, respectively a father and a footballer. Consequently, both father and footballer are extracted from their popular media context and dealt with critically. As stated, both men's voices works are monologues and in the first instance (*ME/WE*), the script emerges forcibly to the foreground, while in the second (*Zidane*), it sinks back, undermining the idea of an apparatus.

Gender, or the discursive construction of femininity, is the focus of Silverman's argument and if her reasoning is not immediately applicable to our depictions of

masculinity, aspects of her project will be key throughout this writing in different ways. The question of the female gendered voice will return in the last chapter dedicated to the singing voice, while here I focus on the question on the territory between language and the body. Where Silverman relies on a Lacanian paradigm, which posits subjectivisation operating exclusively within language, my position assumes that artworks and thoughts do not operate exclusively within a linguistic paradigm, but through a syncretic mode of expression.

In addressing the voice apparatus I borrow from film theory the notion of a psychoanalytical identification with the filmic gaze: 'the process whereby a fictional gaze stands in for and covers over the camera's gaze is assumed to be an ideological one too since it represents discourse'.⁶⁸ The voice apparatus must be considered from an analogous ideological perspective. When the viewer experiences (reads) the 'I' of Zidane's voice, he/she collapses the linguistic structures of the author with a presumed speaking subject (Zidane) in turn experienced internally through the lack of an audible voice; like with the visual suture performed by the gaze, we can talk about a kind of 'voice suture'.

Such suture effacing the apparatus, can be considered along the linguistic paradigm between speaking subject and subject of speech, as theorised by Emile Benveniste.⁶⁹ Benveniste developed Saussurian linguistics and was a fairly unacknowledged precursor of Lacan: 'In Benveniste's writing, the speaking subject refers to the existential person engaged in discourse, and the subject of speech to the discursive marker through which he or she assumes linguistic identity'.⁷⁰ What I find useful in Benveniste is the distinction of the uttering voice against the utterance as discursive and therefore operating as an ideological marker; his position consolidates the above considerations on the voice apparatus and my formulation of the distinction between voice (singular uttering body) and language (structure).

To an extent, the ethos in MUVE is comparable to the structuralist stance in relation

⁶⁸ Silverman, 201.

⁶⁹ In *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. Meek (Oxford, OH: University of Miami Press, 1971).

⁷⁰ Silverman, 200.

to an 'empty' speech act, seen as pure structure to be inhabited by a subject; as Silverman reminds us: 'the speech-act in its entirety is an "empty" process, which functions perfectly without its being necessary to "fill" it with the person of the interlocutors: linguistically, the author is nothing but the one who writes, just as I is nothing but the one who says I; language knows a "subject", not a person and this subject, empty outside of the very speech-act which defines it, suffices to "hold" language.'⁷¹ Only, voice and ventriloquial objects are material entities and not structures; they come into 'speaking' in the experience of listening, in order to eventually become embedded in the mind (thought) of the 'viewer' in their specifics and carrying ideological implications.

To conclude this section I wish to use an example from Roland Barthes to emphasise the shift in problematics from his position in "The Death of the Author" (1967) to that addressing a 'sonorous' writing in "The Pleasure of the Text" (1975). The following passage is merely one of the examples of a movement that can be seen to veer away from the structure towards the materiality of the utterance:

One evening, half asleep on a banquette in a bar, just for fun I tried to enumerate all the languages within earshot: music, conversation, the sound of chairs, glasses, a whole stereophony of which a square in Tangiers [...] is the exemplary site. That too spoke within me, and this so-called 'interior' speech was very like the noise of the square, like the amassing of minor voices coming to me from the outside: I myself was a public square, a *sook*; through me passed words, tiny syntagms, bits of formulae, and *no sentence formed*, as though that were the law of such language.⁷²

Barthes goes on to describe this *non-sentence* as something *outside the sentence* and later states: 'I recalled this scientific scandal: there exists no locutive grammar (a grammar of what is spoken and not of what is written; and to begin with a grammar of spoken French)'.⁷³

⁷¹Silverman, 188.

⁷² Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 49-50.

⁷³ Barthes, 50.

MUVE is less concerned with the author because ventriloquial objects are objects authored to speak. Their synchretism of form (of which language is indeed part of but not exclusively) echoes the *mise en scène* of the 'sook', and is the focus of the next section. It becomes clear how the material utterance cannot merge with an abstract structure as language. *ME/WE* has shown the incongruity of a body trying to embody its scripted voice and *Zidane* has displayed a voice internalised by its audience that turn leads to question the nature of the inner speech.

Thought as Artwork, Artwork as Inner Speech

In this section I elaborate on the psycholinguistic notion of inner speech, a feature often misunderstood as silent verbalization. Inner speech is a form of thinking and, since, as we will see, thinking is only partially linguistic, I hypothesise that the artwork (and ventriloquial objects) share a formal syncretic nature of communicating 'in pure meaning' - an expression used by Russian formalist Lev Vygotsky⁷⁴

I introduce the work of linguist formalists Lev Vygotsky and Boris Eikhenbaum because their ideas around inner speech bridge discussions about thought formation and film hermeneutics as a way to assess the impact of film as a new medium. Contemporary notions of cognitive psychology and thought formation⁷⁵ will also be integrated into the discussion as a way to open up the possibilities of a correlation between the non-linguistic aural domain and thought process.

Before thinking of the internalized impact of an artwork, let us consider the making of it and assume that art objects are close to thought, in that they can be seen as a materialization of the thinking process of the maker in the guise of an individual shorthand. Expression features through a syncretic vocabulary⁷⁶ that may include language but is not limited to it and features a collapsing of form and content in the

⁷⁴ Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962).

⁷⁵ Bob Snyder, *Music and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

⁷⁶ I wish to speak at the most general level and not enter into the specific of individual movements and their contexts.

materials. By the same token, the consumption of the objects can be conceived as operating through a shorthand for the receiver, who will assimilate it via his/her own syncretic thought process.

Walter Benjamin states in relation to the nature of the artwork: 'In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. [...] Art, in the same way, posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works it is concerned with its response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener'.⁷⁷ What may at first appear as a provocatively unfashionable statement in the light of contemporary art's participatory modes, including the current trend of relational practices,⁷⁸ becomes clearer if read as Benjamin's warning against the dangers of standardizing an audience. He argued for the autonomy of the work of art in the light of its material contextual conditions.

Benjamin's essay 'On the Task of the Translator' was published in 1923, while in 1927 Boris Eikhenbaum published his 'Problems of Film Stylistics' in *Poetika Kino*.⁷⁹ In this contribution Eikhenbaum applies formalist linguistics to the hermeneutics of cinema. The opening is prefaced by some considerations of the role and status of art: 'The arts as such, as natural phenomena, do not exist; rather, there is a need for art that is peculiar to man. This need is satisfied in different ways in different epochs...', then later: 'The primary nature of art is the impulse to give an outlet to those energies of the human organism which are excluded from everyday life [...] This basis, in essence playful and not connected with definite logical "thought", is embodied in those "trans-sense", "self-orientated" tendencies which are transparent in every art form [...] The constant disparity between the 'trans-sense' and language - such is the internal anatomy of art'.⁸⁰

Some conclusions can be deduced from these statements, namely in the idea that art does implicate and compound the use of acquired skills relying on a level of

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 70.

⁷⁸ As championed by Nicholas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2002).

⁷⁹ Eikhenbaum, 13.

⁸⁰ Eikhenbaum, 7.

expertise, as well as being motivated by a psychological bias. Furthermore, we can conclude that the production of art is (partly) divorced from logical thought and that the art object is imbued with its own autonomy. However, the most relevant points for this discussion concern the schism between thought and logical thought in the artwork, and the sense of liminality activated in the economy between the idea of an interior object (thought) and its exterior counterpart (art object).

I began the section by addressing the artwork as a syncretic form of note taking, now I relate this notion to ventriloquial objects specifically, because the (crafted) internal conflict of these objects can be seen to reveal the syncretism of the 'apparatus' of thought process. This is because of the oscillation between the verbal and the vocal and the functional role of musicality in thought process as corroborated by contemporary references.

Firstly, this is how Vygotsky describes thought process: 'The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. [...] An analysis of the interaction of thought and word must begin with an investigation of the different phases and planes a thought traverses before it is embodied into words'.⁸¹ This statement seems to corroborate my hypothesis, yet, how can it be validated when thought cannot be observed nor measured?

In this regard Vygotsky sets out empirically by considering language apprehension in childhood through Piaget, and in particular, with the notion of egocentric speech in the child evolving into inner speech in the adult. By this stage, thought and inner speech, appear to collapse with a palpable sense of liminality:

Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings. [...] there is no rigid correspondence between the units of thought and speech. Thought has its own structure, and the transition from it to speech is no easy matter. A speaker often takes several minutes to disclose one thought. In his mind the whole thought is present at once, but in speech it has to be developed successively. Thought

⁸¹ Vygotsky, 125.

must pass first through meanings and then through words. Thought itself is engendered by motivation, i.e. by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions.⁸²

Vygotsky warns us about the complexity surrounding thought, language and meaning making and, for him, the distinction between thought and linguistic communication is evident. On the other hand, as I implied previously, like thought, the artwork can be seen as a compound of meaning that does not easily and univocally translate into a linguistic statement, neither organized as logical reasoning.

Significantly and unequivocally, the psychologist emphasises the distinction between the language of thinking and verbal language: 'thought and word are not cut from one pattern'.⁸³ Yet, paradoxically, contemporary theorists have used Vygotsky to justify the fact that all communication, including cinema is structured within language: 'whatever number of different matters of expression enter into a filmic system, verbal language must be included: no film can exist without it, *because internal speech, which in the final analysis is verbal*, forms an integral part of filmic writing'.⁸⁴

Despite this essentialist claim, Paul Willemen states earlier that inner speech is not subject to empirical apprehension. On the other hand Vygotsky's theories are elaborated through empirical tests analyzing the function and structure of the *manifested* hence with an emphasis on the *external* expression of egocentric speech in children. And again, using Vygotsky, I would like to draw another analogy between the artwork and egocentric speech, this is a symbolic analogy where the artwork is seen to take the form of 'a collective monologue directed to nobody, but that, on the other hand, is believed to be understood and has the character of external speech'.⁸⁵

⁸² Vygotsky, 150.

⁸³ Vygotsky, 126.

⁸⁴ Paul Willemen, "Reflections on Eikhenbaum Concept of Internal Speech in the Cinema," *Screen* (Winter 1974/75): 63. My italics.

⁸⁵ Vygotsky, 136.

It will be useful to clarify and sketch out the psychological process of language acquisition further. Children are understood to begin in an autistic state before graduating to speech with *egocentric speech*, which corresponds to audible speech not directed to specific others and independent from information exchange. At the age of about seven, they make the transition to *social speech*, defined as audible speech directed to others and reliant on information exchange. After the transition to social speech, Piaget claims that egocentric speech is totally supplanted by the former. The crucial point for this discussion is provided by Vygotsky's dissenting position in relation to Piaget's claim, stating that egocentric speech does not disappear in the adult but it develops into inner speech and my contribution draws the art object and its consumption close to this 'thinking in pure meaning'.

Furthermore, if social speech is merely the functional standard speech used to communicate with others, egocentric speech does not preclude an audience as it belongs to the child's egotistic stage: here I draw an analogy with the assumption of the intentionality behind art production proposed by Benjamin and Eikhenbaum earlier in the text. Therefore, egocentric speech developmentally belongs to a child phase, and it is theorised to turn 'inwards', when it is not socially appropriate to manifest it, yet it nevertheless seems to constitute a significant aspect of linguistic/cognitive functioning. Vygotsky's position that egocentric speech turns inwards in the adult and becomes inner speech is very plausible.

It is of no surprise that the theories of Russian formalists resurface in critical writing in the 1970s for a number of reasons that include a need to redefine the aesthetic field via a preoccupation with the formal apparatus. Also, in the same period, Russian formalist work was reviewed in both in the UK and US in the context of critical practice generating widespread influence in aesthetic debates around the apparatus and performance in the visual arts.

In the UK, in 1974 two issues of *Screen* were devoted to Eikhenbaum's essay; the first features the original article, the second two contemporary responses by Ron Levaco and Paul Willemen. Levaco's article describes inner speech in its technicalities by referring to formalist poeticians of *Poetika Kino* (Moscow-Leningrad 1927) like Eikhenbaum, and the concurrent work of Vygotsky; Willemen focuses on the process of film 'divination' to argue how this is entirely anchored in inner

speech.

Levaco references Barthes in the question of the affinity between artwork and thought. He quotes a 1972 Barthes essay⁸⁶ claiming that the artist 'Like the ancient soothsayer, *speaks* the locus of meaning, but does not name it'. In addition, Levaco relates this function to what Eikhenbaum terms the need for 'divination' in the arts: 'it is achieved systematically, however, and in distinct stages: first, by *differentiating* the units of the structure of expression from one another; second by *synchretising*, or combining and agglutinating these into groupings, through their dialectical dynamic regulator of *affinity* and *dissimilarity*; and third and finally, by relying on and drawing from a reservoir of such patterns of expression'.⁸⁷ The complexity and syncretic nature of the thought process involved in the experience of the artwork confirms the premise of my discussion.

Finally, it is also interesting to note that the development of oral speech precedes the formation of inner speech and that written speech in turn presupposes inner speech (Vygotsky). In other words, the syntax of inner speech is opposite to that of written speech with oral speech standing in the middle. It has become clear that inner speech does not equate to inner voice, recollecting conscious thinking or unvoiced cognitive process: inner speech bears a strong connection with the thinking process itself, as it is syncretic, mythic, imagistic and non-conventionally logical.

If we were to refer to the classical staged ventriloquial performance, the solipsistic nature of the ventriloquist's act - as a staged interaction - sits appropriately between the definitions of egocentric speech and social speech. In the same vein, the ventriloquial object (here singled out as artwork *par excellence*) has a strong affinity with egocentric speech, defined as audible speech not directed to specific others, and therefore not reliant upon information exchange, or inconsiderate of its audience in a Benjaminian sense.

⁸⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard, (Evanston, Illinois: North Western UP, 1972).

⁸⁷ Ron Levaco, "Eikhenbaum, Inner Speech and Film Stylistics," *Screen* (Winter 1974/75), 53-54.

Complex conceptual relationships are set into play by a material speaking voice preceded by the written script. This movement between language and the utterance has led to consider the inner voice and its shared territory in through process and the artwork. We have discovered that writing and speaking are two very distant processes cognitively speaking, and therefore the deconstruction of the scripted voice becomes even more urgent.

Incongruence and Infantilisation as Critique

When considering the *unacknowledged* artifice of using the voice, hence of taming this organic material, with its 'graininess' and unpredictability of contingency, into the predetermined and fixed formula of the script, questions must be raised around the implications accrued. This is where the *acknowledged* artifice that is peculiar to the economy of ventriloquial objects can become useful. I continue the discussion with two objects in which speaking bodies clearly manifest their original disconnectedness from the scripted contents they utter: *The Arbor* by Clio Barnard introducing the discussion on my film *Voicings* (2007/10).

The Arbor, a feature documentary premiered in the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, bypasses scriptwriting altogether and constructs the film structure from fragments of voice interviews. The voice recordings are subsequently lip-synched by actors in the mise en scène that follows as a secondary process. Class and gender are central to this project featuring the biopic of Bradford playwright Andrea Dunbar, who died at 29 leaving a legacy of three plays (one of which resulted in the 1986 cult movie directed by Alan Clark, *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*).

Two decades after the playwright's death, Barnard visited the Buttershaw Estate where the writer grew up. She recorded interviews with members of the Dunbar family and with dwellers of the Estate over a two-year period; the 'audio screenplay' forms the basis of the film, in turn ventriloquised by its actors, in what is in fact an established live performing genre (verbatim theatre), spilling into documentary via

the radio play.⁸⁸ My film *Voicings* like *The Arbor* presents testimonies where visual access to its originators is precluded; it also addresses a context where its subjects can be seen to belong to an underclass. *Voicings*, however, operates with a very different methodology and scope.

I conceived my film as a way to explore the difficulty of 'being' in another language (from a biographical experience) but more importantly I wanted to expose the level of bullying and discrimination I witnessed in everyday interactions when people lack articulacy in English. I visited a class of refugees who were learning English and we talked about their specific difficulties with language barriers when they first came to the UK (all of us spoke several languages and came to English as adults). At the end of the day the language teacher asked the participants to write an account of their experiences as homework. A week later I was given the homeworks and was moved by these 'scripts' in that not only they had personal account but for me the mistakes were the tangible signatures of the migrants.

My methodology repudiates pointing the camera at a vulnerable subject so I set up the work by enlisting white, British, classically trained actors to learn and perform the scripts and I chose to film these sessions in their respective homes. It became clear how the focus of the performances did not consist in the memorising the script as such but in memorising it with its errors. This was the greatest challenge for the actors who had to nevertheless pronounce and articulate the incorrect terms in a RP convincing manner. In this way I deflected the actors from acting (there is no character to act) and engaged them in a process of language 'unlearning'.

The analysis of the conceptual premise and outcome of this moving image work will be integrated at this point with elements from the context opened by the psychology of language acquisition. The theoretical work introduced in this chapter can help

⁸⁸ My critique of *The Arbor* takes issue with the message of the film rather than its technique. I think that this form of verbatim has great potentials and a connection with my strategy in *Voicings*. On the other hand the director decides to insist in the dysfunctional nature of the playwright's family, instead of giving the audience some background on a talented writer. In this way the overall message conveys the idea that poor people are unable to conduct meaningful and successful lives, a very conservative and classist view, when in fact Andrea Dunbar demonstrated the opposite.

expand on questions around verbal and vocal aspects of the utterance since the methodology of language learning, or ‘unlearning’ used in *Voicings* provides an ideal context. If we refer back to Vygotsky’s ideas on language apprehension, we find that, developmentally, meaning and phonetics, rather than progressing in tandem, oscillate in opposite directions. The psychologist considers the unit of internal meaningful semantic speech and its external phonetic component separately.

Vygotsky explains that when assembling speech:

The child starts from one word, then connects two or three words; a little later, he advances from simple sentences to more complicated ones, and finally to coherent speech [...] Semantically, the child starts from the whole [...] The external and the semantic aspects of speech develop in opposite directions – one from the particular to the whole, from word to sentence, and the other from the whole to the particular, from sentence to word.⁸⁹

If semantically the child starts from the whole, from the perspective of grammar acquisition and the composition of complex sentences: ‘the child uses subordinate clauses with *because*, *although*, etc., long before he grasps the structures of meaning corresponding to these syntactic forms. Grammar precedes logic.’⁹⁰ These preliminary notions are useful when responding to a work that attempts to deconstruct the spoken utterance of native speakers by forcing the performer to learn and articulate a text written in a defective grammar; I will return to these notions after a broader contextualization of the methodology of this film.

In *Voicings*, a number of performers are repeating and rehearsing a scripted monologue. Each actor is framed in a close medium shot, the camera is fixed and the performer is instructed not to acknowledge it; the script is available to them but not in shot. The performers toil in the difficulty of memorizing the script in one hour, but more importantly, because these native English speakers struggle not to autocorrect the syntax. The laborious incongruity of this performance reveals the

⁸⁹ Vygotsky, 126.

⁹⁰ Vygotsky, 126-7.

apparatus behind the script and forces the viewer to ask: 'Who are they voicing?'

The conceptual strategy of this film is designed to foreground the chasm between the actor and the utterance, generally naturalized in the acting role of assuming a character. It is crucial to note that in this instance the discomfort in the delivery of the scripts has a context, which is autonomous from the content of the script. Impersonation is the outcome to be avoided and the paradox of acting in the presumed naturalization of the utterance is on display. The rift that separates the linguistic utterance from the body uttering it, discussed by linguist Benveniste, becomes manifest in the mis-performance that in turn is designed to convey a critical stance.

I reiterate the radical division of uttering body and script in *Voicings* by displaying the credit titles 'in reverse': for example 'Bukurie as Kaye Topping Smith' and so forth for the six contributors. The (eminently not English) first name of the writer 'as interpreted by' a fully referenced British name, is more accurate and in keeping with the economy of the work; it also politicises the issue of authorship and interpretation. When we speak of voice, we refer to the singularity of the utterer and in this sense the speaking actors in *Voicings* are fully credited. On the other hand, I choose to protect the privacy of the authors of the scripts by using only their first name; this generic naming translates an individual into a collective presence, haunting the film via their absence.

This chapter addresses the voice apparatus from the perspective of the script, made apparent by different strategies of ventriloquial objects. In this respect, *Voicings* operates by presenting a tainted script that is nevertheless authentic since penned by actual witnesses. Their mistakes in turn are incoherent with the pronunciation and appearance of the actors delivering the contents. I suggest that the chasm between uttering body and language (Benveniste) is amplified in the chasm between actor and utterance. This is experienced by the audience in the uncanny acknowledgment of 'two points of speech': one located in the actual speaking voices of the performers toiling with the text, the other at the narrative level with the authors of the accounts.

The split that is negotiated in this work between authors' voices and performers'

reminds me of a ventriloquial object by Marcel Duchamp quoted in the introduction. In *With Hidden Noise* (1916) a ball of string is enclosed between two brass plates held together by four screws. If the object is shaken, a sound emanates through a mysterious object inside the ball of string. The identity of the object is secret because Duchamp asked his patron to hide it prior to assembling and sealing the ball with the glass plates. Metaphorically, the object emblematises a distinction at the site of production and therefore agency: the voice of the object is not authored by the maker. In *Voicings* a similar disparity at the level of agencies is made apparent by engaging linguistic and formal prescriptive devices.

At the same time the film has a 'materiality' residing in its lack of resolution or in its actuality. The toil of the performer, mostly undirected and unrehearsed, is reproduced in real time and documents a non-fictional experience. This mode foregrounds the ideological critique that is implicit in the perfectly fashioned acting. Aside from the questions surrounding the delivery, the content of the script represents an unmediated documentation of the factual and emotional experience of the writer. The artifice of the ventriloquial object enables the emergence of a political reality that is not mediated by a closed schema, but which results through the contingency of two conflicting realities.

Given the considerations mentioned of the technicalities of language apprehension, specifically the point that grammar precedes logic, it becomes clear how *Voicings* succeeds in forcing the paradox of the scripted utterance by instigating language un-learning with a political intent. In fact, if we consider, as stated above, that the grammar is already in the body of the actor (a native speaker), when he or she engages in learning the text that in spite of the errors is semantically understood, when it comes to the task of delivering the errors the body 'rejects' them. This confirms the linguistic hypothesis outlined earlier that grammar precedes logic in cognitive development; in this sense, if grammatical structures are consolidated much earlier they must also be the hardest to undo.

It becomes clear in the toil of the performer, that if the meaning or message is grasped, the enunciation is jeopardized not only by the challenge of remembering and memorizing but mainly by the trappings of an altered grammar. The incongruity is deliberately emphasised by the conflict between an impeccable enunciation that

indicates a professional training and mastery of the language, and the content of the scripts describing the linguistic shortcomings of the migrants' experience.

The performers are exposed to the trap of auto-correction, into which they sometimes fall. At times, the auto-correction instigates other subconscious associations, such as 'when I came to England I had learning difficulties' instead of 'language difficulties' – the implications of this slippage by the performer is emblematic of the motivating impetus behind the production of the work, which is the infantilisation and bullying that foreign speakers can be subjected to.

Language apprehension becomes the tangible hurdle as a sign, while the content (in itself crucial) is still being delivered. The hurdle is not an accent, nor an inflexion, in itself the empowering signature of the subject of speech, it is a tarnishing of the language against its polished received pronunciation of the official subject of speech. Here a script undoes the assumed notion of a naturalized spontaneous utterance.

To conclude, the ventriloquial objects discussed in this section insisted on the verbal of the script to challenge the voice apparatus, they have teased out key aspects dealt with using different techniques. The questioning of a speaking agency for example emerges with the characters in Ahtila's film almost being spoken for by their scripts, the obliteration of the accented voice of Zidane, the mouthing of actual voices by the actors in *The Arbor* or the toiling and stumbling with syntactical errors with the actors practicing in *Voicings*.

Questions of gender, isomorphism of voice and body and social stereotyping are addressed by these works through characterization, choice of topics and a critical practice of voice staging and delivery. Linguistics and psycholinguistics intervene to undermine claims for language encompassing power when it comes to thought process or subjectivisation. Ultimately, ventriloquial objects call for a critical reconstruction of the voice apparatus that includes form and ideology. The fact that *Voicings* unfolds *within* the English language and it is the language of the 'privileged subjects' foregrounds the uneasiness of its content and therefore its political message. To conclude with Barthes:

we are all caught up in the truth of languages, that is, in their regionality, drawn into the formidable rivalry which controls their proximity. For each jargon (each fiction) fights for hegemony: if power is on its side, it spreads everywhere in the general and daily occurrences of social life, it becomes *doxa*, nature: this is the supposedly apolitical jargon of politicians, of agents of the State, of the media, of conversation; but even out of power, even when power is against it, the rivalry is reborn, the jargons split and struffle among themselves. [...] So it is, among others, with certain vulgates: with the Marxist jargon, for which all opposition is an opposition of class; with the psychoanalytic jargon, for which all repudiation is avowal; with the Christian jargon, for which all denial is seeking, etc.⁹¹

Barthes' vivid analysis goes beyond the specifics of geography to address the working of institutions and the embodiment of ideologies (something also addressed in *Voicings* where individuals lament a discomfort in their interaction with state institutions); however, the choice and use of a particular language in a global system of communication and representation assumes a political and economical role since ultimately it fundamentally contributes to shaping cultural identity. The veneering of dubbing in filmic texts can be a dangerous move and it is something that Ahtila understands by insisting in realizing her films in her original Finnish language. Coming full circle, it is only by acknowledging the power behind the script that it can be problematised and re-deployed subversively.

⁹¹ Barthes, *The Pleasure*, 28-29.

Chapter II

TRANSLATED VOICES, THE SENSE THAT CANNOT UTTER ITS NAME

Premise

This focus of this chapter is another problematic moment for the voice apparatus, one that threatens the efficient functioning of the verbal component and undermines semantic communication. This time the verbal is threatened by the differentiation between languages and unorthodox moments of mistranslation. Of course, malfunctioning becomes a virtue because at this point ventriloquial objects intervene in highlighting its productive potentiality.

In this faltering of semantic communication, the vocal can be seen to interfere with the verbal, with prosody, tone and rhythmicality, or with creative uses of mistranslation or mispronunciation. The upsetting of the conventionally balanced role of the verbal and the vocal occurs in ventriloquial objects where language is stunted, opening a gap in the utterance: if Chapter I insisted on the problematic relationship between text and utterance, here the argument addresses languages and the external and unsettled space of an unorthodox or imperfect articulation that resists the normalizing role of linguistic structures.

The move towards this perspective is itself liminal and is therefore introduced by *Voicings*, discussed in the previous chapter as a work that bridges questions concerning the relationship between an original text (or script) and the notion of agency in the utterance. In this chapter *Voicings* links the discussion of mistranslation in aesthetic practice and its political potential for subversion. In fact, *Voicings* dismantles the privileged subject of speech by corrupting the mode of the native speaker who operates in English as lingua franca. The process does not suggest a conventional translation from source to target language, it rather emphasises the fact that there is only one communication system available. Furthermore, the unorthodox play of a corrupted text and its impeccable performance demand a sanctioning of the distortion of the source idiom as the target outcome. Its desired outcome equates with a corruption of the overall

structure; its malfunctioning is endemic to the overall configuration, just like the action of a computer virus in a digital communication system.

The cybernetic simile is pertinent to the ventriloquial objects in this chapter because the different strategies of translation featured implicate a number of ‘technologies’, either intended as a strategy for performance in the Brechtian sense, or more pragmatically, as a consequence of the medium (film, software and television). In *Voicings*, where the attempted performance is the performance outcome, the translation will remain imperfect, unconventional or open. The hurdle must stay: ventriloquial objects are a permanent reminder that a resolution that cannot come because body and structure cannot be merged. Politically, when it comes to the specific case of *Voicings*, the position of refugees and privileged native speakers will also never merge, and neither will their ‘point of speech’.

Prior to engaging in the specific analysis of the ventriloquial objects in question, it will be useful to introduce some considerations on the contemporary status of the practice of translation. From here we may be able to reclaim a territory for aesthetic production operating in the interstices of this field. To this extent, Gabriel Rockhill, the English translator of philosopher Jacques Rancière, offers a useful contribution. He names the responses in the field of translation as a consensual lamenting on the lack of ‘objective’ criteria for evaluation and eloquently synthesizes existing attitudes by polarising them in two camps: universal translatability (given by the deep structure of all discourse that can be echoed between idioms), against the utter impossibility of a faithful rendering of the translation.

Rockhill uses these debates to situate his own position where translation is conceived historically: ‘The conceptual network defining the basic elements and modalities of what is generally understood as translation is necessarily dependent on a historical situation. The very distinction between translation and adaptation, for example, has by no means remained a historical constant, and the same could be said of the relationship between original prose and plagiarism, transcription and revision, fidelity and infidelity’.⁹²

⁹² Gabriel Rockhill, “Translators’ Preface,” in *The Politics of Aesthetics* by Jacques Rancière, (New York: Continuum, 2004), viii.

He adds a second criterion that is social specificity, according to which translation must take into account the specific logic of signification within the target community. Even granting that communities will enter into conflict, the practice of the translator must operate on a socio-historical plane: 'This process can, in fact, take place within a single language, which does not however mean that understanding itself is an act of translation or that we are condemned to endlessly paraphrasing our original ideas. An alternate logic of signification can actually use the exact same words to mean something entirely different because it determines the very structure of meaning, the horizons of what is qualified as language, the *modi operandi* of words and sentences, the entire network that defines the process of signification'.⁹³ The significant idea that we can draw from Rockhill's conclusion is that the overall logic of signification is often more important than the discrete distinctions between idioms.

While this is a tested method for Rockhill's field of applied translation, aesthetic practices on the other hand may take issue with the possible pitfalls of such a process. At the same time, the underlying purpose of translation must be differentiated from one with a pseudo-scientific and commercial intent, to one deployed in the realm of poetics; in this context I return to Rockhill's initial contextualisation: 'This situation has given birth to a myriad of possible responses: the cynical condemnation of all translation, the enthusiastic acceptance of the archipelago of independent language games, the valorisation of translation as a unique form of writing with its own properly literary forms, the celebration of the abyss separating languages as an aesthetico-ethical opportunity to introduce a Proustian *langue étrangère dans la langue...*'⁹⁴ This impractical plethora of attitudes towards translation, anticipates the possibility of a number of unorthodox approaches to translation in film and the aesthetic fields, where in fact, the 'cynical condemnation' can indeed develop and motivate a creative practice centred around linguistic agency.

⁹³ Rockhill, ix.

⁹⁴ Rockhill, vii.

Rockhill's quotation makes an indirect allusion to the seminal essay by Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', an essential reference point for a number of practices that operate with the question of translation. Another significant reference often considered along with Benjamin is Bertolt Brecht and his estrangement or alienation principle in theatre performance. The ventriloquial objects in this chapter will evidence a number of 'mistranslation strategies' operating according to a number of 'technologies': *Sicilia!* (Jean Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet) manipulates voice prosody while my film *The News Editor* generates its rhythm of speech through editing. In *Murder Was The Case* (Xiaopeng Huang) the target language is corrupted by an automated process, while in *Boomerang* (Nancy Holt and Richard Serra) the intervening medium is an audio feedback. Later in the chapter, the reference to a target language is lost, and with the subconscious mis-articulations of a performer under hypnosis, the aural furnishes an alternative hermeneutics couched in the scientific and philosophical spheres.

The theoretical framework informed by Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno with a contemporary take by Barton Byg and Patrick Primavesi, will show how these methodologies are central to the work of a partnership of materialist filmmakers who will be the focus of the next section: Straub/Huillet.⁹⁵

Outside One's Language: Suffering the Language

In this section, Straub/Huillet's practice is discussed with a specific focus on the voice apparatus starting from Byg's critique of their German films; the critic's findings will be useful in performing a close reading of an Italian work by these filmmakers (*Sicilia!*) that can in turn develop the discussion in this chapter on the productive breakdown of semantic communication.

In spite of a rigorous contribution to the field lasting decades, this partnership of filmmakers has achieved relatively little international acclaim since critics have deemed their style relentlessly difficult or requiring a deciphering intellect. Barton Byg recently published a comprehensive re-evaluation of these filmmakers, where

⁹⁵ This partnership ended with the death of Danielle Huillet in 2006.

he places their German work in a broad critical context ranging from the Frankfurt School to contemporary film and socio-historical criticism. He situates their contribution amongst the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s who established the foundations of leftist 'counter cinema' that was to significantly influence New German Cinema.

Byg's elucidations are specifically relevant in two areas: firstly where he addresses Straub/Huillet's film practice as translation; secondly on the issue of history and spectatorship in relation to a materialist practice informed by Brecht and Adorno. I will consider, along with Byg's overarching contribution to Straub/Huillet's political performative practice, a contemporary commentary by Patrick Primavesi that relates Benjamin's essay to the Brechtian performance project.

Straub/Huillet's working practice follows the Brechtian tradition in seeking specific expressions from performers who are often lay actors, hence unfamiliar with the process and very often with the idiom used in the films. Their camera work is static and highly photographic: 'shooting is always done very directly from a strategic point that records all spatial relations and makes only very little use of the shot-reaction-countershot technique'⁹⁶ and in fact the work is deemed to: 'keep the classical immediacy of early sound cinema or even the silent film'.⁹⁷

According to the precepts of materialist filmmaking, affect was to be avoided, and in fact an austere atmosphere is created in their films through the array of intellectual referencing embedded in them. Yet more specifically in relation to their formal strategy, it is crucial to highlight that their texts (hence the dialogues or utterances in the films) are never self-authored: they work via an array of texts, adaptations, quotations, diary entries from a number of intellectual sources such as Kafka, Vittorini, Schönberg, Brecht, Böll and Mallarmé to name a few.

The fact that the script, or performed writing, is not authored by the filmmakers, honours the intent of presenting the ideas in a 'naked state' not to patronise the

⁹⁶ Margaret Eifler, "Landscapes of Resistance. The German Films of Daniele Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub by Barton Byg", *The German Quarterly* 73, no.3 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 340.

⁹⁷ Eifler, 340.

viewer or influence the reading. Unlike in the previous chapter, where this split between author and utterance was seen as problematic because potentially concealed, here the filmmakers make it apparent that they use original texts; in addition they strive to show the apparatus by making their interventions audible or by emphasising their translation process.

A criticism raised against their method is that the films appear removed from their contemporary socio-political contexts. On the other hand critic Margaret Eifler states: 'by centring more on musical or painterly sources and biblical and classical myths, they evoke a utopian force that is not without a strong sense of history; their films are directed towards an underlying universal obligation to resistance and resisting'.⁹⁸ Critical assessments aside, it is not the scope of this discussion to establish if this method ultimately does implicate a bias and whether neutrality in presenting ideas can be achieved, the emphasis here is on the disavowal of the promotion of naturalistic speech originated from a script.

The second key point to be emphasised is in the use of non-native speakers for the delivery of the text, and its effects evidencing the 'foreignness' of language itself. As we will see in more detail later, Straub/Huillet's strategy favours parataxis instead of syntaxis and this approach results in exploiting the musicality of language at the expense of semantic communication. What specific points can be learnt from this translation 'technology' as a methodology that through film implicates text, performance and the voice?

Primavesi reminds us that at the basis of Benjamin's project of translation is the premise of a failure of the process itself: 'Thus, the translator enacts the ideal of translatability not by communicating the meaning of the original work, but on the contrary, by deformation or even destruction of the work of literature in so far as it has been the expression of an individual intention. From this point of view, the task of the translation is always connected to an expropriation. Ambiguously, the German word *Aufgabe* means not only a task, but also a renunciation or rejection'.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Eifler, 341.

⁹⁹ Patrick Primavesi, "The Performance of Translation. Benjamin and Brecht on the Loss of Small Details", *The Drama Review* 43, no.4 (Winter 1999): 54.

Brecht and Benjamin had an extensive exchange over literary approaches and here Primavesi records Brecht's position on the translation of poetry, which also shares a great deal with Rockhill's views. The playwright warned of the danger of translating too much by suggesting that what should be translated was perhaps the writer's attitude. In Brecht's words:

From the rhythm of the original, only that should be translated which is an element of the writer's attitude, no more. His attitude toward language will be translated even if, for example, one imitates only the way he reshapes certain words by arranging them in an unusual word order. And the occasion for this imitation must not necessarily be prescribed by the original.¹⁰⁰

This position foregrounds the methodology of interruptions and disturbance championed by Brecht in his gestural theatre; at the same time it flags the significance of tonal emphasis and rhythm (or prosody) in the utterance, where consequently semantic accuracy assumes a subordinate role.

Primavesi reminds us that the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, a major source for Straub/Huillet, approached Greek tragedy using the *caesura*, an interruption designed to counteract the dominant rhythm of a text. In order to elaborate on the performance of the 'non native' voice, the critic uncovers a text where in the making of *Galileo*, Brecht describes his process of exploiting the gaps between languages (English and German) in a stage performance. The account describes a detailed methodology in which Brecht and his collaborator Laughton formulated a *mise en scène* at the same time as the play was being translated into English:

We needed such broadly ramified studies, because he spoke no German whatever and we had to decide the gist of each piece of dialogue by my acting it all in bad English or even in German and his then acting it back in proper English in a variety of ways until I

The latter statement is an acknowledged interpretation by Paul De Man of Benjamin's essay, to which both Byg and Primavesi refer.

¹⁰⁰ Brecht in Primavesi, 55.

could say: that's it. The result he would write down sentence by sentence in longhand. Some sentences, indeed many, he carried around for days, changing them continually. This system of play-and-repetition had one immense advantage in that psychological discussions were almost entirely avoided.¹⁰¹

The process described, by shifting the focus from psychological characterisation towards a gestural communicative efficiency, dwells on code and medium in favour of objective distancing. This critical intellectual stance is a plausible strategy in the context of the rise of the mass media and of course in 'the age of mechanical reproduction'.¹⁰² Unsurprisingly, the critical references for Straub/Huillet and the materialist practices of this time include Brecht's proto-mechanical method for translation and dramaturgy, Adorno's critique of the standardisation of the culture industries and Benjamin's productive failure of translation. On the other hand this legacy continues with many contemporary video works that focus on a critical reading of the medium, resulting in a deepened critical awareness of message, receiver, channel and ultimately ideologies.

Primavesi notes that when addressing speech agency and translation, the linguistic plane can be considered in a psychoanalytical sense. For example, in considering the Brecht/Laughton translation process, the critic applies a psychoanalytical metaphor, while also emphasising the Brechtian distinction between poetry and translation (where the latter is always situated outside 'the forest of language'). In this sense he conceives the theatrical experiment of translation described earlier in terms of a metaphoric psychoanalytic instance of speech transference.

Rather than addressing a psychology of individuals, the transference operates symbolically from the position of the other (outside the forest of language) in this way: 'the virtual translation "on trial" articulates a foreign, heterogeneous, and expropriated voice – calling the original into the "forest of language"'. As an echo of the foreign word, the translation discovers its "own" voice, beyond the work of an individual translator [...] the scenario [...] comes very close to Benjamin's essay and

¹⁰¹ Brecht in Primavesi, 57.

¹⁰² Here the paraphrasing refers to Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211.

leads Brecht to a fundamental relation between translation, performance and gesture'.¹⁰³ Hence, from a radically external position identified as the other, or the space outside the forest of languages, the translation acknowledges the expropriated voice and discovers its own via that alienating moment. We can note how this reasoning is coherent with the ventriloquial idea of an apparatus that by slightly failing or mis-functioning achieves a more authentic position.

In the case study of the Brecht/Laughton translation experiment there is also another observation that is important for the scope of this discussion: their 'thinking in process' operates via a syncretic method using text, word and gesture. This observation corroborates the fact that communication is only very partially verbal and that prosody and body language fulfil a major role. Furthermore, their interaction, rather than being standard communication, displays a creative process, as well as being invested in it. I note how gesture is implicated in this thinking process, which anticipates a connection between thinking and kinaesthetics addressed later in the chapter.

Straub/Huillet also take translation to task through performance and they engage with the literary text by using a method that Byg qualifies as 'deterritorialisation of language'.¹⁰⁴ By referring to the Benjaminian 'impossibility of translation', Byg states that such impasse reveals an alienation from one's own language that is implicitly there but generally unperceived: 'The gap between what words say and what they mean, between signifier and signified, may be invisible in one's own language, but the inevitable failure of translation brings it to the fore. Straub/Huillet's methods of distancing texts from their performance in a film has a similar effect'.¹⁰⁵ As noted in connection with *Voicings*, the distancing occurs predominantly at the level of the native speaker, equally in this aesthetic context the 'target' language is the principal locum of deterritorialisation.

¹⁰³Brecht in Primavesi, 57.

¹⁰⁴ The term refers to the strategy of evidencing the gap between what words say and what they mean; this 'truth' about language becomes apparent when a given language is spoken by a foreigner. This concept is discussed in Barton Byg's chapter "Film as 'Translation'" in *Landscapes of Resistance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 199.

¹⁰⁵Byg, 199.

Byg's thorough analysis demonstrates that it is necessary to be acquainted with the original texts, as well as with the target language of these literary works, and consequently his oeuvre focuses on the German production of the filmmakers, specifically with *The Death of Empedocles* (1986) and *Antigone* (1992), two films based on Hölderlin's poetry. My analysis, in turn, will take Byg's contribution into account and focus on *Sicilia!* (1998), a film which Straub/Huillet adapted from Elio Vittorini's novel *Conversazione in Sicilia*; it was made in Italian with optional French subtitles.

Conversazione in Sicilia (published in 1938-39 as instalments in the literary journal *Letteratura* and in 1941 as a novel) is an allegorical anti-fascist tale written in a dialogue imbued with strong lyricism. The following quote by Vittorini is indicative of the quality of the type of prose sought by the author, as well as on his frame of reference. This is what Vittorini writes about Gertrude Stein: 'she applied counterpoint by fashioning a prose style that went forward, back then forward again, like the step of black music and dance' (applicava il contrappunto alla prosa, e si foggiava un passo stilistico di prosa che avanza, retrocede e di nuovo avanza come il passo della musica e della danza negra).¹⁰⁶

Similarly, when we read Giovanni Falaschi's introduction to Vittorini's novel, we learn that this method is appropriate to describe the prose in *Conversazione in Sicilia* and that it also corresponds to the writing technique of the opera libretto. We become aware of how the style makes a strong reference to music and the title of the novel declares the centrality of the element of speech in its *denouement*.

Conversazione in Sicilia features a man returning to his native Sicily after fifteen years spent as an economic immigrant in the north of Italy. The novel, alluding to Dante's *Divina Commedia*, is constructed through the conversations taking place with the individuals encountered on the journey. Vittorini is thought to have claimed that the location of his novel is merely generic, quite simply that Sicilia sounded better than Persia or Venezuela. This device can be seen to reinforce the allegorical intent behind the tale but at the time would have also functioned to deflect the

¹⁰⁶ Giovanni Falaschi from the "Introduzione" to Elio Vittorini, *Conversazione in Sicilia* (Milano: BUR, 2006), 41. My translation.

policing attention of the censors, which at the time was poised to act against any form of critique to national institutions.

It is also worth noting that in the 1930s Vittorini was a specialist of American literature, whose milieu he idealized as 'a sort of new and fabulous Orient.'¹⁰⁷ This liberating context imbued with a universal mythology was an aspiration for the Italians caught in the shackles of Fascist provincialism. As we witness in *Sicilia!*, the protagonist 'becomes' American at the inception of the film: in the first scene, Silvestro, who is as an immigrant alighting from the ferry, is stereotypically identified as American by the local population because he eats in the morning. The opening shot features the back of the protagonist, who states: 'There is no cheese like our cheese', a Sicilian peasant retorts: 'Do you eat in the morning, are you foreign?' From here the two engage in a conversation about food produce and eating habits where the meta-discourse targets economic issues in rural and barren Sicily.

The following analysis will develop the aesthetico-political role of the aural in *Sicilia!*; this move is intended to ascertain in what way the voice operates in this work and what kind of translation is involved in its making, and to evidence that voice deployment comes with an ideological critique. Straub/Huillet's film, as an adaptation of Vittorini's novel, will be assessed for its technique of deploying dialogue in its bias against linguistic naturalism. However, before addressing the film narrative, the starting point must be the title sequence, where often a film's intentions are encapsulated or at least anticipated.

The film opens with the simple title *Sicilia!*, while we hear a Sicilian folk rhyme sung in the local dialect by a woman: she sings in the first person without any musical accompaniment and the melody describes a shepherdess relishing her homeland. This focus on the 'bare' female voice is emblematic of *denouement* to come, giving emphasis to a major female character (here the film diverges from the novel that focuses on the male protagonists/narrator). This deeply regional song is suddenly truncated at the following sound edit: what follows through the rest of the opening credits is a string chamber music melody.

¹⁰⁷ Falaschi here quotes Vittorini and adds that the writer considers American literature as 'compounding the essence of each race in one complete language', 43. My translation.

For me the polemic achieved by a simple sound cut is clear: the 'bourgeois' expectations of the viewer (emblematised by the classical music) are initially offset by the 'accented' rhyme only to be restored with a pronounced irony. The film problematises the position of the 'non rural' spectator and by editing these two soundtracks in this order, the subversion shows that it is the strings that are out of place.

Adorno in 1947 took a strong position against predictability and standardisation in music for screen: 'The demand for melody and euphony is not only assumed to be obvious, but also a matter of public taste, as represented in the consumer'.¹⁰⁸ His proposition does away with conventional leitmotifs advocating instead the rhythmic unpredictability of twelve-tone music: 'the development of the avant-garde music in the course of the last thirty years has opened up an inexhaustible reservoir of new resources and possibilities that is still practically untouched. There is no objective reason why motion-picture music should not draw upon it'.¹⁰⁹ Along with Brecht, Adorno has a significant influence on the production of Straub/Huillet, who aside from working on Schönberg directly, deal with speech as if it were a musical (twelve-tonal) score.

In *Sicilia!*, after the first scene at the harbour, Silvestro proceeds inland, and the second scene takes place in a train carriage heading to Siracusa. This scene features a number of conversations on food, occupation and mores, reverberating between personal and socio-economic registers. The viewer's attention is grabbed both by the content of the speeches and their slightly unnatural delivery. The dialogues sound rhythmic and sustained through a non-emotive regularity that departs from the simulation of naturalistic speech.

During the conversations, we note a Brechtian disjunctive moment that should be taken into consideration. The utterance is a semantic inconsistency that instead is rhythmically coherent. When one of the characters wants to know if the protagonist is heading to Siracusa to visit his family, Silvestro's retort is instead: 'You have a

¹⁰⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Composing for the Films* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 8.

¹⁰⁹ Adorno, 18.

beautiful baritone voice, did you know that?’ We note that despite the abrupt change of topic, the conversation continues in the same pace, with the same musicality and rhythms.

Of course the reader of *Conversations in Sicily* is privy to the subjective narrative and therefore intentionality of the protagonist. In *Sicilia!* instead, the viewer, or listener, who relies on the dialogues performed on screen, is left unaware of the nature of Silvestro’s journey and of his connection to his destination, until the narrative illustrates it later in the film.

The reader of the novel will notice when viewing the film that the dialogues correspond literally to those penned by Vittorini. Straub/Huillet’s materialist *mise en scène* faithfully translates the novel into a script, and consequently what is left to the filmmakers in the process is a dramaturgy implicated in ‘voice technology’ and prosody, along with visuality and gesture. As we will see in the next section, the aesthetic choice of utilising an original text without interference and transforming such text through prosody, informed my own film *The News Editor*.

The filmmakers are totally aware of the potentials in hand and they deliberately develop a Brechtian cinematography that eliminates the possibility of a psychological bias on the part of the protagonist - who in the novel narrates instead in the first person offering personal insights. This is both achieved with the objective camera positioning and by having only the dialogue, thereby excluding the intervention of a voice-over featuring the narrator’s thoughts. The possibilities of the text are exploited through the voice, the dialogue avoids naturalistic rendering by deploying a specific technique that relies on regular rhythms and even emphasis. What is the role of this impartial, unsentimental delivery focused on rhythmicality?

On the one hand, the content is conveyed very clearly at a semantic level, on the other, the parataxis denaturalises speech and instigates a spectatorial distancing in keeping with the materialist project. Still, I would like to suggest that there is more to the question of rhythm. I would speculate that Straub/Huillet utilise this fashioned rhythmicality of speech (not the content) as a suturing method equivalent to the visual device used in mainstream cinema via the shot-reverse-shot camera technique, devised to achieve the viewers’ identification with the characters.

As the viewer experiences the film dialogue, the unnatural rhythmic regularity of the speech requires further focus and forces one to stay with the delivery in order to interpret the utterance. The unnatural pacing coupled with the clarity of the enunciation creates the necessary paradox of distancing the viewer while maintaining a focus on the utterance. Unlike conventional visual suturing, where identification is achieved in order to empathise with the characters, this aural suturing performs a distancing that nevertheless maintains its engagement with the subject by virtue of the musical properties of language. Yet since we acknowledge a discomfort in the viewer's experience, and given that identification and immersive empathy are disavowed by materialist filmmaking, is there a space left for affect? What is the effect of this speech-suture *in lieu*?

Further elucidations can be drawn from the analysis of the next major scene at the mother's house, evidencing how form and narrative content operate in tandem. Prior to such analysis it is worthy to consider the soundscape that leads to it. Silvestro's arrival is prefaced by a series of silent images from the train window that eventually cut to a shot of the protagonist knocking at the door of a rural dwelling. The transition from an unnatural silence, married to moving scenes of the landscape, emphasises the transit itself that leads the protagonist to his destination. As Silvestro knocks, a woman opens the door and he greets her formally and courteously. This beautiful minimal shot of a sun-bleached wall, with a door and a window carved onto it by dark shades, is ironically stylised by a soundtrack of birds chirping. We are approximately twenty-two minutes into the film and what follows, in ironic counterpoint to the bird chirping, is a scene of thirty-two minutes featuring the conversation between mother and son.

As the door opens, the son addresses her jubilantly: 'Sig.ra Concezione!', then after a pause, the woman emits a joyous cry of surprise and says: 'E' Silvestro!'. They hug twice, and pause to make space for more bird song sound, then they hold each other by the hands and gaze at each other. The speech and gestures are clean, precise and always rhythmically paced. Then the language address changes from formal to informal; he asks her how she managed to recognise him, she retorts that she was wondering herself, after this she invites him in to share her fish lunch which

is currently cooking on the stove: the simple meal is described as 'un'aringa sul fuoco' (a herring on the fire).

The long dialogue that takes place in the small house is proportionally the largest continuous scene of the film and considering the politics of these calculating filmmakers its contents must be emphasised. They escalate from food, childhood memories and the economic constraints of feeding a family, moving to the father's ineptitude of character and unfaithfulness, eventually concluding with details of the mother's own betrayal. The recollections soar to poignant moments such as her giving birth and having to enlist the husband's support by throwing a bottle at him or his poetic courtship of other women. The most salient aspect of the rendering of this dialogue is in the strength and prominence of the female character. While in the novel this 'conversation' is interspersed with the son's perception of the mother, his provocative intentions in directing his questions and judgment on her mores, with the cinematographic translation the mother's presence dominates over the son, partly a function of her larger proportion of lines and partly through the cinematography. The camera looks 'down' on a son proffering weak retorts in an attempt to justify his estranged father's behaviour. This audiovisual translation keeps the text intact but emphasises the poignancy of this dialogue with camera positioning and prosody.

The topics are intimate, contentious, even scandalous at points, but the effect on the viewer is not empathy, rather shock at this energetic unfolding. The objective camera technique (disavowing subjective shot-reverse-shot) alternates between the two characters, as they inhabit the frame in respective isolation. The novel is already associated with an expressionist pictorial rendering because of the illustrations of painter Renato Guttuso. Vittorini himself, over twenty years later, undertook the photographic project of returning to the sites of the novel and illustrating it again.

However, the strong photographic portrait style of Straub/Huillet leaves no ambiguity in regard to the reciprocal alienation of the characters: each inhabits the shots singularly. As they do not share the space in the frame, their mutual alienation is exacerbated by the alternating of the cuts. Yet, the visual aesthetic is driven by

the dialogue, in fact the poignancy of the sequence lies in the delivery of the original dialogue.

The use of parataxis and regular spacing between clearly articulated words creates a regular rhythm that cannot nevertheless sound completely regular due to the metric unevenness of the conversation and the emphasis of the breath in the delivery. In fact, the intensity deployed in the utterance (as breath and not emotion) coupled to its striving rhythmic consistency create an uneasiness for the listener who perceives a friction derived from the oscillation between the intention of an organic delivery and its rhythmic constraints.

The son's minimal interceptions add rhythm and punctuation to the dominant speech of the mother and often words from a preceding statement return, committing the flow to a kind of *enjambment*. Vittorini's dialogue contains an overall musicality in the pace, demonstrating his stylistic intent as described earlier in the analogy to black dance. I would suggest that the delivery technique stands in for and replaces the emotive content of an otherwise naturalistic delivery; the rhythmic regularity coupled to the metric constraints that send it off-balance 'performs' the emotion musically instead of relying on semantics. This is why the viewer experiences uneasiness when caught in the musical speech pattern; he/she attempts to decipher its content as if it were a 'realist' film dialogue (the black and white visual aesthetics are reminiscent of Italian neo-realism).

The emphasis is thus drawn to the musical function of language, as previously stated acting as suture in a pseudo-realist experience. Adorno has written on listening and the effects of the dramaturgy of film music:

Ordinary listening, as compared to seeing, is "archaic"; it has not kept pace with technological progress. One might say that to react with the ear, which is fundamentally a passive organ in contrast to the swift, actively selective eye, is in a sense not in keeping with the present advanced industrial age and its cultural anthropology.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Adorno, 20.

This primitivism of the aural in Adorno finds its counterpart in Vittorini's relishing of black rhythms, yet regardless of the qualitative judgment that justifies the function of listening - whether as a cognitive passivity in the listening function, or as evidence that the thinking process has in fact more affinity with music than it does with language and its comprehensive functions – Straub/Huillet exploit listening and the musicality in the utterance for an aesthetic and political purpose that goes beyond the general revival of primitivism in the 1930s.

The estrangement from the utterance, or its distancing from any presumed naturalisation typical of mainstream cinema, is historically lodged in Straub/Huillet 1960s political intention of wresting the language from the control of the bourgeoisie; at the same time Byg points out in connection with Hölderlin's texts that their position is coherent with the romantic poet's attitude towards the Greek language: 'what is proper to oneself must be as well learned as what is alien'.¹¹¹

Byg demonstrates that what the filmmakers achieve by alienating the voice from a naturalised performance in the German texts is paradoxically a more intimate relationship with the poetry of the language, which in turn relies on the vocal and musical qualities of the articulation, such as rhythm, tone and accent. In *Empedocles*, for instance the use of parataxis, or the pacing through a regular rhythm orchestrated by equal pauses in the delivery, produces a more extreme estrangement in comprehension than in *Sicilia!*. This is due to the density of Hölderlin's poetry, where the viewer/listener is at a loss in holding the sentence structure, hence grasping meaning in the utterance, and the effect is reinforced at a micro level by the fact that the lines are delivered by non-native speakers. Paradoxically, this pseudo-mechanical, non-emotive delivery provides the German public with a 'kind of truth' about the text by enabling a new relationship with the words that will have a stronger resonance because of the range of associations that each listener can experience through the audiovisual display. Byg's assessment of the German works is clear and eloquent:

The effect on the language here is twofold. On the one hand, the precise work on the rhythm and intonation, almost to the extent that

¹¹¹ Byg, 201.

the script becomes a musical score, is meant to be wholly in service to making the fundamental rhythmic quality of the Hölderlin's text audible, nothing more. On the other hand, to make Hölderlin's unique manipulation of German syntax audible, a Brechtian "alienation effect" is also introduced.¹¹²

Such a paradigm is useful when considering *Sicilia!* where Vittorini's text is deterritorialised from novel to film in order to open and make use of the lyrical possibilities of the dialogue. The original dialogue extracted from the novel is thus exploited via a use of prosody whose regularity can be interpreted to be operating as an aural suturing device. Furthermore this effect has an affinity with the rhythmically delivered voice of subtitles in *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait*. In both instances the utterance is over ridden by a new prosody, its rhythmicity (that symbolically stands for the vocal usurping the verbal) in turn inviting a new spectatorial engagement.

We have experienced how *Sicilia!* is delivered through an objective 'point of shoot'; when it comes to its point of speech the film strives to comply to the same rigour. Objectivity in the case of the aural is conveyed via its fidelity to the original text and a delivery that invokes distancing rather than emotion. I would state that by avoiding a psychological characterisation, the filmmakers achieve an even stronger affect, resonating with the alienation of individuals deterritorialised by the language they proffer.

In my view, the examples in *Voicings* and *Sicilia!* demonstrate that the vocal toil of performance and the flawed attempts in taming translation and the apparatus, produce a more radical affect than an actor's delivery of emotion. Also that this affect has a connection with the alienation inherent in the idea that subjectivity is contained within a linguistic paradigm. This proposition is argued with more examples to follow in the next section, and with the vocalisations in Mullican's work later in the chapter. The discussion gains momentum considering how the vocal (rhythm and parataxis) contributes to consolidate a notion of voice rather than

¹¹² Byg, 200.

speech.¹¹³ In keeping with the ventriloquial project, less orthodox translation practices are to follow where the semantic function is further challenged by the materiality and play of contents and mediums.

The Music, the Voice, its Accent and the Machine

More contemporary examples follow to emphasise the political aesthetic possibilities of translation practice. I will outline how Straub/Huillet's strategies of voice deployment and their theoretical context have informed my practice, specifically where it comes to the short film *The News Editor* (2009). Also, in acknowledgement of Straub/Huillet's attitude to subtitling, intended as an intransigent formal and political practice inherent to the work rather than a practical accessory for the dissemination of the films, I then focus on *Murder Was the Case* (2008) a video work by contemporary Chinese artist Xiaopeng Huang. Following on from the discussion of voice based translation set against a mechanical interface I will introduce an analysis of *Boomerang* (1974) where Nancy Holt is found toiling with an audiovisual apparatus.

My film *The News Editor* features the performance of a 2008 BBC article about the implementation of lie detector technology to combat benefit fraud. According to the article, the government is to fund and implement a technology geared to achieve savings from fraudulent benefit applications. Only, as I corroborated with my research, the technology has been proved not to work and its covert implementation results in an unethical practice. Furthermore, in a climate of corruption and tax evasion by corporations and the richest tier of society, lie detector technology was being implemented to monitor the poorest demographics, resulting in the political message that it is poor people who lie.

I wanted to address this issue because of its political significance and because it implicated a technology centred on the voice; it took a considerable amount of time

¹¹³ It is important to emphasise that this project is based on the voice as opposed to speech: voice exceeds the notion of semantic communication (here conceptualised as the connubium verbal and vocal), while speech emphasises linguistic communication alone.

to find a strategy to tackle this subject and 'give it a voice'. I carried out a considerable amount of research on the background of the companies involved in the deal with the government and discovered that the deal would profit a certain prominent London corporation that shall remain unnamed. Staff from the Linguistics and Phonetics Department at UCL confirmed to me that the claims of lie detector technology are simply unfounded.

After some attempts at making a piece of work that incorporated this research I decided to change strategy and use the 'unorthodox method' for translation I had been exploring with the work of Straub/Huillet and represent the original news item but by affecting its meaning through rhythmicity and prosody. Again, vocal aspects of the voice had to intervene again the verbal.

I considered this set up: disembodied forces implementing directives that, in turn, were delivered by individuals assessing speakers via a bogus technology. How could I reference this context and problematise the 'point of speech'? I elaborated on ideas around disembodied voices offering navigational instructions in the urban landscape, or the alienating experiences of synthetic voices on telephone lines, along with theoretical notions on the deterritorialisation of language as translation practice.

I chose to intervene by making a critical statement through prosody and performance. The performer/news reader is directed to maintain eye contact with the viewer: direct address is used mostly with news items and conveys power and agency. Meanwhile, such direct address is periodically disrupted by the performer's voice that is made to sound alienating by its re-editing (hence the title). Her voice sounds synthetic like the normative disembodied voices that provide instructions over phone lines or transport systems, except that she has a body and her gaze stares into the viewers'.

Ventriloquial objects aspire to operate audiovisually and to insist on the voice apparatus to problematise it; in this instance, the object's efficiency is heightened here by the fact that its *mise en scène* is kept to a minimum. Just as Straub/Huillet scripted *Sicilia!* using the dialogue of Vittorini's film as it appeared in the novel, I chose to use the BBC News article as it was published. Another parallel is achieved

in the translation technology achieved by applying a new rhythmicity to the voice. Whereas the filmmakers' renditions of German poetry were made to wrestle against the original texts via a reconstituted rhythm, *The News Editor* is formed through its reconstitution which is both symbolic (as with the action of editing or representing information) and formal (operating with visible jump edits).

Chinese artist Xiaopeng Huang also subjects an existing text to a process of translation, or estrangement; his point of departure is a rap song by leading hip-hop artist Snoop Dogg. When considering Straub/Huillet's production against mine or Huang's, the disparity in cultural and formal contexts can be used to frame a contemporary debate on translation as aesthetic practice in the spirit of Benjamin's 'failed' venture.¹¹⁴ It is interesting to note in context, that Byg, discussing Straub/Huillet's use of rhythmical delivery, quotes a contribution by documentary maker Haron Farocki where the director suggests an analogy between natural speech patterns and rap music.

It is obvious that these works (Hölderlin against Snoop Dogg) do not share a context; on the other hand, to prescribe a contextual grounding as a precondition to the analysis, would constrain and subjugate it to a rigid historical framework, precluding other possibilities of discussion. It is possible to find in this comparison ample room for a productive discussion, based on shared and applied methodologies, as well as a subversive intent.

Huang's starting point is *Murder Was the Case*, a song whose lyrics are contentious and provocative in keeping with hip-hop irreverence. Hip-hop is a genre with global aspirations and Huang takes cue from this and critically instigates a process where its objectives are stunted. The artist's methodology in making the piece consists of subjecting the lyrics to an automatic Web translator from English to Chinese, then back from Chinese to English. The textual outcome constitutes the subtitling of Huang's music video, composed of still images.

¹¹⁴ This is a reference to Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" and the notion with translation comes its impossibility.

His bogus attempt to incorporate the song into his own native milieu can only be destined to fail and in this 'failure' lays the productive locum of the aesthetic endeavour. Huang relies on the Web, the most powerful tool for the dissemination of popular music, and its free translation service, in order to undermine the symbolic homogenizing impetus behind these tools for global communication. The outcome reveals the ultimate incoherence of the globalising attempt to establish an equivalence between disparate cultural contexts.

Huang's video features the sound of the original song slowed down: the digital manipulation can be seen to provide a metaphoric attempt to understand the inter-linguistic exchange by 'speaking slowly'. Simultaneously, this technique is deployed pragmatically by allowing the screen time required to display the translated text in its integrity and for the spectator to read it. The process already transgresses subtitling formal constraints that strictly impose a succinct and pre-determined number of characters-per-frame. Ironically, the slowed down translation allows for a degree of intelligibility that functions by undoing standardised methods that promote the dissemination of the film text in a global market.

This is no attempt at auto-ethnography in the more recent trends of third text cinema or the video essay, but rather suggests a failure at auto-ethnography based on the found popular object. The video rejects the possibility of translation between two cultural contexts: this 'automated' gesture performs a political act in asserting a socio-political incompatibility at macro-level, then in the specifics of the linguistic domains.

Like Straub/Huillet, Huang begins with an existing text and ends with a critical commentary on the same material abstaining from an authored hermeneutics: his 'materialist' approach leads him to the mediation by an automated tool (Internet translator). At the same time the approach alerts the viewer to the cultural and political significance of the subtitling tool in the dissemination of the moving image. This is an important context that deserves larger critical attention in a dedicated arena and is one where Straub/Huillet's intransigence manifested itself at the cost of their popularity amongst international cineastes (the DVD of *Sicilia!* for instance exists only in Italian with the option of French subtitling, speculatively read as a purist approach with a symbolic rejection of English as lingua franca).

The way in which the verbal in Huang's piece is affected by the translation deserves specific attention. In the video, the sound is slowed down, generating a monotonous drone while freeze-frames of (local) people in a Chinese street are displayed as a slideshow. The slow pacing of these elements encourages the viewer/reader to reflect on the language of the subtitles and, as can be anticipated, the outcome of the automatic translation mostly results in a syntactical jumble. On the other hand, the viewer's involuntary attempt at interpreting constitutes the active act of translation that is forced onto the spectator and is inevitably framed within a contextual set of references. In fact, much like in Straub/Huillet, the translation breaks the syntax into smaller isolated linguistic elements, which set in an original context, allows for the possibility of a number of individual associative interpretations on behalf of the viewer/reader.

More specifically, due to the instability and unreliability of the mechanical translation method, just like in Straub/Huillet, the text opens up a number of 'stylistic' nuances suggesting different communication registers and different levels of comprehension. The examples here are rich and abundant and this textual variety furnishes Huang's work with a sophistication that at first impression would appear denied by its crass 'impersonal' method.

I will limit the close reading to a few examples where the first version is from Huang's piece, the second from the original Snoop Dogg song.

When I see in the sky top of time	(As I look up at the sky)
My standpoint thought starts tripped over	(My mind starts tripping)
The teardrop lowers my eyes	(A tear drops my eye)
My body temperature autumn	(My body temperature falls)

The first line enjoys a good level of comprehension in relation to the original meaning is achieved in the general sense of 'looking at the sky', then another element is introduced with the 'top of time' that resonates of an epic finitude and remoteness absent from the original. Then the idea of a mindset is conveyed by 'standpoint thought' and despite the syntactical incoherence, the term 'tripped' is easily associated with its original semantic intent. In the third line, the introduction of

'lowers' subverts playfully its original meaning and in the fourth, the misplacement of 'autumn' could alert the reader to its synonym in 'fall' or equally create a productive syncopation in the rhythm of the reading.

These are speculative interpretations that invite further responses and in this sense the work offers a number of possibilities that a 'faithful' translation could not achieve. By stunting the song's language and consequently its commercial aspirations, Huang's video opens it for broad, poetic interpretations; the song achieves popularity in a discursive context, but more importantly this new context demands and is constituted through active interpretation by the audience, eschewing the passive consumption of the culture industry condemned by Adorno.

If the previous example offered some slippages of a naïf poetic nature, the following is more poignant in a different mode:

Nigga what is upwards	(Nigga? Yeah, nigga)
Your mother visits prostitutes	(Yous a dead motherfucker now)

Here the automatic translation produces an interesting alternative. In fact while the absurdity of the statement in the second line is clear, the semantic field does suggest a controversial context: firstly in the introduction of 'prostitution' then by its association with mother. The correlation here is even more transgressive by comparison to the original because it is of a transitive nature, thus hijacking meaning via a coupling that annihilates its original expletive intent with a slant of dark humour which consistently affects other sections:

I buy benz for my mother	(I bought my momma a Benz)
my booboo a press indentation	(I bought my Boo-Boo a Jag)
And I now is revolve in 19trizay (1993)	(And now I am rolling in a nine-trizzay
El L dog ridicules	Do-Rad)

It is interesting to note here that the mechanical translator 'recognises' a Benz but not a Jag, in itself a commentary on the economic power of these manufacturers and the broader cultural significance of their products. The third line is ironic in the syntactical discordance of subject and verb: 'And I is now, ' that is typical of black

gang speech. If totally appropriate to the hip-hop context, this form, however, is not present in the original lyrics: paradoxically the auto-translation introduces a sense of 'authenticity' in relation to its assumed syntactical origin.

The examples could continue and this is symptomatic of the potential richness of aesthetic production that engages with modes of translation. The formal issues and creative possibilities at stake are vast and complex, evolving from Benjamin's 'failure' and Brecht's alienation into a rich practice of methodology and hermeneutics. Voice and its symbolic functions are divorced: if the latter loses its original scope to give way to a landscape of signs, the former is reconstituted as pure sound, a drone whose suturing beat disavows the processed mastering of industry.

The Holt/Serra video *Boomerang* (1974) has also been singled out in this analysis as it features another challenging encounter between the voice and the machine. This piece was created in the materialist tradition but is couched in the domain of the televisual: just as artists' films interfere with cinematic norms, this work could be seen to intervene critically in commercial broadcasting practices.

In *Boomerang*, performer Nancy Holt is filmed in real time describing her situation while a microphone feedback relates her utterances back with a delay. The echo produced by her words prevents and hijacks her thought process, making it arduous by the overlap of temporalities, while the viewer witnesses and to an extent experiences her distress. The speaker is progressively alienated by her attempt at voicing her own thoughts, since they are 'boo-me-ran-an-an-ging-ing-back' to her in a simultaneous present. This work has a reflexive quality, the reverberating voice inexorably returns and it leads the speaker to merge as subject and medium, across past and present.

To an extent, *Boomerang's* issues of time complement the questions raised with Straub/Huillet's, whose work is contemporary to this video; for this reason it will be appropriate to introduce a critique of the work formulated at the time followed by a contemporary reading. Rosalind Krauss discussed *Boomerang* by focusing on the notion of the reflectivity and simultaneity of video as a medium. In 1976 Krauss is prompted to assess the implications on a 'new media' against the legacy of

modernist painting; she describes the two aesthetic domains as being polarised: 'The difference is total. Reflection, when it is a case of mirroring, is a move towards an external symmetry; while reflexiveness is a strategy to achieve radical asymmetry, from within.'¹¹⁵

By addressing the internal dynamic of video, Krauss elaborates on the voice as narcissistic object in the (Lacanian) context of a psychoanalytical session, and here her response bears an affinity with Primavesi's reading of the translated voice (as seen earlier in the Brecht/Laughton experiment). In Krauss' words:

I would say that the analysis consists precisely in distinguishing the person lying on the analyst couch from the person who is speaking [...] The analytic project is then one in which the patient disengages from the 'statue' of the reflected self, and through a method of reflexiveness, rediscovers the real time of his own history. He exchanges the atemporality of repetition for the temporality of change.¹¹⁶

On closer scrutiny, Holt subjects herself to a deconstructing performance (not dissimilar to Mullican's) that results in a stunting of her linguistic faculties, because of an external/prosthetic intervention in her thought process; a new sense of temporality is introduced as the performer's othering occurs coercively via an external medium. In other words the video acts more as a gesture of self-repression rather than a process of self-actualisation. Krauss notes that there are significant differences in the economy of *Boomerang* that distinguish it from the other works surveyed (such as those by Vito Acconci or Joan Jonas). Firstly, the critic acknowledges the fact that the feedback is audio rather than visual, secondly that Richard Serra (Holt's collaborator in this piece) positions himself outside the frame: 'his position outside it promotes an attitude toward time that is different from many other works of video. The tape's brevity – it is ten minutes long – is itself related to

¹¹⁵ Rosalind Krauss, "The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 56.

¹¹⁶ Krauss, 58.

discourse: to how long it takes to shape and develop an argument; and how long it takes for its receiver to get the “point”.¹¹⁷

A key question that emerges from this reading concerns spectatorship and agency; what follows links the current reading to some considerations of the emancipation of spectatorship as wished for Straub/Huillet and Adorno alike. When considering *Boomerang*, the logic of narcissism seems to preclude the spectator’s involvement in the economy of the piece, other than a passive witnessing of the process of self-discovery (unlike with the analyst position for example). In the end, the voice is implicated in a new dynamic with regards to temporality, discursivity and ideology. Krauss’ general discussion is not framed around the notion of spectatorship but within the closed system of the economy of the works as objects. Moving image that questions the role of the medium often does so to problematise its formal and ideological role; Straub/Huillet sought ‘a liberated spectator who could become the historical subject that until now has been obliterated by various modes of oppression’.¹¹⁸ Here *Boomerang* could be emblematic of this oppression in process.

Holt loses her ability to think, her sense of embodying a speaking subject, and symbolically she has no memory. Adorno claimed that the lack of historical consciousness is a condition of the prosperity of the culture industry, which is founded on the assumption of a constructed and ahistorical collective memory. For Adorno the working class is purged of an imaginary and concrete utopia, and its intent for resistance would allow for: ‘real history of real subjects – preserving the artistic yearning for that which does not yet exist: a future for those very subjects’.¹¹⁹

Spectatorship, or what Byg calls the ‘impasse of modernism’ in the light of apolitical postmodernism, is connected to the question of medium. One of the points made in “Real History and the Non Existent Spectator” is that while Benjamin foresees in cinema an opportunity for transformation, Brecht’s intent of mastering the technique’s possibilities and incorporating them in his ideas of epic theatre is doomed to failure. This is because Brecht’s premise is based on the newness of the medium and his erroneous assumption that the unreality inherent in this medium

¹¹⁷ Krauss, 59.

¹¹⁸ Byg, 233.

¹¹⁹ Byg, 244.

automatically would serve his purpose. In Byg's words: 'The actual development of cinema has sought to overcome the technical newness of film in favour of novelistic realism. Exactly the psychologising individual perspective that Brecht detested in the bourgeois novel has triumphed in the film as in the cultural industry in general'.¹²⁰ So if mainstream cinema has been swallowed by the culture industry, how does art practice fare?

Adorno wrote "Transparencies on Film" in 1966; it was republished in 1981. This chronology brackets both the work of Straub/Huillet and that of Holt/Serra and here is a statement from the introduction:

While in autonomous art anything lagging behind the already established technical standard does not rate, vis-à-vis the culture industry – whose standard excludes everything but the pre-digested and the already integrated, just as the cosmetic trade eliminates facial wrinkles – works which have not completely mastered their technique, conveying as a result something consolingly uncontrolled and accidental, have a liberating quality. In them the flaws of a pretty girl's complexion become the corrective to the immaculate face of the professional star.¹²¹

While Adorno's simile makes the point very clearly, in my view his promotion of flaws sins on two grounds. Firstly, from a gender perspective by using the trope of little girls and make-up he subliminally reinforces a fetishistic notion of the cultural production of female bodies. Secondly, he appears to endorse a view that undermines the makers' agency in constructing or designing the 'flaws' in the work. It is as if a successful outcome is guaranteed by virtue of a medium inherently imperfect, consequence of the limited resources of autonomous, or rather non-industrial modes of art production.

Let us reconsider *Boomerang* under a different perspective, one that is more contemporary to the other objects considered in this section, and discern how the

¹²⁰ Byg, 237.

¹²¹ Theodor Adorno, "Transparencies on Film", *New German Critique*, no.24/25 (Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982): 199.

notion of suffering and affect can be reconsidered and integrated to notions of time and spectatorship. A quarter of a century later in *October* (the same publication that featured Krauss) Anna M. Wagner considered the effect caused on the performer by the interaction with the echoing audio. For Wagner, Holt undergoes an abysmal experience that forces her to inhabit past and present at the same time. In Wagner's words:

As a result, we see her staring into a void, out of which language falls because technological artifice makes it too present, too insistent, too public, to be endured. Though the gap is simulated and correctable, its effects *really happen*; watching Holt struggle with a toxic media overdose, the viewer encounters something she can only be convinced is real.¹²²

The focus shifts to the process and endurance of the performance, rather than its symbolic role. The implications are that of a toxic sound phenomenology and this process is real, palpable and affective: the harrowing cacophony that results is the by-product of non-scripted contingency.

Several elements core to the discussion return: the use of voice that undermines semantic communication; the affect in the performer undergoing a difficulty in articulation; the implication of a spectator affected by the *realness* of the medium. Pain, sorrow and discomfort are not strategies deployed by these artists to engage in a novelistic bourgeois narrative. They are outcomes developed from a formal reconstruction of original material via a method that more or less directly acknowledges the Brechtian project.

The Disorder of Language and the Music of Thought

Suffering connects the discussion about the role of affect and discomfort in previous examples to Mullican's practice: it is clear to anyone witnessing Mullican's

¹²² Anne M. Wagner, "Video and the Rhetoric of Presence", *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 75.

performances that he is subject to a degree of distress, and this is related to his attempts to articulate something. This is how Byg's observations on Benjamin's essay address suffering:

The task of the translator, this poetics of relationships between language, thus end up describing the particular suffering and alienation of humans in both language and history. Neither is stable and in our control, not linguistic structures, relationships to nature, or even relationships between people, De Man concludes "since there is, in a very radical sense, no such thing as the human".¹²³

Mullican's case study is eminently ventriloquial because his research is carried out using two voices. With *Voicings* I suggested the idea that the spectator could perceive 'two points of speech'; in Mullican's case these two speaking positions are manifest: we have his performance voice under hypnosis and his conscious voice elaborating on the performance. Mullican is a paradoxical medium in that he inhabits both senses of the term: as a material subject to a formal process and as conveyer of a kind of knowledge beyond intelligibility – or beyond what is considered conscious human assessment.

I conceptualize Mullican's strategic delving into subconscious territories as a form of 'thinking in process'. De Man's cue on alienation anticipates the sorrowful and unpleasant experience of Mullican's experiments. On the other hand his seemingly doomed project follows the goal of the linguists who wanted to understand thought processes, and paradoxically, or tellingly according to the ideas that translation implies a sense of failure, Mullican's findings seem to corroborate contemporary scientific research.

In a strategic move that anticipates this straddling of theoretical paradigms, I choose to elaborate on Mullican with two distinct approaches echoing his two voices. The first uses Giorgio Agamben, who also touches on the linguistic impasse of German Romanticism, the second strays from the humanities towards a scientific paradigm coming from cognitive theory.

¹²³ Byg, 205.

I think that Mullican's research has an incredible resonance beyond any single reading; according to Carlos Vidal: 'No works of art do illustrate, prove or justify philosophical or critical statements, although they can be interpreted more easily through one or another train of thought'.¹²⁴ In this statement the word 'interpreted' implies a degree of subordination of the practice that especially in Mullican's case, is unacceptable. In fact, the syncretism of the artwork (as thought work) allows for the productive gap, the blind spot that ultimately resists objectification by ideological dogmatism. In addition, this artwork 'as thought' must retain a sense of openness to vouchsafe its authenticity as process.

Mullican's vocalizations during his performances are not utterances designed to communicate to an audience, they are instead vocal by-products that can be described as fragmentary, blasphemous, self-deprecating and solipsistic. His yearning remains eminently embodied in its relationship to sensorial responses. His work is not iconoclastic – this is no Dada performance – nor does he claim to illustrate the workings of the unconscious, since, as Mullican insists, there is a level of consciousness in his behavior under hypnosis. Jungian analyst Vicente de Moura asks him:

VM: Would you say that there is a consciousness inside your unconscious? [...]

MM: You uncover that the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious is very complex.¹²⁵

Post-performance, Mullican declares that his suffering during that process is very much akin to mental illness, such as Tourette's, schizophrenia, manic depression, autism etc, and he concludes that these conditions are already in all of us and through his intervention process that they can be accessed (differentiating the mentally ill from the artist in the inability to exit these states on the part of the ill individual). Significantly here his suffering is partly expressed as language impairment.

¹²⁴ Carlos Vidal, "Art and Truth", *Lapis*. 207 (November 2004): 38.

¹²⁵ Vicente L. de Moura, "Interview between Vicente L. de Moura and Matt Mullican" in *Matt Mullican: That Person's Workbook* (Gent, Belgium: Paper Kunsthal, 2007), 736.

A collection of interviews with Mullican was published in 2007 in the volume *That Person's Workbook*. I consider his 'conscious' voice just as integral to the work, as his research is located in between 'this' person and 'that' person, as a radical move attesting to his medianic and ventriloquial role. Despite his methodological precision and his attempt at making tangible sense, in order not to make tangible sense of human nature, his research has a complexity that, while assuming empirical testing, is inscribed in an aesthetic project. Ulrich Wilmes writes:

it doesn't actually make sense to speak about "that person", because he is a *modus operandi*. In this advanced understanding of his work under hypnosis, Mullican is more in search of a kind of being than an individual, and again for simplicity's sake he is personalizing an abstract concept. He calls it "that person", because it is an anonymous person who could be anyone.¹²⁶

I think that this level of abstraction welcomes the encounter with a philosophical discussion and I set out to elaborate on his work using Giorgio Agamben's writing on the voice in "Vocazione e Voce" and "Io, l'Occhio e la Voce".¹²⁷

My point of departure is Mullican's actual and solipsistic suffering during his performances and the affective outcomes in the viewers.¹²⁸ This paradoxical and astonishing work features an existential space in self-denial where a performer, already alienated from his conscious self by the hypnosis, marks his alienation from the audience with a taped line. The establishing of this division between performer and audience creates a kind of impossible theatre because it is difficult for the audience to negotiate the relationship implied by the line between them and the performance.

¹²⁶ Wilmes, 724.

¹²⁷ These are two chapters in Giorgio Agamben, *La Potenza del Pensiero, Saggi e Conferenze* (Milano: Neri Pozza, 2005), a collection of rare essays unpublished or published in obscure publications since 1980.

¹²⁸ Viewers' affect is not the focus nor goal of the work, in fact the ways in which viewers respond during the performances is varied (sadness, humour, surprise) as they are faced with an unpredictable experience.

The physical body of the performer is the site of a psychological yearning, which reverberates in two different kinds of present (the audience's and the performer's) activating a further estrangement. Mullican collects the transcripts of his words during the performance and this text, left as a trace of the event, is the reversal of a script.

He seems to put everything at stake and yet nothing 'coherent' is achieved. Where are we? If we take a step back in Mullican's investigations of the creative process, they begin performatively with his 'projections' on drawings. He invented a stick figure called Glen and proceeded to live Glen's life, then he pursued these derivations in performances rejecting a psychoanalytical reading in favour of a search for a tangible process.

When Carlos Vidal files Mullican among the Derridian practices typical in the work of the 1980s (and distinct from the post 1980s practices that follow Badiou) I feel he does him a great disservice. Mullican's 'super theatre' cannot be reduced to the domain of deconstruction, nor can the complexity of his practice be contained using fashionable taxonomies.

In the following sections, I will address suffering in Mullican's performance and his declared strategy of a super theatre using two essays on the voice by Giorgio Agamben. In the first Agamben interprets Heidegger and I will align Mullican's work to his notion of 'voicelessness'; in the second I will discuss Mullican's super theatre in relation to Agamben's reading of Paul Valery's 'impossible theatre'.

Vocation and the Body

In *Vocazione e Voce*, Agamben reasons through etymology and starts from the notion of *Stimmung* in Heidegger as man's yearning to accomplish his *Dasein*; here he focuses on the acoustic domain embedded in the etymology of *Stimmung*, its relatedness to *Stimme* (voice). There is a sense of affinity between Mullican's vocal yearnings and Agamben's *Stimmung* as both are inherently implicated in a form of alienation.

From the viewer's perspective, Mullican's performances are like medianic regressions, departures from a conscious state exposing the artist's vulnerability. As the artist is locked between 'himself and himself' all that is available is the spectacle of this paradoxical experience of self-denial and alienation. As we witness a kind of breakdown we learn very little, because we are outside the narrative that takes place in a subconscious space. The performer marks his space from the audience's with a line, 'deterritorialising' his own language and establishing the onset of an impossible theatre:

What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular attention, a particular suffering.¹²⁹

De Man, cited in Byg, suggests here that the highest sense of alienation is experienced in the voice of mother language, and the suffering can be seen vis-à-vis the problem of articulating selfhood.

Agamben points out that in Heidegger the *Stimmung* (a complex term, that has been translated as 'emotive state') performs a core function of the *Dasein*, in the role of enabling man's original opening onto the world (in other words the *Da* part of *Dasein*). He specifies that the *Stimmung* 'calls for' a necessary status of anxiety; as the *Dasein* performs the opening onto the world, man is seized by an enigmatic discomfort in a feeling of being lost. However, in Heidegger *Stimmung* does not concern psychology or interiority. The fact that *Stimmung* has moved from the acoustic sphere to a psychological domain testifies for Agamben an example of the dislocations through which culture operates.¹³⁰

Following this reasoning through etymology the philosopher notes how the predecessor of the *Stimmung* in classical Greece is the *thaumazein* (speechless

¹²⁹ Byg, 204.

¹³⁰ Another example is *eros*, love that now belongs to the emotional psychological sphere, while originally being a god. In fact the Greek pantheon of gods 'moved' inside us with Christianity, reconfiguring theology into psychology.

wonder), which unlike the *Stimmung*, is etymologically rooted in the optical sphere (*theastai*, to look). The wondering and yearning associated with philosophical/religious revelation shifts domain in the modern world from the optic to the acoustic. The Bible can be seen to reference a point of entry in the modern world and Agamben quotes a Deuteronomy passage where the 'Eternal, spoke from the fire. You heard a voice but no figure was revealed'.¹³¹

Agamben elaborates further on the concept of *Stimmung*, investigating its position amongst the other passions, or *pathe*, in classical philosophy. How does this anxiety and condition of man's opening onto the world, rooted in the acoustic domain but not pertaining to his interiority, link back from Heidegger to Aristotle and the Stoics? Agamben uncovers with the Stoics an original connection between language and emotion, between *logos* and *pathos*: 'man is affected by passions because he is a speaking animal; he is an animal affected by passions because he is an *animal rational*'.¹³² The Stoics believed that man is subject to passions only because he can speak, since passions are not a natural phenomenon per se but they originate as a consequence of reasoning. Even more importantly, *pathos* is conceived as violent outbursts that manifest themselves by pushing beyond the confines of language.

Where Agamben posits that this excessive violence is a condition of language and of man's attempt to push through it, in Mullican the discomfort derives from temporarily inhabiting a condition of mental impairment that, instead of pushing beyond language, is stunted by its inarticulacy. For Mullican language and emotion are at the basis of thought work:

I think that thought processes are really contextual and they are primarily emotional. I think that the emotional self is at the core of thinking. You think that somehow working out problems is not an emotional thing it's an intellectual thing but I think that the intellect is

¹³¹ Agamben, "Vocazione e Voce", 82. Original text: 'l'Eterno parlo' a voi dal fuoco. Voi udiste una voce di parole, ma forme, figure non ne avete vedute', Deuteronomio, 4, 12.

¹³² Agamben, "Vocazione e Voce", 83. Original text: 'L'uomo incorre nelle passioni, perche' e' un animale parlante; e' un animale appassionato perche' un *animal rational*'.

so tied to the emotional self that you really can't separate them, especially on the level of where your intuition is right there, when you're working out problems. You are right there, your brain is just going at it and the intuitions are just traveling so fast. That's something that I am really still very much interested in.¹³³

While in the classics emotion is a condition of *logos* that pushes beyond it, for Mullican emotion is to an extent a condition of rational thought and is contained by thought process.

Agamben reinterprets the *Stimmung* as a passion that reveals a disconnectedness between man and the world; man is left voiceless and caught in the anxiety of establishing the connection between life and language, nature and culture. As man is thrown into being in language, he is without language and without a voice he has to make of the world his word, he has to 'gain a voice'. Ultimately Agamben interprets the *Stimmung* as *vocation* (from the Italian: voce, trans. voice) as the silent call of man's purpose, or the voice of his conscience¹³⁴.

The parable of this metaphysical voice can be seen as parallel to Mullican's sorrowful and inarticulate linguistic output. As his established connection with the world is questioned, his medianic self utters a discomfort that resists articulation. If to an extent Agamben's move is that of making a metaphysical concept tangible, Mullican's tangible move can be seen as an attempt to 'self abstract' through the locum of the voice and his inarticulate anxiety remains as the by-product of such ambitious attempt. If philosophy assumes a proposition of the self that exceeds the body and its psychology, Mullican's body and psychology seem to aspire towards an alterity that cannot have a tangible place: the translation has become 'homeless'.

¹³³ Mullican in Vicente L. de Moura & Ulrich Wilmes, *Matt Mullican: That Person's Workbook*, 740.

¹³⁴ He refers to later writings by Heidegger where the *Stimmung* is nothing but the silent voice of being that calls man into experience.

Sightless Seer

The question of whose voice features in Mullican's medianic performances can be addressed alongside Agamben's reading of Paul Valéry's poetry and the role of his fictional Monsieur Teste. As mentioned earlier, Mullican's investigations into the creative process began performatively with his drawing 'projections'. Prior to using hypnosis, he invented a stick figure called Glen and proceeded to create a life, to live Glen's life. He then elaborated on these elements in performances. The artist speaks about the idea of projection and the way a spectator projects empathy very readily onto an object; at the root of the hypnosis is a kind of self projection:

I had this idea of a kind of super theatre; a theatre where the actor believed that they were this fiction and that they were acting this fiction out. It was as far out as I could get, it was a kind of super-theatre of sorts. I don't know how else to put it. [...] That's when I thought of hiring a hypnotist.¹³⁵

Agamben finds in Valéry's practice a significant point of disjuncture between the philosophical subjects of Descartes and Wittgenstein; the disjuncture in Valéry happens because these philosophical subjects are brought together with the paradoxical reality of the corporeal voice. Valéry is seen to anticipate the findings of structural linguistics and his poetic project is read as an attempt at going beyond the linguistic 'I' towards the body through the voice.

In "L'Io, l'Occhio, la Voce"¹³⁶ Agamben begins with a drawn schema from Descartes: the mise en scène of the act of vision through a disembodied eye. Since for Descartes seeing is an action of the thinking subject, the immaterial *cogito* is allegorized in the schema by a bearded man. Agamben suggests that this bearded man is a precursor of Monsieur Teste a 'perfectly impossible character' in Valéry's work.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Wilmes, 732.

¹³⁶ Giorgio Agamben, "L'Io, l'Occhio, la Voce", in *Paul Valéry Monsieur Teste*, translation by Libero Salaroli, (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1980), 91.

¹³⁷ Agamben, "L'Io l'Occhio, la Voce", 93.

By the same token I consider Mullican on stage under hypnosis an impossible character. Consciousness plays a different role in the two instances: the conscious thinking subject allegorised in Descartes schema is followed by a less conscious performer on stage (who nevertheless has consciously devised his experiments). Descartes schema of vision implies a seen eye, a seeing oneself seeing; Mullican's experience of hypnosis has some affinity with it:

...that was when I had my first clear insight of this dual mind: that you are in two places at once. You know, you are in your brain looking at yourself do this stuff, commenting to yourself as you do it and then you are this other person doing it automatically. So it's like you are a passenger in your own body, you are looking at yourself do this weird thing.¹³⁸

There is an analogy with Descartes' schema and the experience of split mind described by Mullican and yet the artists' tangible experience does not subscribe to a Cartesian model.

Agamben refers to Wittgenstein, who redrafts Descartes' experiment: his disembodied eye is this time before a window and it 'sees' through the frame; out there is a mirror and other disembodied eyes hang on tree branches, their 'limits' of vision can be defined also by the frame placed in front of them. All that this reveals for Wittgenstein is a geometrical problem in space, since the eye cannot see a subject; for Wittgenstein the philosophical subject does not belong to the body or the soul, but it is located at the limit of the world. For Agamben this liminal position at the limit of the world, much like the paradoxical position of the bearded man, are the two features of Monsieur Teste. According to Agamben, Valéry takes Descartes' *cogito* in a completely different direction: his bearded man becomes pure theatrical fiction resulting in 'I am not, therefore I think' and in my position this framing is also more compatible with Mullican's findings.

Mullican expressively refers to a super theatre, where a fictional self is played out, and furthermore *that person* is a biography *before* a person: 'We do it the other way

¹³⁸ Mullican, 733.

round [...] Normally, what happens is that a biography is written after the person has died, yet here, we try to create a person from his biography or from the beginning.¹³⁹ What is significant here in the light of previous consideration of the scripted voice is the fact that *that person's* utterances are not the scripted utterances of an actor:

He exists; there is no doubt about that. But we do not know who he is. [...] *That person's* philosophy of life is a romantic one, which teaches people to respect themselves. He believes in justice and God, he is very interested in the spirit of things, and looks behind their surface for their essence. [...] But we know almost nothing about his identity, not even whether it is one and the same person we're learning something about. Is *that person* a man or a woman? I don't know how old he is, I don't know where he lives, yet these things may not exist, simply do not exist in his life or in my relationship to him'.¹⁴⁰ From this description, *that person's* role shares an affinity with that of a super conscience, another analogy we find through Agamben in Valéry's description of Monsieur Teste as 'an intimate apostle of consciousness [...] a mystic and physician of self-consciousness pure and applied'.¹⁴¹

Mullican's *that person* and Monsieur Teste seem to share a goal to be explored in the light of what each can reveal for the other as 'fictions'. Wilmes states in relation to Mullican that we cannot be sure whether *that person* is even a person; if Mullican is convinced of dealing with somebody, he also adds that instead of a 'who' it could be a 'what', it could be a situation since it is free forming.¹⁴² Monsieur Teste is also an allegory of self-consciousness, which for Agamben does stem from the project of the modern self but at the same time is deconstructed as fictional theatricality.

Agamben proposes that Valéry's project is a deconstruction of the canonical notion of (self) presence of Western philosophy and that it operates by attacking the two

¹³⁹ Mullican, 723.

¹⁴⁰ Mullican, 724.

¹⁴¹ Agamben, "L'Io, l'Occhio, la Voce," 95.

¹⁴² Wilmes, 724.

core principles upon which this rests: visual (self) apprehension and logocentric (self) designation through a speaking subject. Valéry unhinges the principle of visual self-witnessing by attacking its presumed simultaneity in the following allegorical pantomime. A subject, who is making some grimaces at the mirror, sees his own image with a delay because a playful God has chosen to thicken the ether, which in turn affects the speed of light. Consequently, instead of seeing his image appearing after 2,666 billionth of a second, he sees his reflection after one minute, then a day and then a century.

The denial of simultaneous apprehension problematises agency and selfhood and has been played out empirically by the interposition of a medium of representation: the 'ether' could simply be the tape recorder/player in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tapes*, or the microphone delay in *Boomerang*. For Agamben Monsieur Teste is the quixotic knight with a progressive view, championing the denial of the certainty upon which Western metaphysics rests. Agamben works with etymology and Teste is literally the witness (*testis*, Latin: witness, spectator, one who gives evidence) and as such he uncovers a gap, while simultaneously he is/stands for what cannot be seen. Mullican's *that person*, although visible to his audience, also cannot see himself, like Tiresias *that medium* squints towards a vision that does not rely on eyesight, which could be 'seen' as allegorizing a new witnessing. Ultimately both Mullican and Monsieur Teste discredit vision as a tool for self-knowledge.

With regard to the second premise, the logocentric self-designation with an 'I' as a foundation of Western metaphysics, Valéry anticipates the position that Emile Benveniste elaborates much later by emphasising the radical distinction between a subject inhabiting language and a body uttering a voice. Valéry finds in the 'I' no substance other than a situation in speech, whose reality can only remain within language itself; it is a liminal and substanceless entity, like Monsieur Teste eminently theatrical and fictional. In this sense Agamben identifies Valéry's poetic project in striving to find in the utterer something other than he who says 'I'.

His intent becomes directed towards the voice as the locum between 'I' and the body. In Valéry's case this actualization through poetry becomes a painful project allegorized by a mythical figure *La Pythie*, where poetry's voice becomes a 'nobody's voice' distinct from language. In an elegant conclusion implicating the

weeping of a poetic subject, the ultimate goal remains vain, the 'I' as pure fiction cannot die but repeats itself, neither can it reach through the voice the origin of the weeping, in the same way that Teste cannot actually die - he is the ultimate limit and mirror to which death is denied.

Mullican's project of embedding his body into a generic entity could be seen as an indirect attempt to inhabit the place of language. Except that in *that person's* embodiment he can only fail to have a voice: using Teste as an allegory, his voice can only *testify* to his *vocation*. Mullican's expletives and physical discomfort can be read as emblematic of his *voicelessness*, in Agamben's terms, performing from his body and destined to fail in the 'homelessness' of language.

To conclude, a philosophical reading of Mullican's work can be seen to integrate his notion of impossible theatre with a message that challenges the tenets of traditional Western selfhood. Is there another way in which Mullican's process can be interpreted to stimulate further knowledge? His empiricism foregrounds the scientific approach that will follow in the next section.

Body of Evidence

Mullican's ventriloquial split is located between his part-automatism during a performance and his retrospective commentary. The artist acknowledges automatism in the process: 'when I am in a trance, it's like you're a radio, an AM radio, and I am moving it around the room. I am receiving different kinds of information. And they don't necessarily make sense'¹⁴³. Furthermore automatism participates in explaining thought process:

What distinguishes the artwork? How do we control what we do? And when someone sees it what does it do to them, what are they feeling? How do we communicate things that we don't fully comprehend? It's intuitive; in a sense is very surrealist, you know, it becomes a free association. But then we are more in control than

¹⁴³ Mullican, 724.

we might think. [...] Somewhere in your brain you understood what you were doing!¹⁴⁴

The reference to surrealism is useful in principle but from a historical perspective the scope and political agenda differ and need to be qualified. Automatism in the surrealists acted as a political tool of dissent and to an extent, can be thought of as a staging of the method for such purpose; in Mullican this process is a methodology in its own right where he subsequently scrutinises his findings.

What kind of knowledge is Mullican uncovering? If the chasm between language and a subject reveals an impasse where the body is concerned, does his research offer an alternative way to reconcile creative intellectual activity and embodiment? Can a different paradigm enable a tangible correlation with the less tangible nature of thought and the role of the aural within that?

Mullican reflects that on the subject of creative thinking as follows: ‘... you don’t even see how it all works but you see emerging patterns. Because I think there are patterns that we follow that we have no comprehension of’.¹⁴⁵ He introduces an analogy with the abstract patterns of a Moorish castle (the Alhambra in Spain) and claims that those patterns stand for our sense of self, not as the content of thinking, but thinking itself freed from that. This position reverberates with the idea of thinking in pure meaning assigned to the inner voice in Chapter I and of course the inner voice has a syncretic expression that is not contained within language. Mullican’s insights converge with my discussion in questioning the nature of thinking and the inner voice: ‘Do we think in pictures or do we think in words? [...] I believe that we think in neither. I don’t believe that thought occurs in pictures nor in words and I think music comes very close to the nature of thought’.¹⁴⁶

The idea of a correlation between abstract designs and thought process is less far-fetched than it may appear. This view is consistent with the role of associative memory in contemporary cognitive theories, which also agree that language is the non-exclusive mode for thinking. Furthermore, sound and the aural are particularly

¹⁴⁴ Mullican, 734.

¹⁴⁵ Mullican, 736.

¹⁴⁶ Mullican, 738.

invested in thought processes as composition scholar Bob Synder elaborates in *Music and Memory*.¹⁴⁷

Synder's work on the aural and cognition stems from Stockhausen's lectures and the realization that the distinction that the composer had made on the levels of musical structure might be related to the nervous system's ability to process information. Synder's contemporary line of enquiry states that memory, as the condition for thinking, operates associatively and is organized through schemas, in turn defined as a kind of metacategory that distinguishes between new experiences and known ones. At a particular level, the associative process utilizes metaphor, defined as a relationship between two categories or schemas:

Note that this definition of metaphor is not just limited to literature, and indeed *does not necessarily imply the use of language*. Metaphors not couched in natural language are referred to as "non propositional metaphors". That is, either or both the experience that cues the reminding, and the memory of which one is reminded, while they may or may not be describable in language, do not necessarily originally occur as statements in language. They may be connections between any kinds of experiences and memories, such as those of sounds, images, and smells, and some of the memories may be implicit, taking the form of basic perceptual representations.¹⁴⁸

Mullican's transcripts from his performances are rich in perceptual and sensorial references and when he states: 'thought processes are really contextual and they are primarily emotional',¹⁴⁹ he could be seen to stress their non-linguistic nature. Synder also refrains from relying on a linguistic paradigm: 'metaphorical mappings are not arbitrary, but are grounded in fundamental embodied cognitive structures generalised from recurring physical experiences, especially the experience of our

¹⁴⁷ Bob Synder, *Music and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁸ Synder, 107.

¹⁴⁹ This quote is a part of a previous quote by Mullican in "Vocation and the Body" on p. 142.

own bodies'.¹⁵⁰ In other words thinking processes are entrenched with abstract patterns, body movements and emotions.

Synder argues that cognitive structures named 'image schemas' are defined as perceptual abstractions that compound a number of different perceptual experiences and are generated from the interaction with our environment. They often have a kinaesthetic, muscular or a particular 'feeling' component and although we may be able to visualise them, they are more abstract than a specific image (e.g. the notion of up or down), while in other instances they cannot be translated into an image. Unlike language: 'image schemas are thought to be grounded in perceptual experience; they are non-arbitrary in that they represent experience by drawing directly from perceptual categories'.¹⁵¹

Contemporary speculations re-evaluate the role of percepts as hierarchically superior to linguistic functions, not because antecedent but because core to cognition. Focusing specifically on the aural domain Synder flags a correlation between memory and thought on the one hand, and music construction and apprehension on the other (he does not take a reductive position that excludes cultural specificity). This model is significant for this research in that it posits thinking as embodied (through spatiality and kinaesthetics) thus resisting subject formation through an always already linguistic framework; it also significant that this connection is made with specific reference to the aural. In Mullican's words:

I remember when I was doing the Ludwig project and I was writing on a big sheet of paper in this very weird kind of up-and-down exaggerated way of writing because it's not just simply writing a word, it's writing a word in an extreme sense when that word almost becomes like music.¹⁵²

Mullican interprets his own syncretic gesture by drawing on the aural, linguistic and kinaesthetic domains. His reference to 'up and down' as a mode of articulation bears an uncanny connection with Synder's argument, whose key chapter

¹⁵⁰ Synder, 108.

¹⁵¹ Synder, 109.

¹⁵² Mullican, 739.

'Metaphor and Image Schemas' is based specifically on the 'up and down' image schema.

Synder elaborates on the fundamental vestigial notion of gravity (of the position of bodies in space) by relating it (from its basic and fundamental cognitive role) to music making and consumption: 'The system of gravity metaphors is a pervasive one, used to describe many different kinds of things in the world'.¹⁵³ Gravity and spatially related structures, like tension, centrality, point of view, motion-linkage causation, linearity (paths and goals), containment (inside and outside) are developed in their specifics by Synder.

In all, there is a correlation between Synder's and Mullican's findings despite the disparate contexts: they both assume that gravity and spatiality, the obvious conditions for physical existence, play a fundamental role in intellectual activity, and that language becomes marginalised suggesting a reconciliation between embodiment and cognition via the aural. This position confirms my line of enquiry based on objects conceived as a form of materialisation of thought process. It also foregrounds how thinking and art making occurs in spite and because of, the limitations of language.

Music and the body seem to share a strong connection aside and beyond language. On the other hand, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the lack identified in the limitations of language spurs a productive mode of translation that emphasises material technologies and the vocalic element in the voice. The liminal transition from Chapter I to Chapter II has implicated thought process and consciousness in the notion of an utterance and the underlying argument sets out to discredit the all encompassing role of *logos* or a form of linguistic based rational reasoning that assumes that voice is speech.

Voicings has attacked the verbal by demanding an imperfect enunciation, *Sicilia!* and *The News Editor* by alienating the utterance through prosody, *Murder was the Case* unwillingly translates the content of a hip pop song into a poetic text and *Boomerang* returns to the notion of the apparatus challenging a conscious

¹⁵³ Synder, 112.

utterance. These examples lead up to Mullican's experimentations on the uttering under altered states of consciousness resulting in an almost complete breakdown of the semantic component of the voice. This situation leads from a progressive attack on the verbal to the privileging of the vocal in the next chapter, dedicated to the singing voice.

Chapter III

THE UNBEARABLE PLEASURE OF LISTENING AS THE RECORD OF SIN

Premise

This final chapter is devoted to specific uses of the singing voice that open up questions about its role within and outside institutional power, economy and representation. The ventriloquial objects in this chapter will again constitute the tangible basis for the discussion, only this time they have been selected following a movement towards the subversive role of the vocal. In particular, here the singing voice is seen to stray from its 'mastered' accomplishment or its formal conventions, to challenge spectatorship.

As discussed in the previous chapter, by challenging the role of the spectator, one challenges how history is conceived and the ideological markers underscoring those positions. The objects considered here span from the inception of recording technology to the present: this historical breadth is considered in the light of a historiography that, as we will see with Jacques Attali's contribution (*Noise*), is designed to embrace a delinearised notion of history (Jameson) and that operates synchronically, where conceptual paradigms are made to intersect tangible practices and bodies in a Foucauldian sense.

Gender representation and the position of the spectator will be problematised via ventriloquial objects featuring singing in different genres of moving image: from opera representation in film, to performance-based video works. In turn, these works will cover a number of singing genres from opera to pop, from individual performance to choral singing. Before introducing how Attali conceptualises the role of music in history, and as a way of presenting the range of subversive thematics covered by the aural, I would like to 'play' a film clip.

The sequence is from Terence Malick's *Badlands* (1973), a film based on a real-life 1958 Midwestern killing spree by two alienated youngsters, fictionalised as Kit and Holly (played by Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek). We are twenty-five minutes into the film in the aftermath of Kit's murder of Holly's father, who did not approve of their union, and just before their runaway. As we will see, the killing sets in motion a

number of dynamics that implicate a symbolic dimension and the narrative device uses Holly's retrospective voice-over, an unconventional choice from a gender perspective.

This sequence begins with an ECU of a machine slot: Kit inserts 50c into the slot of a public device that records onto a 78rpm LP. Having cleared his voice, he begins by stating that he and his girlfriend have decided to kill themselves 'the same he did her dad'. He acknowledges that it is a big decision and that the reasons are obvious but he has no time to go into them. He adds that the father was provoking him when 'he popped him' making a deadpan pun on 'pop' as father. The scene cuts onto the machine display indicating 50 then 30 seconds left of the recording. Kit says he is sorry and concludes his 'performance' with an obsequious 'thank you' to his prospective audience, who we eventually gather to be the authorities.

As Kit exits, the recording booth is identified as a 'Voice-o-Graph - Private Recording Studio' with 'Record Your Voice it's Fun!' over-layered onto the smashed glass door. The dark irony of the shot is reinforced by the static presence of two individuals sitting still and apart in the deserted hall, one of whom has a bandaged head. Kit exits and the next scene cuts to a piano (we are in the father's house); Kit opens a can of petrol and pours it violently over the keys, whose sound is the musical cue anticipating the catastrophe that follows. Kit's previous calm turns into rage as he spills petrol all over the interior and accordingly the cuts are faster and disorientating. When the pair enter the room, the camera returns to a static mode with a shot of the dark interior; Kit puts on the gramophone with the LP of his confession and Holly's voice-over states: 'he left the record playing over and over for the D.A. to find'. As the getaway car screeches away into pitch darkness and the flames pick up, a non-diegetic music begins with some soft piano keys.

In the soundtrack, the recorded bogus confession gives way to choral music in a transition that implicates a symbolic meaning. What follows is an unambiguous and stylized audiovisual sequence steeped in Catholic religious iconography: a choral piece of white voices envelops the scene like the flames that devour a selection of objects in the house.

This systematic sequence of hellish tableaux (each static camera shot presents an

object/composition in flames) begins with the burning portrait of an angel and is followed by peacock feathers, cut fruits amongst flames as in a Caravaggian still life, table and chair and the bed alike. The bright flames provide backlighting for the objects that become silhouetted, like the iron bed frame that returns various times, and the outline emphasises their symbolism. Steeped in a painterly tradition, these images reference, via the objects, an iconic status, like the doll on the bed, framed in a supine profile and reminiscent of saints' reliquary iconography.

Symbolism is prominent in the spirit and mode of referencing of these tableaux: the doll left on the bed represents metonymically Holly's past innocence. More images follow including the burning doll's house and this debris escalates toward the ultimate martyrdom: the foreground supine profile of a man lying in the flames as if asleep – Holly's father. The images return, as in a musical refrain: the piano, the exterior shots, the bed consumed by fire; all of them consolidate the destruction and the loss of innocence of the protagonists, but also seal their 'passing' on to another life. In the dark burning house finally the movement of the torches of the rescue team announces the possibility of a future and here abruptly the scene cuts to a mundane action elsewhere in Holly's new life.

The music accompanying these seductive yet hellish tableaux is a religious choir piece reminiscent of *Carmina Burana* performed by young voices, as if momentarily replacing Holly's narrative voice. The principal musical theme for the film (subsequently adopted by Tarantino in *True Romance*) is *Musica Poetica* by Carl Orff (d.1982) who adopts a genre popular in sixteen and seventeen-century German schools and universities when music had a strong affinity with rhetoric and poetics and was structured like a voice dialogue. In the burning sequence of the *Badlands*, music and images collude in transposing a crime scene onto a medieval apocalyptic setting.¹⁵⁴

This sequence is significant on two levels. Firstly, in the specifics of Malick's narrativization through speech and with the role attributed to music: I will explore

¹⁵⁴ It is worth noting how extensively *O Fortuna* or the excerpts from *Carmina Burana* has been used in feature films and has almost become a filmic cliché for the cataclysmic moment. Amongst these are *Natural Born Killers* (Dir. O. Stone, US, 1994) and *Saló, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (Dir. P.P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975).

this further with a comparative reference to his voice/music strategy in a later work *The Thin Red Line* (1998). Secondly, this sequence introduces a thematic context for this chapter that is devoted to the transgressive potential of the voice in connection with recording devices and the problematic institutional role of singing. This clip acts as a *trait d'union* between previous ventriloquial objects focusing on speech and the ones that focus on the singing voice in representation.

In *The Thin Red Line* Terence Malick reconfirms his commitment to the use of a female voice-over combined with a meta-dialogical notion of music; this time the theme of human alienation is dealt with in the context of the tragedy of war. This is how for Johanne Villeneuve music introduces war and destruction (my translation):

At this point in the film the music takes on the role of the voice-over and appears to embody the narrative function of *mythos*, the assemblage of the heterogeneous elements; pushing more towards a “tectonic” level, the music relays via this iteration, the sameness of a human existence already pushed to its own limit: through the music we hear in the image the repetition of the same thing, music marks, through an increasing and almost unbearable intensity, the hellish circle which prevents the acknowledgement of one’s suffering in the suffering of the other. Only, this time, in the background of the music, all the images disavow speech and discourse to give breath to the scream, the cry or the inability to articulate – the opposite of the utterance. Are they addressed to their perpetrator, the Japanese who cannot be understood as they speak another idiom? The only time when the scream resonates through the body to make itself heard is over the image of a dead Japanese soldier, as if carved in the earth he seems to emerge from the limits of time, unreal, he is emblematised by the plume of smoke that slowly rises.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Johanne Villeneuve, “Le bercail et la voix. À propos de *The Thin Red Line* de Terrence Malick” in *Études françaises* 39, no. 1 (2003): 123. Original text: “À cette étape du film, la musique prend le relais de la voix-off et semble poursuivre l’opération narrative du *mythos*, la «prise ensemble» d’éléments hétérogènes; mais

Just as in *Badlands*, the film reaches a paroxystic moment where the narrative register foregrounds a hellish Manicheism and only the music is left to speak: the magnitude of war recalls the *mythos*. Music is the voice beyond discourse. Silence and the scream are vocalisations beyond discourse or culturally specific idioms that articulate human suffering.

Music, as deployed by Malick in these key moments, marks a specific territory and as such can be seen to replace the utterance. Whether it is intrinsically within the domain of signification or it is designed to represent an area outside the symbolic is a speculative matter. However, musical themes are subject to aesthetic regimes and contexts and when dialectically deployed with imagery inevitably produce signification: the religious dimension is unambiguous in the burning scene of *Badlands*.

In the short film sequence discussed, sound is represented diegetically and acousmatically in a number of disparate forms. A public booth used to record people's voices 'for fun' is used to create an LP of a murder confession and a bogus suicide note designed to confound the police authorities; a young female is the narrator; a musical choral piece is used in connection with the ultimate transgression of sin and moral fall.

The macabre subversion of the voice recording device in *Badlands* has a predecessor in the 1947 film, *Brighton Rock* (Dir. John Boulting) based on Graham Greene's novel. The psychopathic killer Pinkie befriends and marries a naïve young woman because she could otherwise be a condemning witness to his killing (just as

sourtout, à un niveau plus «tectonique», elle rends compte, par son iteration, de l'ipséité d'une existence humaine sans cesse ramenée à ses propres limites: la musique permet d'entendre dans l'image la repetition du même, de marquer, à la faveur d'une intensité grandissante et presque insoutenable, le cercle infernal qui empêche de reconnaître dans la souffrance de l'autre sa propre souffrance. Mais cette fois, en arrière-plan de la musique, la parole fait place au cri, à la plainte ou au mutisme – toutes images inversées de la parole. S'adressent-ils à leur bourreaux, les Japonais ne peuvent être entendus parce qu'ils ne parlent pas la même langue. Le seul moment où le cri traverse les limbes pour faire entendre une parole transmissible, c'est lorsque le visage d'un Japonais mort, comme sculpté dans la terre, semble remonter à la surface du temps, irréel, et se précise sous la fumée qui s'estompe lentement.”

in the *Badlands* the young couple is enshrined in a Manichean religious iconography). One day Pinkie delivers the 'confession' of his abhorrence for his young wife onto an LP recording, which he then presents to the unsuspecting girl. But neither she nor posterity will ever hear the truth about Pinkie due to a glitch on the record that edits the message down to the phrase 'love you' that loops ad infinitum. After his death Pinkie is consigned to the realm of martyrdom as a devoted husband because of a malfunctioning of the record, or an involuntary sound cut up.

We note in *Badlands* how the use of the LP changes from that of commercial medium of voice recording designed for entertainment, to an object destined for use in the locus of the courtroom. At the same time music emblematic of religious catharsis becomes the harbinger of the damnation following the homicide. These aural forms can be seen to evoke issues of power and institutional control. This is unsurprising when we consider the fundamental role of the voice in implementing standard normative practices: in law courts, churches or schools. Yet, at the same time, the voice carries the potential for subversion. So when it comes to music this conflict is still evident, if not exacerbated: on the one hand canonized or ritualised music is utilized for institutional validation, while as counterculture, it is a powerful tool to upset the status quo.

The singing voice in opera inaugurates the discussion in the following sections. I will consider the implementation of opera against patriarchal values: I chose to discuss my film *Mi Piace* that dramatises the singing rehearsal of an opera aria by Gianni Schicchi (*O Mio Babbino Caro*) where a daughter sings to her father in jest threatening suicide if her love choice is not approved. I will also discuss in more detail two films where opera and imperialist ideologies are challenged (*Fitzcarraldo; Teatro Amazonas*). When the aural strays from the canon, from the typical patterns that underpin norms and desire, its 'noise' can be seen to engender a shift in power dynamics (*Theme Song* and *Baldessari Sings LeWitt*). To conclude, a contemporary example of choral singing (*Everything is Gonna Be*) where the ideological predicaments of choral practice are mobilized with political repercussions.

The law, or norm, can materialise in a number of formats, symbolic or prescriptive

and these formats operate thanks to conventions. In aural terms, noise can be conceptualised as the strategy to deny the possibility for intelligibility that is required in Western culture for the implementation of the law.¹⁵⁶ For Jacques Attali noise emblematises transgression in a critical deconstructive sense, a principle shared by ventriloquial objects that insist on disturbing boundaries. It is important to point out that vocal (defined against verbal) and musical have different connotations in a discussion about singing. In fact, musical can be seen to refer to a fixed and codified system, while the vocal aspect of singing insists on the 'noise' subverting signification or normalisation.

Historicism Vanguard and Resistance

In this section I evaluate Jacques Attali's work with a reference to a materialist approach along with a Foucauldian tactic that privileges a theorizing 'bottom up' by starting from material practices. This in turn leads to reconsidering Kaja Silverman's notion that the materiality of the voice implies that it can never be standardized, and this subversive message is followed by the Deleuzian notion encountered in the previous chapter on the role of art as resistance. I begin the discussion on the singing voice with opera because of the economic implications married to this genre, its stereotypical gender connotations and its emphatic overlap of verbal and vocal. Firstly, what can music achieve in Attali's terms?

Noise, the Political Economy of Music is the title of Attali's book, published in French in 1977, then in its first English translation in 1985. This long essay on music and social change assigns music a historical vanguardism. The writing is rooted in Marxist theory where the material world determines historical outcomes, yet, it suggests, contrary to this premise, that music has the power to escape the material determinism. Consequently, it is not only a vehicle to analyse the socio-political course of history, but a tool to determine its future outcomes.

¹⁵⁶ It is important to note the cultural specificity of these notions and the strong ethnographic dimension that sound and music fulfil even if this dimension is not the subject of this writing. Silence and noise are part of a rich territory heavily implicated in the constitution and re-constitution of order for a number of societies (Lévi-Strauss, 1974).

The book is structured according to three historical moments representing four different paradigms or modalities (Sacrificing; Representing; Repeating; Composing). The merit of this publication lies in its visionary poetic and speculative breadth, rather than an empirically substantiated analysis; as Susan McClary states in her *Afterword*: 'The subject of Attali's book is noise, and his method is likewise noise [...] It is, therefore, quite conceivable that those trained in music will perceive the book's content also as noise – that is, as non-sense – and dismiss it out of hand.'¹⁵⁷

It is significant to note that book attracted reviews in a wide range of publications¹⁵⁸ and this in itself is indicative of the significance that a theorisation of music outside the predominantly conservative aesthetic domain engenders. In his *Foreword*, Frederic Jameson contextualises Attali's work in his part-revival of historiography, not as the self-limiting 'historicism' repudiated by Althusser, Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, but more in the guise of an interactive, integrated practice by the likes of Foucault:

from a unique perspective [his reflections thus rejoin] (which is, given his political role, a unity of theory and practice in its own right) the now widespread attempts to characterize the passage from older forms of capitalism [...] to a new form [...] of capitalism, in which the media and multinational corporations play a major role, a shift on the technological level [...] to the newer cybernetic, informational nuclear modes of some Third Age Machine.¹⁵⁹

Jameson comments that other post-structuralists remained historicist in the consideration of periods and stages of social development, albeit in connection with breaks and ruptures, while Attali's work escapes from this model in that he seeks to

¹⁵⁷ Susan McClary, "Afterword. The Politics of Silence and Sound", in Jacques Attali, *Noise* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 149.

¹⁵⁸ These are some of the publications evidencing the fields in which the book has been reviewed: *Socialist Review*, 1987; *Theatre Journal*, 1989; *Sub-Stance*, 1988 (inter-disciplinary); *Ethnomusicology*, 1989; *Media Culture and Society*, 1987; *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 1986.

¹⁵⁹ My italics. Friedrich Jameson's "Foreword" in Attali, xii.

delinearize discrete phases in favour of a distinction between different paradigms that overlap synchronically. Jameson asserts that Attali's concerns for a Marxist utopianism that is imminent and materialistic are also present when considering his work in *Noise*:

...one of the most stimulating features of this work is its insistence on grasping history and social life as a totality, in the way in which it offers us a model of the systematic interrelationship of the various levels of economics, technology, political forms and culture proper [...] In this work, we find, exceptionally in contemporary thought, a new model of the relations between culture and society that valorises production in the present at the same time that it reinvigorates an enfeebled utopian thought.¹⁶⁰

Two aspects emerge here for consideration. The first is in the way music can be seen to perform a role that is completely integrated in an aesthetic, economic and social context at once, rather than existing in separate rarefied fields or one defined and limited by rationality.¹⁶¹ Secondly, the utopian prophetic value of music that in Adorno excluded the popular and contemporary is now reinvigorated and open to new possibilities in contemporary practices.

Another crucial point is the interdependence of practice and theory in a reasoning that repudiates the existence of universals as starting point, in Foucault's terms: 'instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals, or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices'.¹⁶² I consider my deployment of the voice as a privileged site of instability the ideal territory for an integrated practice: one that eminently resists containment but allows a constant renewal in its own redrafting.

¹⁶⁰ Jameson in Attali, xiv.

¹⁶¹ As far as this point is concerned, Jameson references Max Weber.

¹⁶² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2008; first published 1979), 3.

As previously stated, the voice is, in Kaja Silverman's words: 'the most radical of all subjective divisions – the division between meaning and materiality [...] the sounds the voice makes always exceeds signification to some degree [...] the voice is never standardized'¹⁶³ yet the tendency will be to seek to contain, fix and standardize it; in other words to avoid ambiguity. This is because language and economies are based on and thrive on standardisation and homogeneous practices; fluidity instead is unstable and deemed irrational or sick in a reasoning that most definitely does not follow logical thinking but only utilitarian rationale.

How do these concerns about the voice change when considering the singing voice? There is a tension between the voice as energy, surplus, and unique, on the one hand, striving to express its potential, and, on the other, a framework designed to contain it via abstract conventional codifications (music). Economics are implicated in this process since once 'contained' within formal conventions, singing can be a lucrative commercial commodity. On the other hand, music, as the ultimate universal tool for counterculture, is composed and deployed to counteract the status quo. In Attali's words:

With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. [Music] is at the heart of the progressive rationalisation of aesthetics, and it is a refuge for residual irrationality; it is a means of power and a form of entertainment. Everywhere codes analyse, mark, restrain, train, repress, and channel the primitive sounds of language, of the body, of tools, of objects, of the relations to self and others¹⁶⁴.

Ventriloquial objects perform, in a Foucauldian sense, like the 'concrete practices' that seep and challenge, in a traversal way, the universal precepts of normalisation. They operate in the problematic encounter between material and form. Echoing the radical division heralded by Silverman, they resolve the conundrum by exploiting the very ambivalence of the voice. For Deleuze art has to be a form of resistance rather than a yearning to communicate; art must belong to a regime of counterinformation:

¹⁶³ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 44.

¹⁶⁴ Attali, 6.

What is the relation between the work of art and communication? None whatsoever. The work of art is not an instrument of communication. The work of art has nothing to do with communication. The work of art strictly does not contain the least bit of information. To the contrary, there is a fundamental affinity between the work of art and the act of resistance.¹⁶⁵

For Deleuze the films of Straub/Huillet exemplify this act of resistance:

when they perform this disjunction between auditory voice and visual image, which goes as follows: the voice rises, it rises, and what it speaks about passes under the naked, deserted ground that the visual image was showing us, a visual image that had no direct relation to the auditory image. But what is this speech act that rises in the air while its object passes underground? Resistance. An act of resistance.¹⁶⁶

When Straub/Huillet address Bach in *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, his music becomes act of resistance: 'Bach's speech act is his music, which is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the partitioning of the profane and the sacred'.¹⁶⁷ For Deleuze the aural has a particular propensity to perform resistance; music and the speech act merge in this very intent.

The idea that music can be conceived to fulfill the role of the utterance is a position endorsed by musicologist Caroline Abbate's with regards to opera. Abbate rejects Catherine Clément's feminist stance that focuses on the diegetic annihilation of women in the plots of most classical operas. Instead, she insists on the idea of a sonorous discourse embedded in music. This line of thinking, that conceives music as utterance is the consequence of a culture rooted in *logos* according to Steven

¹⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze, "Having an Idea in Cinema" (a 1991 lecture by at FEMIS, École nationale supérieure des métiers de l'image et du son), in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, ed. Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1998), 18.

¹⁶⁶ Deleuze in Kaufman, 19.

¹⁶⁷ Deleuze in Kaufman, 19.

Connor: 'The less music comes to depend upon actual voices, the more it comes to be thought of in terms of such ideal, abstract utterance'.¹⁶⁸

Opera is the obvious place from which to approach the singing voice from a context that implicates language. The ultimate blurring of speech and music is achieved in opera's more unconventional or experimental forms, as in the way of Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg's *Sprechgesang* or 'spoken-song'. According to this technique, the singers are asked to 'speak notes' without the vibrato emission of singing, as a kind of recitative.¹⁶⁹ However, even in its more conventional formula, opera's paroxysmal singing can be seen to disavow linguistic communication despite its firm anchoring to a libretto and a narrative structure. Unlike the musical, also marrying speech and song, opera belongs to the domain of classical music, and is possibly the most conservative of aesthetic disciplines. This genre seems to promote an elitist attitude; only, questions around status and exclusivity are entrenched with economics just as much as entertainment is.

It is for this reason that the following considerations on opera must be developed via a web of strategies that are more encompassing than the discrete domain of musicology. The interdependent context of music and economy that Attali's *Noise* brings to the foreground makes me consider the structural economic relations that the operatic singing voice can be seen to assume in the light of capital and normative institutions, and the consequent power relations derived from assumed economic and political dictates that inform individual identities.¹⁷⁰ One of the main objectives of my film *Mi Piace* is to challenge the tyranny in the discipline of opera singing, geared at achieving the perfectly 'mastered' voice. In the light of a politics of resistance, one key work (*Fitzcarraldo*) will be scrutinized for what it does not intend to convey; here a recent example of opera literature emblematises elitism.

The point of departure for Michel Poizat's analysis of the compelling power of opera is conversation transcripts of the people who queued up through the night outside

¹⁶⁸ Steven Connor, "The Decomposing Voice of Postmodern Music", *New Literary History* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 471.

¹⁶⁹ Ironically in this context, the term *sprechgesang* has recently acquired a new meaning identifying German rap music.

¹⁷⁰ Films like *Diva* (1981) or *Citizen Kane* (1941) use opera to emphasise a gendered relationship of discipline and control embedded in economy.

the Palais Garnier in Paris in 1985 to acquire opera tickets.¹⁷¹ This devotion, inexplicable at rational level, is explained in the futile search for ‘the angel’s cry’, the pure vocal emission of the child, beyond speech and approximated to *jouissance*. Some reviewers declare this work non scholarly, tedious and silly, contradictory, lacking an argument, historically flawed etc.,¹⁷² but more importantly, the very premises of such study consolidate an elitist view, verging on a mystical appreciation framed via the classist trappings of connoisseurship.

In his first chapter, Poizat states that he will be addressing a debate about the notion of the social function of art via two antithetic positions with regards to opera. The first is identified with the fans of the recitative, supporters of moderate pleasure consumption, who would be integrationalists; the second by the fans of the ‘emotive upheaval’ who become associated with the revolutionary camp:

However passionate the philosophical aspects of this question, it seems that as far as this rift between pleasure and *jouissance* is concerned, the crux of the matter in fact lies elsewhere: at the very heart of the whole operatic institution, at the basis of the very instinct that drives human beings to want to “speak in song” and in that so doing leads us to seek gratification in that strange monster born of the tortured and torturous union of words and music that is opera [...] For those who have heard the call, it is indeed a matter of a Quest, with all that this implies in the way of constant itinerancy, ordeal, privation, and suffering.¹⁷³

Poizat’s passionate baroque rhetoric, coupled with a hijacking of the language of the diaspora, is a sufficient hint for the displacement and incongruity of his argument.

Opera’s inherent cross-disciplinarity (theatre, literature and music) which now

¹⁷¹ Michel Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (New York: Cornell University, 1992).

¹⁷² See Raymond Monelle’s response in the book review section of *Music & Letters* 74, no. 3 (August 1993): 453-55.

¹⁷³ Poizat, 7-8.

extends to cinema, generates a range of conflicted and mutually exclusive discursive approaches amongst musicologists, film theorists, philosophers, psychoanalysts, cultural theorists that rarely acknowledge the need for a more integrated practice. Opera remains a contentious subject for a number of reasons: the economic demands at the level of production have contributed to equate it to reactionary decadence. Economics aside, the theatre of opera is one where the most acrimonious struggles in gender politics take place, more or less covertly. Women are diegetically suppressed in spite, and possibly because of, their unique musical range 'above' men. In addition, metaphoric messages of revolt or subversion are often played out in opera plots: where opera is concerned power is rife.

A recent example illustrates this point. A contemporary opera by John Adams takes a recent historical event as the hijack of the passenger liner *Achille Lauro* by the Palestinian Liberation Front in 1985, where the murder of one American-Jewish passenger generates a vast controversy. Channel 4 subsequently produced an opera film in 2003 directed by British filmmaker Penny Woolcock: *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), which was received in post 9/11 USA with much dispute. Collective paranoia affected its critical assessment thus reduced to accusations of romanticizing terrorism. Supporters of 'the war on terror' and of a society of surveillance under a permanent status of emergency rejected the possibility of political debate and the opera found its validation in other camps.

The Problem with Fitzcarraldo

Far from any aim of reconciliation, it is the imperialist goal of opera that is the subject of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) by Werner Herzog. In keeping with a ventriloquial analysis I choose to problematise the association between opera and power, as well as the production of spectatorship and memory in this film. However, I do not consider *Fitzcarraldo* a ventriloquial object because for me it features a number of problematic and unconscious choices by the filmmaker. On the other hand, this film provides us with a rich case study of opera representation because of the distinct tiers from which power is seen to be deployed, as well as in terms of its diegetic and non-diegetic historicism. Later this film generates a ventriloquial response in a film

by a female artist (Lockhart). In this section I will develop a discussion that critiques how Herzog portrays the power of the operatic voice, from its status symbol in nineteenth-century Latin America, to the ambition to rewrite history and memory.

I am convinced it is extremely difficult to maintain a distancing between Herzog and his production, between the auteur and his *modus operandi*. Herzog has always enjoyed the persona of a visionary, uncompromising and difficult director whose Sisyphean challenges have preceded the outcome of the works: *Fitzcarraldo* is no exception and its mythology was already in place before the film release. With the film comes its sensational aura: set in the Amazonian jungle,¹⁷⁴ *Fitzcarraldo* did not simply exceed its budget. This film cost the lives of people involved in a plane crash, caused local upheavals and the nearly fatal injuries of local actors. It also suffered major production drawbacks when, after 40% of the film was shot, the main protagonist was taken ill, and not only did the production have to start from scratch, but the set had to be moved 1,500 km from its original point.

The frustration of the director committed to his impossible dream is more than apparent in *Burden of Dreams*,¹⁷⁵ the documentary about the making of the film released before the actual feature reached the auditoriums. Despite the most extreme obstacles ever known to a film production and their wide dramatisation, Herzog completed the film and won prizes at Cannes (and in Germany). Yet the critical appraisal of *Fitzcarraldo* was mixed.

Fitzcarraldo is based on a historical figure extensively documented: Carlo Fermin Fitzcarrald, son of an American sea captain settled in Peru, grew to become one of the prominent rubber barons along the Ucayali and Urubamba rivers in the late 1880s. He was surrounded by opulence and extravagance and his capitalist greed earned him a reputation in his acrimonious wars against the indigenous populations. He died at thirty-five in 1887 when his boat was overturned. What drove Herzog is not historical content but an idea: the pursuit of the impossible. It is as if behind his quixotic goals was a pseudo-religious call; consequently his pursuits must subordinate many others who do not share his faith.

¹⁷⁴ Herzog has a documented connection with Latin America: e.g. his previous production *Aguirre* was also set in this area.

¹⁷⁵ Les Blank, *Burden of Dreams*. USA, 1982.

In my opinion, this justifies the obsession that drew Herzog to make the film. I do not think that opera was not the motivation: instead Herzog was struck by the fact that the uncompromising rubber baron hauled his whole vessel over a mountain in order to conquer previously unclaimed lands. Fitzcarrald wanted to achieve wealth, Herzog wants to produce art, but both share a methodology in the idea of the impossible. But for Herzog Art is superior to wealth and Herzog must outdo his predecessor: practical goals must serve ideals and 'Herzog's Indians' must labour to haul a whole vessel ten times heavier than Fitzcarrald's (and his was dismantled prior to being hauled up). If that were not sufficient, the grade of the mountain selected for the hauling location is twice as steep as in Fitzcarrald's case. The Brazilian engineer who designed the system of pulleys on set has no faith in the efficiency of the system. As he fears people might perish he quits, but Herzog goes ahead, a rope snaps, and only miraculously, nobody is killed.

Driven by faith, miracles and tragedies Herzog and Fitzcarraldo are in pursuit of a dream and this idealistic plane justifies outlandish pursuits. Klaus Kinski as protagonist complements and supplements the extravagance of the historical character who was notorious for his obsession with collecting exotic plants and maintaining expensive estates, Herzog scripts a different pursuit for his character by combining action and opera.

Both Herzog and Fitzcarraldo as producers operate on two levels: the level of dreams and ideas (Art) and on the financial plane where the implementation of the former must come to an implicitly justified cost. Opera production is the goal for Fitzcarraldo, and his plan: to build an opera house and invite Caruso to sing in the Amazon has significant socio-historical roots for the history of Latin America. This 'production' context is the level where imperialist power is deployed and must be the focus here to be distinguished from other critical appraisals based on geography, landscape or characterisation.

Ronald K. Dolkart produces a precise and favourable assessment of the work because he sees in *Fitzcarraldo* a 'historical document' for Latin America that emphasizes the intellectual dichotomies between 'civilisation and barbarism'. With particular reference to the role of opera he maintains that:

An identification was formed that made opera a symbol of the advancement of Western ideas in Latin America and it came to have a particular power in the region because devotion to and knowledge of opera represented entrance into the elite and disdain for indigenous culture. The lore which has surrounded opera created a need for the oligarchies in Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil particularly to furnish their members with the latest European music dramas.¹⁷⁶

This ideological apparatus was equally supported by intellectuals, like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento¹⁷⁷ and the discourse of barbarism versus civilisation sedimented into a powerful discourse that seeped at many levels from literature and socio-political systems to become 'a code word for Europe and its modernisation'.¹⁷⁸

If the broader socio-ideological context implied in the dichotomy is certainly addressed by Herzog, the claim to historical accuracy falters in his characterisation of *Fitzcarraldo*: 'Herzog however treats this character with humour and affection, even though he is as driven and monomaniacal as Lope de Aguirre.'¹⁷⁹ Why would a rapacious killer be treated with humour and affection? I think because Herzog does not set out to make a historical documentary nor an ethnographic project: he is fascinated by a man who would haul a vessel over a mountain. He cleanses his pecuniary motivations through the ideal of Art and the bringing of the opera to the jungle is the motivation that justifies his financial pursuits. In actual fact an opera house was built in the Brazilian jungle, the *Teatro Amazons* in Manaus, as an aspirational vestige of the richness and opulence of a centre for rubber cultivation that could rival the theatres of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. If this film is about an aspiring opera 'producer', what role does the operatic singing perform against this socio-historical scenario?

¹⁷⁶ Dolkart, Ronald H., "Civilisation's Aria: Film As Lore and Opera as Metaphor in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*", *Journal of Latin America Lore* 11, issue 2 (1986): 126.

¹⁷⁷ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento authored a very influential essay "Facundo: O, civilisation y barbarie en las pampas argentinas", D. Appleton y compa nia, 1968, on its fourth edition in 1874. What is interesting to note, is that the essay has a political intent behind in stigmatizing the regime that had exiled him.

¹⁷⁸ Dolkart, 126.

¹⁷⁹ Dolkart, 129.

It is very obvious from the beginning that the aural characterisation of civilisation versus barbarism is played out between opera and the acousmatic voice of the drumming in the forest. But at this point I would like to flag the distinction between two different kinds of ventriloquism: a good ventriloquism (that of the *ventriloquial object* that is actively plays out the ideological embroilment of both subject and apparatus) and a bad ventriloquism, which less transparently invokes an insidious manipulative play on behalf of the author/s. Along these lines, I am suggesting that the over-identification between auteur and character in this particular instance can be dangerous, and if overlooked can jeopardize the ideological subtext of the film.

What is the problem with *Fitzcarraldo*? In terms of its reception, Dolkart states: 'The critical commentary has been continuous and can best be described as "mixed". Although Herzog received the citation for the best director at Cannes, some reviewers found the film pretentious. The majority, however, praised it as imaginative and humorous, a far cry from Herzog's usual heavy fare'.¹⁸⁰ Dolkart reviews the range of readings of the film and establishes that they are incomplete since they do not address the specific use of opera in context. He relates broadly four viewpoints emerging from a review of the critical appraisals. Here a first group denounces Herzog's own imperialism in the making of the film, a second focuses on the surrealism achieved by juxtaposing oppositional imagery, a third combines the latter with imperialism to discuss a clash of oppositional dreams, and a fourth relies on metaphor especially with the hauling of the boat. Dolkart senses something important is missing in the specific address of opera:

the answer lies in the film-lore created by Werner Herzog, and for an understanding of his intentions, both conscious and unconscious, it is essential to look at his own words [...] While Herzog denies that any of those ideas has to do with opera, which he disdains,¹⁸¹ claiming that he only attended once and then walked out in mid-

¹⁸⁰ Dolkart, 139.

¹⁸¹ Between 1986 and 2008 Werner Herzog directed twenty-five stage operas.

performance, nevertheless he demonstrates a sophisticated use of opera both in time and place.¹⁸²

I find Dolkart's critical contribution significant in the identification of Herzog's accurate historicism in the use of opera, in the notion of 'conscious and unconscious' contributions, and his acute analysis of the first and last scene of the film, featuring the *mise en scène* of the two opera performances

The two performances that open and close the film represent its 'conscious or unconscious' subject: the penetration of opera into Latin America. An element I need to flag is that both scenes happen regardless of Fitzcarraldo as far as the film diegesis is concerned. Let us consider the two scenes with Dolkart's help.

The film opens with Fitzcarraldo and his companion Molly arriving late at a lavish theatre in Manaus, on the Amazon River. It is a sumptuous gala performance of *Ernani* by Verdi, featuring Enrico Caruso and Sarah Bernhardt. The Indians stare in disbelief and champagne is poured into buckets and offered to the horses attached to the carriages waiting outside. The decadence of this tableau is pushed to a parodic limit on set: 'This Caruso [...] is a fat, pallid, diseased figure, while even more exaggerated is the supposed Sarah Bernhardt (played by a man, Jean Claude Dreyfuss, who made a career impersonating her), the epitome of an aged crone, heavily made up, and bewigged'.¹⁸³

When Fitzcarraldo and Molly enter the auditorium late, it is at the point that Caruso stabs himself while pointing at the audience: Fitzcarraldo is convinced that the performer is pointing at him as a sign to carry out his mission of building an opera house deep into the jungle at Iquitos. Fitzcarraldo is the chosen one and becomes the operatic hero set against nature and its adversities – this is the device that validates the protagonist's mission, and therefore at this point the film can begin. Dolkart here stakes his claim for Herzog's historical accuracy because what we witness in this parody of a performance is a critique of opera as status signifier in post-independence Latin America: 'Such ridiculous performance of mismatched

¹⁸² Dolkart, 140.

¹⁸³ Dolkart, 132.

artists plays to an audience of formally dressed Brazilian millionaires, aping the manners of the European elites, as the Indians outside look on with incomprehension'.¹⁸⁴

Another opera gala is featured at the very end of the film, in Dolkhart's description:

like the opening scene at the Teatro Amazonas, but with a notable reversal in the participants. The opera now comes to Fitzcarraldo [...] Rather than a stage inside the auditorium with a decadent Caruso and Bernhardt, we see Indians and mestizo vocalists from Latin America perform out of doors. The audience is not a crowd of grasping parvenus come to the opera to be seen; *tout* Iquitos looks on in amazement and joy, all classes and all cultural and ethnic groups. And the opera itself is not *Ernani* with its suicidal climax; it is *I Puritani* with its happy ending of lovers reunited. Fitzcarraldo is seated on the bridge of the *Molly Aida*, which serves as a royal box, with his pig at last seeing the promised performance,¹⁸⁵ as the strangely costumed singers pour forth the Act I duet [...] Here is "Fitzcarraldo's now multifaceted status as spectator, entrepreneur and celebrity applauded by the audience... The jubilant air of climatic wish fulfilment".¹⁸⁶ The comedy is ended.¹⁸⁷

This performance is to an extent ethically if not aesthetically uglier than the first because of the colonialism that it sanctions: the 'voice' of the West is now played in nature with the happy compliance of the natives, it has become 'naturalised' in that does not need to hide in the ghetto of a cultural institution. We are not sure if the critical intentions of the director (so clear in the first scene) have been tarnished by his unconscious love affair with his protagonist/producer. And why 'the comedy'? The pig made to appreciate opera can only be the token of how deranged the power of imperialism can be. But Dolkhart's reading of the final scene is far from ugly, he sees here the evidence that:

¹⁸⁴ Dolkhart, 132.

¹⁸⁵ Previously in the film, Fitzcarraldo is seen playing opera to his pet pig.

¹⁸⁶ Steve Jenkins, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 49 (July 1982) in Dolkhart, 139.

¹⁸⁷ Dolkhart, 139.

Latin America has evolved its own culture, a blend of traditions, often in absurd juxtaposition. Opera in Latin America and an opera house in the jungle is one of those absurdities [sic].¹⁸⁸ Todd Gitlin reads in the final scene the whole resolution of the film and interprets it as divorced from an imperialist discourse altogether: 'Culture is not to be *founded* on real property, but rather *found* in the fugitive here-and-now moment when something wonderful is accomplished for the immediate delectation [...] Far from being what Pauline Kael called a "token of a finish", Fitzcarraldo's epiphany is the point of the whole movie, the revelation that suggests that culture is not a thing that has to be wrested from nature at the cost of blood. This is what sets *Fitzcarraldo* apart from *Aguirre*, and makes it more mature work.¹⁸⁹

So, what is the problem with *Fitzcarraldo*, aside from the factors pointed out by anti-imperialists? Dolkar's ultimate appraisal of the film is positive because for him Herzog produces 'a historical document about Latin America's past';¹⁹⁰ the critic is satisfied by Herzog's historical accuracy – despite highlighting the historical inaccuracies in the film concerning the historical figure of Fitzcarrald and Caruso's physical absence from Latin America. Yet, the question of colonialism remains obfuscated despite being the central ideological issue. It is true that Herzog uses a well documented historical backdrop for his film and that the greed and ugliness of economic imperialism is condemned through parody but it is as if Art were clean and capital dirty: the voice of Caruso acquires a transcendence worthy of the appraisals of metaphysics.

I would suggest that Herzog's 'conscious' intention' is not geared to making political films, yet a lack of politics can be eminently political. I would add that Herzog's 'conscious and unconscious intentions' are drawn towards a specific notion of humanity. His 'usual heavy fare' is to do with the challenge to the limits of what is humanely possible and consequently what can be considered sub but mostly supra

¹⁸⁸ Dolkart, 141.

¹⁸⁹ Todd Gitlin, "Fitzcarraldo by Werner Herzog", *Film Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Winter 1983-84): 53.

¹⁹⁰ Dolkart, 141.

human. This is because amongst his subjects feature: a record breaking ski jumper, Kaspar Hausen, congenitally deaf and blind people and a man who thinks he can live with bears - and here the historical Fitzcarrald attracts Herzog because he performed the impossible action of hauling a vessel over a mountain. But of course this gesture remains embedded in a specific political context: the hauling of civilisation over a barbaric land. Is the problem with Herzog his historical accuracy, and the decoy that attracts Dolkart's praise, or is it in an 'unconscious' ruse in the maker's intentions?

Ultimately, *Fitzcarraldo* cannot be assessed exclusively using the two moments at the beginning and the end of the film; the sheer bulk of this lengthy film is devoted to this individual and his quixotic enterprise. The enterprise is to bring Opera to the jungle and his operation does succeed – as witnessed by the 'smiling pig'. Fitzcarraldo, the Individual, stands out like the white unicorn in the forest. Dressed in a white suit brandishing his gramophone or holding outsized cigars as he progresses into the jungle, Kinski is the anthropomorphic counterpart of the mythological creature notorious for lacking human fears, solitary and mysteriously beautiful, fierce yet good and who can only be tamed by his beautiful maiden¹⁹¹ - in Kinski's case, Claudia Cardinale as Molly, the beautiful and loyal partner who also financially supports his venture - this gentle maiden has the power to tame the unicorn and restrains him when provoked by the local rubber barons, who do not share his faith in opera. But capital is dirty (Molly runs a brothel) and the financial enterprise of spreading Art's message must fail.

The dramatisation of individualistic yearning cannot suffice as criterion in the appraisal of this film because of its historical collocation. Maybe it is possible to find a key for interpretation based on Herzog's 'unconscious' historicism to push forward Dolkart's logic? Fitzcarraldo is the self-appointed producer of Caruso, he projects the singer's voice at the 'barbarians' throughout the film especially when under siege:

Fitzcarraldo's dependence on Caruso grows more acute after his crew deserts him, fearing a Jivaro attack. When he plays the start of

¹⁹¹ According to a 1602 fresco in Palazzo Farnese, Rome, by Domenico Zampieri entitled *The Gentle and Pensive Maiden has the Power to Tame the Unicorn*.

the *Quartet* from *Rigoletto*, the Indians appear in a large number of canoes behind the *Molly Aida*, preventing the vessel from turning back. Like the children of Iquitos, the Jivaros have seemingly accepted the man who plays Caruso as their Viracocha and refuse to let him leave. Fitzcarraldo decides that he can use the Indians' help to complete his project [...] to haul the ship up.¹⁹²

Fitzcarraldo does not shoot down the Indians: firstly he is outnumbered and secondly they are too precious as potential manpower. Instead, with another symbolic twist, Fitzcarraldo's gun is a gramophone. In this innocent image that earns the character's benevolence there is a key for interpretation. The machine that plays the mass-produced voice of Caruso is constantly by his side: he uses it by his bedside where it enchants indigenous children, as a propaganda tool during a function gathering the most powerful rubber barons, and of course on the river against the voice of the jungle. With historical hindsight one can see the insidious all consuming propaganda power of the media, but in 1880?

In 1880 the French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-1888) felt compelled to respond to an article on the subject of memory by Delboeuf where the latter states that the soul is a notebook of phonographic recordings. This claim did not surprise Guyau because he was aware that historically (and to this date) the brain has been metaphorically compared to the latest technological invention. He felt obliged to endorse the interpretation and illustrated his analogy describing the engraving produced by the vibrations of the voice onto the wax cylinder comparatively with brain functioning:

it is quite probable that in analogous way, invisible lines are incessantly carved into the brain cells, which provide a channel for nerve streams. If after some time, the stream encounters a channel it has already passed through, it will once again proceed along the same path. The cells vibrate in the same way they vibrated the first time; psychologically, these similar vibrations correspond to an emotion or a thought analogous to the forgotten emotion or thought

¹⁹² Dolkart, 137.

[...] If the phonographic disk had self-consciousness, it could point out while replaying a song that it remembers this particular song. And what appears to us as the effect of a rather simple mechanism would, quite probably, strike the disk as a miraculous ability: memory¹⁹³

In keeping with our digression that is leaning more towards Herzog's 'unconscious' rather than 'conscious intentions', the technology behind the gramophone recalls Freud's 'Mystic Writing Pad' (in the 1925 essay 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad') where this wax based writing toy becomes an ideal metaphor to illustrate the recording process of the psyche. This essay is subsequently reconsidered by Derrida in *Writing and Difference* to articulate how perception is subjected to the primacy of writing and signifiers - a paradigm not embraced in this research since Derrida's argument about the voice is deployed in service of the pre-eminence of writing.

Another observation in this context must refer to a very recent film by Aura Satz, *Sound Seam* (14 mins) exhibited at the Wellcome Gallery during December 2010 and January 2011. This non-narrative work, the outcome of a residency at the Ear Institute, is concerned with the material properties of sound. More specifically, it utilizes otoacoustic emissions¹⁹⁴ and addresses the possibility of playing the coronal sutures of a skull via a phonographic needle. Such was the wish expressed by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, whose text *Primal Sound* (1919) is one of the starting points of Satz's enquiry.

The film has a wonderful ethereal dimension that conveys the notion of inner bodily compartments reverberating with sound. This matches the literary and historical dimension addressed at this point of the discussion. For my part, my reference to Guyau is driven by a critico-historical ambition in suggesting a lineage between early and contemporary science on the phenomenology of hearing, on the one hand, and one the other in connecting this knowledge on the role and functioning of memory to a political domain.

¹⁹³ Guyau in Kittler, 31.

¹⁹⁴ These are sounds that are generated within the inner ear.

It is worth noting his distinction between the imperfect nature of phonographic reproduction and the live event, he also outlines many correlations between the phonograph and the brain, such as those based on a degree of intensity (speed variation in the phonograph and increased and decreased vibrations in our brain cells). Subsequently he discusses hypotheses about thought process and associative memory that are coherent with contemporary scientific research. But his conclusion states: 'The principal difference between the brain and the phonograph is that the metal disk of Edison's still rather primitive machine remains deaf to itself; there is no transition from movement to consciousness'.¹⁹⁵

Aside from the Western modernist dream of fathering the sentient machine (Alan Turing), we find in Guyau a number of clues that anticipate a reading of *Fitzcarraldo* as cultural critique: principally in the manufacturing of memory for the masses to ensure subjugation, a notion developed later by Adorno in his critique of the culture industries. Barton Byg referring to *Composing for the Films* states: 'Imaginary pastness is the power behind the social cohesion of the culture industry. But real pastness – the real history of real subjects – preserves the artistic yearning for that which does not yet exist: a future for those very subjects'.¹⁹⁶

Adorno politicises the notion of a fictional past, while for Freud's scientific paradigm there is no fiction, only a problem of retrieval and interpretation. Interestingly, Delboeuf's initial premise (that the soul is a notebook of phonographic recordings) endorses the basis of the aural nature of Freud's psychoanalytical practice – the psyche stores all sounds, i.e. experiences that can be excavated like the layers of a city, just like the engravings produced by the phonograph. But above all, memory becomes acquainted with storage capability and technology (the archive) and secondly, the primitiveness of the machine is identified in lacking self-awareness.

In the final scene of *Fitzcarraldo* we witness the indigenous populations ('*tout* Iquitos looks on in amazement and joy, all classes and all cultural and ethnic

¹⁹⁵ Guyau in Kittler, 32.

¹⁹⁶ Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 244.

groups')¹⁹⁷ who have been 'shot' by Fitzcarraldo's gramophone and Herzog's camera as they collectively ventriloquize Western culture's voice. They are happy, as they have no memory (just like the audience) of the bloody exterminations perpetrated by (the historical) Fitzcarrald. They are united in their submission, they are at one with their environment, they merge with the conquered land as imperial property. They are made primitives, portrayed as lacking in self-awareness, 'strangely costumed' they smile and sing romantic tunes. Fitzcarraldo is now the fulfilled producer, his 'multifaceted status' is the universal power for which he is applauded by his subjugated people.

As Friedrich Kittler notes, storage facilities are not only able to alter the character of the replayed sound, but to alter its relationship to historical time, and such time manipulation can shatter the very concept of memory. But this conception of technology can also be seen as an aid to reconfigure memory compatibly with a contemporary practice of historiography and the notion of the archive: an idea already anticipated by Walter Benjamin who heralds the unfulfilled potentials of the past, and repudiates both the empty gaze into the future and 'the bordello of historicism'¹⁹⁸ that relegates the past to an 'eternal' remote space. As Benjamin states in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*: 'Materialist historiography differs [...] its method is additive [...] He (the historical materialist) takes cognizance of it (the past) in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.'¹⁹⁹ In this sense the discursive potentials of the work (*Fitzcarraldo*) enable an assessment that takes into account both intentional inherent elements as well as those potentially repressed or overlooked, leaving open the potential for reconciliation with the past, and a work that is not reductive.

It is true that Herzog is claimed to have struck deals with local governments to protect the peoples and their territories in the Amazon and his declared political position is in favour of these territories – yet, unlike with previous works by Herzog, in *Fitzcarraldo* History returns as the repressed to haunt the film. Interpretations

¹⁹⁷ Dolkart, 139.

¹⁹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999, first published in 1979), 254.

¹⁹⁹ Benjamin, *Theses*, 254.

remain mixed, just as the critical response. The issues raised and embedded in this film are too complex to find a contained resolution in the agonistic achievement of an eccentric individual (especially where auteur and protagonist have a tendency to merge).

If this film contains Herzog's repressed historical 'unconscious' then the filmmaker cannot be credited with an unambiguous anti-imperialistic stance. Does this film provide a background in the German imperialism to come with the Weimar Republic and does it stand in general for a denunciation of European oppression? Or is the gramophone (accredited with resurrecting the dead) indirectly and symbolically operating as the Benjaminian 'rubble' or historical signifier that enables the histories of the non-victorious to emerge? Or even, is the gramophone, as in its diegetic use, symbolically the excessive voice of authorship that becomes auteur propaganda? The political debate that *Fitzcarraldo* owes us continues through its legacy, since this very film stimulated a new work by a contemporary female artist, Sharon Lockhart.

Monotone and Difference

It was *Fitzcarraldo* that instigated in Sharon Lockhart the fascination and desire to find the Manaus Theatre. The artist pursued a major project in the Amazon that resulted in a photographic series and a film realized in collaboration with musician and composer Becky Allen. *Teatro Amazonas* (38 mins, 1999) features a single shot in real time of the audience arriving and sitting in the baroque theatre while an out of shot chorus sings a minimal composition. The methodology couched in this work is highly significant especially following the ideological concerns left hanging by *Fitzcarraldo*.

Lockhart worked with a local demographer and populated the nineteenth-century theatre with an audience from, and representative of Manaus: the 308 seats of the theatre are occupied by a statistical sample of the demographics based on the respective population of each neighbourhood. Since the stage is out of shot, the viewer cannot verify if the audience in the film inhabits the time of the musical performance. We are told that it does, but the lack of disclosure sets out a range of

tensions that continue with the visual juxtaposition of a European baroque theatre and a casually dressed local audience. However, the strongest jarring is provided by the audiovisual juxtaposition of a minimalist contemporary composition and the baroque setting.

The composer Becky Allen worked with a 60-person choir from the Choral Do Amazonas in Manaus. The composition is 24 minutes long and is based on mathematical formulas from a three dimensional cone, which are then transposed into musical parameters. In the 24 minutes the clustered voices imperceptibly transform to a single note. The music starts assertively, its resonance and jarring quality extends beyond the musical to be marred in spirit to the *mise-en-scène*. As the sound slowly and progressively decays, the voices dissipate into the incidental sounds of the theatre audience, which become discreetly identifiable in its components: shuffles, coughs, chatter and children's voices.

The distributors at the Arsenal in Berlin describe this film as 'the literal interpretation of one culture looking at another.'²⁰⁰ Since gazing is voyeuristic and unidirectional, Lockhart's contemporary gaze could be seen to embody a critique of the traditional ethnographic gaze that does not implicate a viewer in the apprehension process. The artist could be also seen to suggest a position that resists pedagogy through its sophisticated simplicity. Yet, the gaze that the distributors refer to is developed in terms of narrative through the audio.

A gaze suggests constancy. Instead, as the thrust of the contemporary minimal composition grows progressively fainter, the whole film can be conceived visually as a dissolve, in the sense of the visual transition from one image to another, or to black. Considering that dissolves are an editing device to signal in the narrative a passage of time or a spatial transition, and given that in *Teatro Amazonas* we experience the scene in real time with a fixed and constant narrative space, then the narrative is delivered through the audio. The audio fade becomes the principal narrative device of the film: the narrative delivers a shift of 'voices' as a transition between here/us and there/them and therefore alluding to a metaphorical spatial

²⁰⁰http://films.arsenalberlin.de/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/4311/lang/en_US

montage bridging the viewer to the viewed.

The narrative is linear and teleologically constructed towards to dissolution of the voice of the chorus, the us. The chorus articulates in unison to, rather than for, the audience a culturally dissonant message just as in *Fitzcarraldo* opera was thrust upon the jungle, but as the narrative comes to realization, the denouement delivers the voice back to the space of the audience and the message thrust upon them simply evaporates. This transitional mode is allowed by the live recording and natural mixing taking place as the chorus subside, and it is sealed by the fact that no applause is delivered at the end. The video portrait of the population of Manaus is complete as we linger with the image and the actual synch sound of the audience.

Teatro Amazonas with its apparent simplicity and its rationale of inconsistencies can be seen to resolve the issues left open with *Fitzcarraldo*. This film was also the catalyst for a powerful cultural anti-imperialistic legacy, since when Becky Allen experienced a local performance written in three tribal languages (“O Meio do Ceio”) she was inspired to start the World Music Choir in Los Angeles. In the following years the choir performed a repertoire from a number of countries including Brazil, Mexico and Bulgaria.

Live Recording, Repetition and Gender Fetishism

With *Diva*, directed by Jean Jacques Beneix (1981) the subject of opera returns to the film diegesis along with the politics of live recording. The problem of live singing versus the recording of the event features as the main diegetic strand of this popular crime thriller. The voice becomes emblematic of a notion of transgression in aesthetic and legal terms: *Diva* features the dilemma of an opera singer who resists being recorded and therefore commodified. Perhaps it is not coincidental that this film is chronologically, geographically and thematically close to Attali’s book on the economics of music referred to earlier in the chapter. *Diva* is functional to this conversation that addresses questions of the subversive power of the singing voice. With its gender slant it introduces the problematic of ‘mastering’ the singing voice subsequently addressed in my film *Mi Piace*.

The diva in question refuses to have her voice recorded, insisting that her performance only makes sense in the context of the live event with a live audience. In the course of the film (that contains a number of more sensational sub-plots) she is attacked during a press conference and accused of being against the commercialisation of Art. She retorts that it is commerce that has to adapt to art and not the opposite. Subsequently her (middle-aged, male) manager pressurises her, given that she is now in her 30s and therefore losing her prime as a live performer. The diva is also infantilised, as her position that could be seen as a matter for politics and aesthetics is defined as a 'whim'. The film rather pathetically triumphs with the diva 'finding her true self' in an implausible relationship with a puerile postman, who had previously 'violated her principles' by producing a pirate recording of her performance that caused her professional capitulation in the commercialisation of her voice.

Diva is laden with Freudian references to fetishism and unsurprisingly patriarchal 'mastering' triumphs in the private and public sphere of this female character²⁰¹. It alerts a 'listening' public to questions around the distinction between a sound event and sound representation: these are not merely ontological questions when we consider the commercialisation of music in the context of commodity fetishism and how the modalities of production and post-production that can be seen ultimately to strongly affect music aesthetics (as particularly relevant in the more commercial spectrum of popular music).

²⁰¹ Interestingly, Freud refuses to deal with music in his work. He overstates his lack of responsiveness by claiming to be tone deaf and his lacking any connection with the subject. Documented evidence proves the opposite, renowned composers were amongst his clients, he had a piano in the home and subsequently forbade his children to have one, and we do find in his writing a confession of simply not being able to rationalise affect in music (see "Freud's Voices" in Dolar). On the other hand, Freud was interested in opera, possibly because of the linguistic harnessing of this genre. Paradoxically, his psychoanalysis is eminently aural: aside from being a spoken practice, voices feature in psychosis as well as in the normative status of the superego. Of course, subsequently Lacan introduces the 'voice object' and here the fetishisation of the singers voice in the film can be justified as being represented stereotypically via a fetish object (the diva's dress); on the other hand the film touches simultaneously on commodity fetishism which acknowledges its materialistic dimension.

My film *Mi Piace* (2008) also challenges the notion of a 'mastered' performance from a material and gender perspective. I set out to make a film about a singing rehearsal in order to explore the sheer materiality of the singing voice. Since I wished to emphasise the specificity of each repeated phrase, I directed the performer so that the movements in her body would be progressively constrained during the repetitions. This process does not feature directly in the *mise en scène* because functional to the exercise; on the other hand this dynamic does eventually become a prominent element in the conceptual resolution of the film that becomes more and more about the 'mastering' and resistance of the singer, and the creative outcome of her resistance.

I have explored ideas around gender representation associated with the female voice for a number of years and Kaja Silverman's input with *The Acoustic Mirror* remains a significant point of reference. We learn from her theorisation that traditionally women's bodies have been visually matched to their voices as the condition for their fetishisation, the isomorphism of aural and visual forms the precondition to the female body in representation:

it has gone largely unnoticed that like the visual *vraisemblable*, the sonic *vraisemblable* is sexually differentiated, working to identify even the *embodied* male voice with the attributes of the cinematic apparatus, but always situating the female voice within a hyperbolically diegetic context. [...] Hollywood soundtrack is engendered through a complex system of displacements, which locate the male voice at the point of apparent textual origin, while establishing the diegetic containment of the female voice. [...] interiority has a very different status in classic cinema [...] far from being a privileged condition, synonymous with soul, spirit, or consciousness, interiority in Hollywood films implies linguistic constraint and physical confinement – confinement to the body, to claustral spaces, and to inner narratives.²⁰²

Mi Piace specifically avoids the use of synchronised images to prevent a diegetic

²⁰² Silverman, 45.

construction that anchors the singer to her body and fetishises it. There are occasions when synchronized singing appears, yet when it does, the protagonist's singing is overlapped to fragments of her own conversations during the shoot. The film predominantly insists on the use of still imagery in order to steer the viewer's focus to the soundscape created by the field recording of the single twenty-minute shot to resist and problematise the visual fetishisation of a performer stereotypically assumed to be beautiful.

This strategy gives way to the predominance of the aural and of a soundscape that becomes the territory where the dynamic between performer and director is played out. During the shoot I direct the singer on stage in rehearsing the aria under specific instructions. After the experience, it becomes crucial that my agency is implicated in the film narrative rather than being erased. The soundscape reconfigures the experience behind the shoot, where the complex creative interplay between myself and the performer is played out. In this sense it provides an alternative history to this single shoot where the audience is actively involved in deciphering the narrative at play.

The opera extract featured is a popular aria *O Mio Babbino Caro* (from *Gianni Schicchi* by Puccini) where a daughter addresses her father pleading with him to approve of her romantic choice and otherwise threatening suicide.²⁰³ The semantic context therefore implicates patriarchy and agency in relation to it. It also provides a dimension that is addressed performatively: only a section of the aria is repeated obsessively, the one that translates as 'it pleases me' (*mi piace*).

As the repetitions give evidence, via the slight difference in each utterance, to the efforts of the singer (whose body unbeknown to the viewer is progressively being constrained) the semantic content points at the inevitable masochistic tendency in the agonistic striving for 'mastering' perfection in Art. If the critical instance of process and endurance is addressed in the tradition of performance art, more conservative or commercial practices like classical music are geared to erase the process in order to deliver the perfected outcome.

²⁰³ This opera is derived from an episode in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, but unlike the referent, which is a tragedy, here the outcome is comedic and the daughter's threat sung in jest.

The outcome of the film suggests a progressive breakdown of an assumed and ideal unity of body and singing in the representation. I choose to conclude with the dramatic and abrupt interruption of the singing voice, uttering a more redeeming 'vorrei' (I would like to) instead of the 'vorrei morir' (I would like to die) as stated in the aria. In this way I use a sound edit to prevent the singer from succumbing, and this resolution is orchestrated in response to the diegetic repression of women (Silverman) and the 'mastering' of the perfect performance. In this final section the singer's voice is now heard performing behind a gag: her less than clear singing exemplifies a failure in achieving the perfect voice, or a success in the Deleuzian sense of 'resistance' to complying with its expectations.

The film dramatises the materiality of the singing voice into a narrative that rejects its 'mastering' into a standard ideal and the fetishisation of a woman's body. It also actively participates in re-addressing a history in which making and spectatorship are problematised in true ventriloquial fashion.

Bad Singing and Impossible Love: The Law That Cannot Tell its Name

In this section I abandon opera and move from the fetishisation of the singer to the fetishisation of the audience: I use a ventriloquial object by Vito Acconci (*Theme Song*) to show how a subversive form of singing can deconstruct spectatorship. Considerations on the uncanny return with a new interpretation (Dolar) developing further this notion introduced earlier with Todorov and Freud. In the same section I introduce a ventriloquial object contemporary to Acconci's piece that uses singing in a transgressive fashion, John Baldessari's *Baldessari Sings LeWitt*. In these ventriloquial objects singing is insubordinate to the laws of seduction and of conceptual art.

Acconci sets off to seduce 'me' through song. In *Theme Song* (33', 1973) the performer lies on the floor with his face close to the camera, imposing himself on the onlooker in an over-intimate address. Playing songs from an off-screen cassette player, he keeps changing the songs haphazardly and sings along while intent to seduce the viewer addressed as 'you'. His unglamorous appearance along with his

husky whispering and/or singing voice conveys an immediacy unencumbered by any artifice of seduction: what we see is a squalid man looking to fulfil his fantasy with 'you' as 'me' – I am the exclusive audience who is being seduced.

The casual familiarity of this *mise en scène* is exacerbated for the contemporary viewer because of the present-day commonplace of TV confessional style and the proliferation of web-camera exchanges (blurring the fundamental distinction between an anonymous televisual address and an actual reciprocal audiovisual exchange).

Like in the previous examples, 'mastering' and gender politics return by virtue of a performer who 'speaks' to a female viewer in the vain attempt to instigate an encounter. Partly sung partly spoken, his register shifts continuously to accommodate for a number of stereotypical scenarios of desire fulfilment from the overtly sexual to the romantic. In this shifting mode he constantly redefines the interlocutor: 'come to me', 'I need you, I am lonely/Ok I am not lonely', 'c'mon we both need it', 'ok I am not in love' 'I am the one who can fulfil your dreams', 'I really do love you', 'I never had you but if I had, I surely would try to keep you', 'I see you right in front of me' 'ok, you don't trust me, you have reasons' etc.

Yet, because of this oscillatory mode of address the receiver remains an empty sign, exemplified in the 'pale blue eyed' (or stereotypically tame) female. The pleading is echoed by the accompanying songs and is destined to remain a tired fantasy just as the direct address makes this sign even more implausible: 'it's only a memory, nothing is worth nothing because you never came to me, I can feel your body' 'I'll watch every move you make, I'm an audience, I'll love everything you do'.

As a viewer this delivery is compelling because it is simultaneously implausible and familiar. The (feminised) spectator is implicated while at the same time being alienated via a range of clichés from romanticism to sexual deviance and opportunistic intimacy. Overall, *Theme Song* could also be read as a specular critique of the address of patriarchal capitalist media advertising according to which consumption is conflated with the promise of sexual fantasy fulfilment. The specularity is in the ventriloquial reversal offered by the performer, who lacks but

assumes the idea of the artifice of seduction while speaking and singing to an imaginary female viewer. Yet in *Theme Song* such hermeneutics seem insufficient.

I will develop the notion of song and seduction by returning to the uncanny in a contemporary reading developed by Mladen Dolar.²⁰⁴ Dolar in fact re-elaborates Freud's uncanny in Lacanian terms and some aspects of this paradigm can be useful to broaden the debate from both a formal and historical perspective, from Acconci's work to modernist literature such as Kafka's in view of his emphasis on voices. In particular, his rewriting of Ulysses' encounter with the sirens provides a new template to address the notion of the song of seduction (*The Silence of the Sirens*).

Dolar claims that in the uncanny one finds a compound of all core problematics of psychoanalysis. He elaborates on what he feels Freud left open-ended, the unresolved strands of the psychoanalyst's thought, and uses Lacanian motifs applied to *The Sand-Man* and other Gothic literature to develop his argument (and since an equivalent in French of the term uncanny does not exist, Lacan creates the term *extimité*). In Dolar the classical themes of the tale are reworked, namely the automaton interpreted as the Other, followed by castration and the double as the mirror phase (inclusive of the object *a*, the disturber of the attainment of pleasure and terrible harbinger of *jouissance*).

One item worthy of note here is in the role of the doll Olympia as the automaton, in Dolar's words: 'The question arises as to who is the real automaton in the situation, for the appearance of the automaton calls for an automatic response, it entails an automatic subjectivisation. Hoffmann's ironical twist, the social parody implied in the episode, highlights the role socially assigned to the woman: it is enough to be there, at the appropriate place.²⁰⁵ A correlation is evident in the presumed (= automated) female viewer in Acconci's piece, in other words her presumed role is all that is required.

²⁰⁴ In particular here "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding Night: Lacan and the Uncanny", October 58 (Autumn 1991).

²⁰⁵ Dolar, 9.

On the other hand, even if the woman or the doll represent the Other or the narcissistic supplement, according to Dolar: 'Nathaniel's lengthy conversation with Olympia prefigures the analytic session'²⁰⁶ (although classically the analyst is male and the analysand female) and in fact both Nathaniel's and Acconci's interlocutor-less lengthy amatory discourse can be seen to foreshadow the analytic session where the analyst is simply there, anonymously acknowledging the analysand to allow for their speech to materialise as narcissistic projection. In this light Acconci's *Theme Song* is simply the materialisation of his (narcissistic) incoherent attempt at articulating his desire.

Discussing the motifs of castration and loss of sight, on a first approach, Dolar assumes the uncanny to be, the thing that bars sexual relation or the dimension that blocks the fulfilment of subjectivity via the 'Platonian missing half'. Acconci is clearly trapped in a double bind of not seeing the interlocutor and lack of sexual fulfilment, all he can see, we can presume, is his mirror image on the monitor as he films and speaks into the camera lens. And in this way in the traditional logic of the uncanny he is at once and paradoxically his own double (he is a monitor image with a double as another monitor image).

Otto Rank cited in Dolar states: 'The image is more fundamental than its owner: it institutes his substance, his essential being, his 'soul'; it is his most valuable part; it makes him a human being. It is his immortal part, his protection against death'²⁰⁷ and Dolar completes this reasoning via Lacan's mirror phase which is emblematic of self-recognition and simultaneously one's loss of self, since the doubling cuts one off from the part of oneself of immediate self-being. Here Lacan identifies in the object *a* the part lost in the mirror which is not visible, and which consequently cannot be an object of 'objective' knowledge causing the imaginary to come dangerously close to the real.

Aside from the formal outline of these functions, Dolar makes another significant point by introducing a historical dimension, in that Lacan locates this formal process

²⁰⁶ Dolar, 9.

²⁰⁷ Dolar, 12.

as historically coinciding with the modernist development of science.²⁰⁸ Here he identifies *Frankenstein* as the emblematic embodiment of the Enlightenment that in the uncanny produces its own limit, as the object without a double, the monster, the Thing. In Dolar's words:

The point where the monster emerges is always immediately seized by an overwhelming amount of meaning [...] it has immediate social and ideological connotations. The monster can stand for everything that our culture has to repress – the proletariat, sexuality, other cultures, alternative ways of living, heterogeneity, the Other.²⁰⁹

In the culture of televisual address, where the anonymous power of media ideology is poised to pervade the sphere of the personal, Acconci could stand for the *monster* demanding the fulfilment of his satisfaction and who cannot achieve it by virtue of being pure image or its own double. The point that the uncanny is historically contingent while being ever present as embedded in a critique of ideology leads to a consideration of the role of psychoanalysis against aesthetic production, for Dolar:

Psychoanalysis doesn't provide a new and better interpretation of the uncanny [as opposed to literature]; it maintains it as *a limit to interpretation*. Its interpretation tries to circumscribe the point where interpretation fails, where no "more faithful" translation can be made [...] In other words, psychoanalysis differs from other interpretations by its insistence on the formal level of the uncanny rather than on its content.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Another contemporary intellectual who has reconsidered Lacan's work in terms of historicism, or rather resurrected Lacan's historicist analysis is Teresa Brennan in *History After Lacan* (London: Routledge, 1993). Brennan elaborates on Lacan's notion of modernity as a psychotic age that began with the seventeenth century and culminates in the present. Her analysis spans Marxism, gender politics, neo-colonialism and environmental exploitation.

²⁰⁹ Dolar, 19.

²¹⁰ Dolar, 20.

Another significant point is made by Dolar in the final section of the piece where he refers to Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the uncanny in *The Fantastic*. This section is important as it brings to the fore questions of hermeneutics thus bringing the discussion back to the role of *Theme Song*, which after all is not an analytic session despite its connotations.

The main distinction between Todorov and Lacan in relation to the uncanny is that the former identifies it with a moment of 'intellectual uncertainty' - in other words, when the reader has not assigned the content to either the supernatural or the plausible with a rational explanation. For Lacan, according to Dolar, uncanniness is directly opposed to the logic of suspense:

what is horrible is that one knows in advance precisely what is bound to happen, and it happens [...]. So for Todorov the fantastic comes from a lack of certainty and is dissipated when certainty is restored. From a Lacanian perspective the uncanny comes from too much certainty, when escape through hesitation is no longer possible, when the object comes too close.²¹¹

A kind of reconciliation appears at the end of Todorov's book when he claims (since modernist literature happens to coincide with the birth of psychoanalysis) that psychoanalysis is the most fantastic of all tales, 'the ultimate horror story'. Dolar comments that psychoanalysis has in fact the role of keeping the uncanny open while at the same time literature has to develop other strategies to deal with it and via Todorov he gives Kafka's example of double uncanny: when the supernatural is assumed to be natural it becomes 'doubly' uncanny, as with the commonplace invested in *The Thing*.

In a postmodern context like Acconci's, it becomes clear for Dolar that this period embodies a new consciousness about the uncanny that does not expect to move beyond its fundamental dimension in modernity but simply resolves to accept and incorporate its limitations, the internal split that was there from the beginning. This is why Acconci's proximity can be seen as at once monstrous and commonplace: the

²¹¹ Dolar, 22-23.

familiarity of his approach makes it doubly uncanny as we do not need to ascertain the actual position of speaker and addressee when he fluctuates between modes of address.

His address is defined as performed through *Theme Song* and the connotations of desire and seduction attached to this form can be seen to operate on two levels. Firstly on a literal and contextual level from the actual message of the songs employed, themselves embedded in the logic of mass culture and the performance of desire. However, *Theme Song* in the singular could be seen more symbolically as a singular gesture (mis)performing its musical allure: (mis)performing because on the one hand of its implicit failure, on the other, based on the (uncanny) certainty that if successful its results would be disastrous.

Theme Song presents a kind of ambiguous double bind that can be explored further through Kafka's 'voices' and in particular with *The Silence of the Sirens* (1917, published posthumously in 1931). Kafka's perplexing rendition of Ulysses' episode of the sirens in the *Odyssey* addresses the idea of the (mis)reception of the allure of seduction as a possible strategy for preservation. *Theme Song* on the other hand succeeds because it sets up to fail: we know to an extent the outcome of the 33 minutes of performance because its format precludes the achievement of its own goal.

Kafka's story is complex and baffling. He rewrites the episode of the sirens with some modifications: firstly as anticipated by the title his sirens do not sing. On approaching the sirens Ulysses takes further precautions by stuffing his ears with beeswax and by having himself bound to the mast. The former (added) gesture is superfluous as the song is meant to pierce through wax; the sirens in turn, as Dolar states, have a more effective weapon which is the silence as 'the voice at its purest': 'The silence which is unbearable and irresistible, the ultimate weapon of the law'.²¹² In fact Kafka assures the reader that if some have escaped from their singing, no one has from their silence. In this enigmatic statement Dolar identifies

²¹² "Kafka's Voices" in Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 171.

the mechanism of the law in its pure embodiment (or internalisation?) since it is possible to object to an injunction once manifest but not before it is uttered.

There are further complications in Kafka: the sirens are not just silent, but they pretend to sing as Ulysses sees their breasts rising and falling; Ulysses is seen to hear them sing or perhaps Kafka adds later, perhaps he pretends that he hears them sing and outwits them: is Ulysses naïve or shrewd? At the same time we are told that the sirens by this stage had no desire to allure (they just wanted to hold on to the image of Ulysses) because they have no consciousness. They are mere devices or automatons: 'if the sirens had possessed consciousness they would have been annihilated at that moment' states Kafka²¹³. In this perplexing tale, Kafka seems to suggest the conundrum of the possibility of escaping the law: 'there is no simple strategy, it defies human understanding [...] It takes supreme cunning, yet does not introduce a closure of the law. Ulysses was an exception, and everybody else is the rule'.²¹⁴

When we experience *Theme Song* we have already escaped the law, the allure of desire and what is left in the performance is a grotesque play or semblance of the possibilities of the consequences that the hypothetical danger would entail. Acconci's image has no conscience. But unlike Kafka's tale, in *Theme Song* there is no tension, no suspense because to an extent Ulysses and the sirens are collapsed in the game of the performer, whose unlikely allure reflects back at himself precluding the possibility of an interlocutor as intended: he becomes the automated sirens and we can pretend to hear them safely. Acconci does not emit a lethal silence but noise and here *Theme Song* is somewhat reassuring: noise, in the conflation of modes of address and the series of songs played out, disturbs the law which becomes ineffectual.

When *noise*, or song, breaks with the code, it also breaks with the law and its enforcement. The law can be the law of desire or embodied by the ideological and institutional forces that maintain the status quo because the law is dependent upon

²¹³ Kafka in Dolar, 173.

²¹⁴ Dolar, "Kafka's Voices", 173.

a reliable universal code. Again, the voice in its potential faltering has the privileged potential to subvert this reliability.

Almost exactly contemporary to *Theme Song*, the next work was authored on the other side of the continent. If Acconci's piece is designed to fail to seduce, John Baldessari's sung utterance fails to pay a tribute. In 1972 the artist made a 13 minutes videotape, where he sings Sol LeWitt's 'Sentences on Conceptual Art'. Here some background considerations are due in relation to the origin and dissemination of this text, especially when we consider Baldessari's introduction to his own performance of the 'sentences' in the opening section of the video piece.

Le Witt published his 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' in *Artforum* in Summer 1967. These precepts are decreed to mark the transition from Minimalism to Conceptual Art and coincidentally the magazine in which they appear had just 'transitioned' from Los Angeles to New York. The 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' appear in the same publication in 1969 and are 'premiered' in a less widespread Coventry based publication, namely *Art-Language* designated in this inaugural issue as *The Journal of Conceptual Art 1* (May 1969).

At the opening of *Baldessari Sings LeWitt*, the artist announces his intent: this tape is intended as a tribute to LeWitt's output since 'he thinks that these sentences have been hidden too long in the pages of exhibition catalogues' and that perhaps by singing them he can bring them to a larger public. If this proposition is immediately experienced as ironic, this premonition is consolidated when experiencing the singing that uses classical American pop swing and musical songs (including *The Star Spangled Banner*). He then explains his improvisational method in that he will pause between each sentence and that may have to perform some of them more than once to get the phrasing correct.

When considering Baldessari's declared intention together with the 1969 marker for the consolidation of the precepts on Conceptual Art in the east coast, two considerations come to the foreground. The first concerns the polemical debate between aesthetic approaches between the two coasts, stereotypically 'acted out' by Holt/Smithson in *East Coast/West Coast* (see later in the text). The second attributes to Baldessari's performance a certain droll 'literalness' or honesty in

reminding his (Western) public of this body of work that has been consolidated elsewhere four years before and whose legacy cannot be ignored. On the other hand, his 'tribute' is critical rather than neutral and the irony is complete:

Baldessari's droll and demure persona seated in front of the camera in casual attire and holding a bunch of papers has more the appearance of a church devotee than a pop performer.

This performance sets out to seduce, the 'failure' implicit in the project comes from a sense of despondency in the delivery. The songs are barely in tune and the almost monotone singer does not project his voice as he appears to be casually improvising. In fact he announces beforehand he may have to do some of them more than once, as the words might not fit the tune at the first attempt. The notion of words (= the laws of conceptual art) fitting a tune represents the formal kernel of how the polemic is set up, as in fact symbolically an unfit music is undoing the words or the (transcendent) law is subjugated by a malfunctioning (human) juke-box.

In the performance the two sets of codifications clash: a theoretical manifesto and popular songs. And the clash has repercussions in that it generates subordination: in 'fitting' the words to the tunes the text is undermined. The terms of the manifesto become a mere pretext for the singing and are lost in the vacuous poetry of popular lyrics. The gravitas of the law in LeWitt's manifesto is subverted by a merry-go-round of songs. Each time a new statement is introduced by a new tune and given the brevity of some of the statements the singing itself becomes absurdly fragmented like an haphazard search on an FM radio station. At the same time the familiarity of the tunes as a whole locates the performance in a pop art context diametrically opposed to LeWitt's original intentions.

If in Kafka access to the law is denied, here the law is made available: 'the law can remain the law only insofar as it is written, that is, given a form which is universally at the disposal of everyone, always accessible and unchangeable'.²¹⁵ Baldessari (mis)performs the laws with his voice, as we need to remind ourselves that just as

²¹⁵ Dolar, "Kafka's Voices", 170.

the voice is required to implement the law, as a judicial decree or an injunction and can also thwart its authority.

The format of this piece is modelled on a 1956 album where Ella Fitzgerald sings Cole Porter, the first album of a series of eight known as the *Great American Songbook*, in other words the established national popular musical canon. Anecdotal evidence has it that when Porter heard the album he commented: 'My, what marvellous diction that girl has'.²¹⁶ (Despite this condescension the album was introduced in the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2000 and in 2003 was chosen by the Library of Congress to be added to the National Recording Registry). Cole Porter's use of words undermining as 'diction' uses speech as critique of singing in a reversal of Baldessari's strategy.

What are the motivations for Baldessari's droll irreverence? It can be speculated that Baldessari is spurred by the East/West clash between US artists that was rife at the time: the two coasts adhered to such different models that this generated polarised stereotypes. In this light, this becomes a meta-conceptual exercise in the wake of a collaborative piece that was created in the same year of publication of LeWitt's *Sentences*. In fact in 1969 Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson made a 22 minute video, *East Coast, West Coast*, featuring the two artists in a humorous improvised conversation: Holt impersonates the intellectual New Yorker, while Smithson the laidback instinct-driven Californian. Sixteen minutes into the film, Holt is heard asserting 'we are not afraid of a little conceptualisation', while unengaged Smithson talks about feelings and the pleasure of having all those seductive paints in front of him. Vexed by Holt's provocations he retorts: 'it's feeling, it's all bullshit what you are talking about, bullshit, bullshit [...] you are inhuman'. Mildly echoing Rousseau's ideals, this deadpan mise en scène stages a critique of the self-confinement and reductionism inherent in the North American debates.

Baldessari's performance on the other hand embodies a more sophisticated approach in the part-acknowledgment (the tribute) of these normative precepts, which he then critiques through his haphazardly sung delivery. If Acconci's song is

²¹⁶ "Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ella_Fitzgerald_Sings_the_Cole_Porter_Songbook

deployed to parrot the mechanisms of an ineffable law, Baldessari's undoes the immanent law of the statements. Both songs are ventriloquial objects and in Jacques Attali's sense they are 'noise' in that as sound they resist the fixity of organised prescribed code (language or music). In Attali's apocalyptic words:

There is no communication possible between men any longer, now that the codes have been destroyed, including even the code of exchange in repetition. We are all condemned to silence – unless we create our own relation with the world and try to tie other people into the meaning we thus create. This is what composing is.²¹⁷

There is a bold sense of the possibility of agency in Attali's statement about composing and paradoxically what these artists are doing is composing through reiteration, and at the same time their law breaking contribution reverberates as an act of resistance in Deleuze's sense.

Undisciplined Choir

Where *Mi Piace* insisted on the normative regime that the singing voice is subjected to in the context of musical training, with choral singing it becomes even more apparent how training regimes can also be conceived in socio-political terms, beyond a formal-aesthetic domain. In this final section the attention moves from the subversive solo performer to the unconventional deployment of a chorus. The ventriloquial object is *Everything's Gonna Be* (2008) a video work by Katarina Zdjelar, featuring a precariously self-managed chorus. The resulting fragmentation calls into play 'points of speech and audition': spectatorship, history and the production of collective memory will be developed in a discussion that follows a Foucauldian approach (Garnett).

Where a solo singer (not only in a pop or rock context but also in classical performances) can be seen to embody an idea of self-expression and individuality contained within the parameters of the aesthetic training – and what constitutes a

²¹⁷ Attali, 134.

'natural' trained voice is in itself a complex conflicted notion manifest in the tension between nature and artifice according to relatively arbitrary assessment criteria – it becomes evident how with choral singing the collective aspect has to suppress individual expression in favour of disciplined conformity.

Two aspects are at play when considering choral singing: one is the role (political, subversive, ritualistic, oppressive, celebratory) that the singing can be seen to perform and that cannot be divorced from institutional or collective bodies (church, school, the football ground, the political party); the other is the disciplinary practice that is involved in order to sanction the outcome of choral singing as an established practice (not in the instance of spontaneous collective outbursts). By considering choral training under a Foucauldian tradition, as Liz Garnett proposes by scrutinizing the prescriptive literature addressed to choral directors, it becomes apparent how bodies become structured by the discipline of singing and how this has wide repercussions in constituting the boundaries of identity and social relations.²¹⁸

To this extent, and for the purpose of this discussion that insists on the places where slippages occur and liminality defies normative boundaries, it will be interesting to place Garnett's findings published in 2004 next to Zdjelar's video *Everything's Gonna Be* presented in the 2009 Venice Biennale. According to Garnett, before the symbolic value assigned to a choral performance, there is a discipline of the body:

'Singing in a choir is a regime of the body' is the opening sentence of Garnett's essay and it encapsulates the project of considering choir practice in an ideologically ridden domain that extends beyond the leisurely vocational activity of singing. Unlike other more spontaneous forms of collective singing, choir singing is directed and contained within the boundaries of a (disciplinary) practice that relies on issues of social inclusivity, yet these elements in Garnett's

²¹⁸ Liz Garnett, "Choral Singing as Bodily Regime," *IRASM* 36, issue 2 (2005): 249-269.

words: 'seek to disguise themselves by grounding their dictates in discourses of the natural and the universal'.²¹⁹

This aspect becomes much more insidious than when considering the speaking voice whose conformity, or lack of, to standards of pronunciation acknowledges geographic and sociological differences between individuals as a given. And when standard RP is implemented, it is evident and justified by the professional role of the speaker: with choral singing a group must strive to conform to a singular mode of expression. Garnett considers the technologies in place and points out:

how musical practices can be simultaneously independent from and constructed within the power structures of day-to-day social relations: while the mechanisms that regulate choral behaviour index overtly political axes of identity such as class, education level and regionality, they do so with an agenda that is more focused on the transformation than on the exclusion of the individual.²²⁰

Choral singing presents the interesting problem of considering the hypothetical shape of a 'typical' singing voice as opposed to the 'extraordinary' or singular singing voice of the individual; since these practices are couched in the pragmatics of inclusivity of funding bodies their success ought to aspire to a critical evaluation that goes beyond implementation and leisure. Garnett scrutinises the literature available to Anglo Saxon conductors between 1914 and 2003 and identifies common themes and problematic areas from the behavioural expectations of the participants to questions of repertoire and their cultural significance.

Schematically, the trajectory of Garnett's analysis reveals a problematic concern with notions of the natural and the universal applied to the singing voice leading to apolitical, limited and totalitarian descriptions of what choral singing entails; to this extent some dictates are justified simply arbitrarily, others by a paradigm rooted in science. The second level of analysis identifies in the prescriptive boundaries of choral singing four main categories: bodily control, definition of social identities,

²¹⁹ Garnett, 249.

²²⁰ Garnett, 250.

discrimination against other genres, moral attitudes of a singer. Consequently, these very specific technologies appear to overdetermine the boundaries of choral practice:

...as a result, it is not possible to separate out those behaviours that are conceived in terms of cultural political axes of identity (race, class, education level, regionality) from those who are purely technical or musical. The bodily, the moral, the social and the generic are inextricably intertwined in defining what constitutes choral singing, and ostensibly pragmatic statements of good practice, when placed in their broader intertextual web of reference, are rarely neutral with reference to the operations of power in wider culture.²²¹

Finally Garnett emphasises the strategies of boundary policing that appear to insist on the individuals' transformation rather than exclusion (like previous musical experience, accents or the need to conform to accepted styles) in favour of a supposed universality. Of course this policing is implemented as a 'technology of the self' in Foucauldian terms, where it is the individuals who appear to effect their own changes through the group dynamic; in addition these choral 'instructions' affect individuals' bodies as well as interiorities.

Garnett reminds us that a Foucauldian methodology implies 'not claiming a greater or more privileged explanatory power than the knowledge system it investigates, but it does seek to make explicit the operations of power that this knowledge system suppresses'.²²² This is an ethos shared by ventriloquial objects which, by introducing a conflict and duplicity in the intended failure to achieve a harmonious whole or the resistance to embrace a formally and contextually coherent proposition, speak out of 'the operations' that would otherwise remain concealed; *Everything's Gonna Be* makes an interesting contemporary intervention in the light of the above considerations.

²²¹ Garnett, 262.

²²² Garnett, 252.

The video does not address traditional choral practice as it lacks a conductor and is set in a domestic environment. It features a group of middle-aged individuals (based in a small Norwegian town as we are told by the literature) whose performance constitutes the process of learning a song by John Lennon. Just as in *Voicings* the learning process features as the outcome and it is utilised to open up questions of what would be the desired outcome and why this outcome is sought: in other words it critiques the political significance of performing a text.

This calls into question considerations on the text itself. The song undergoing practice is 'Revolution' by John Lennon, which appeared in the 1968 album *The Beatles*, commonly known as 'The White Album' and which sanctioned the break up of the group as each song is authored by an individual band member. This text allegorically stands for the dissolution of a collective and fragmentation on the one hand, and on the other for a call to radical change. As the fragmentation is echoed by the lack of cohesion and control of the group of singers, how do we relate to these performers? They are white middle-aged people in a domestic middle-class environment in a provincial Northern European place that could equally be many other places. This static generic context jars with a 'script' that is historically specific and calls for political change and the subversion of a status quo that in itself is conflicted and utopian because simultaneously radical and non-violent.

Frans-Willem Korsten in his review of the video comments:

Those familiar with Revolution, and the scream with which it starts, will still hear Lennon's voice through the choir's harmonious tranquillity. This highlights the scripted-ness of the voices. [...] Often, the individuals singing with the choir appear lost, struggling with the words. Intensely looking at something that we cannot see, searching for something for which they cannot find a match. This something is the text, scripted. This is the script that these individual characters are trying firstly to follow, then to incorporate, and finally *to become one with*.²²³

²²³ My italics; Korsten Franz-Willem, "Everything's Gonna Be: Tragedy and the Script of History", *C_M_L archive*, <http://c-m-l.org>.

From Korsten's contribution, we can see how through this aesthetic deployment of a choir, the trope reverberates and expands into, collective, nationality, humanity, and that the 'script' implicates ideas of historical agency.

Korsten's reading takes its cue from the song as a script for history and identifies in this work a successful attempt at enacting the state or modality of modern history and, more specifically, modern tragedy. He quotes Georg Lukács and his view of the fundamental irony of history's reliance on contingency, and how coincidentally an individual might be caught in a tragic turn of events. When defining tragedy, the references turn to ancient Greece and a mode of re-staging that has become obsolete in contemporary terms since after the holocaust tragedy as a genre has become obsolete – the survivors can only be caught in trauma and trauma implies remaining in the present-ness of the horrific events without the possibility of gaining a historical perspective. Consequently, tragedy can only exist at a level of representation where the role of the onlooker becomes problematised as external; yet, if tragedy does occur in reality, representation must be also a form of reality, only somewhat distinct. Its mode relies on a form of re-staging 'that creates a quasi-tragedy or retro-tragedy'.²²⁴

For Korsten this video work is a form of tragedy where individuals are caught in history. Whilst 'witnessing the wrong history' they are unable to become the subjects of history: 'their way of being caught in history consists in their inability to escape the position of being historicised before even having become present [...] their eyes are fixed on what will never truly become theirs'.²²⁵ Kosten's reading of this piece as a metaphor of historical modality can be integrated with the previous concerns about time, historiography and the present point of audition of the spectator.

In addition, the reference to the role of the gaze, itself emblematic of a historical perspective or subject positioning, is also present in Garnett's analysis. She refers to the gaze of the conductor whose eye contact is a necessary tool to enforce

²²⁴ Korsten, <http://c-m-l.org>.

²²⁵ Korsten, <http://c-m-l.org>.

discipline and monitor auditory outcomes, and she adds that it also serves to intrude into the singer's sense of interiority. Yet, authoritarianism in Garnett gives way to a hegemonic interpretation (the Gramscian position as well as Foucauldian in *Discipline and Punish*) resulting in the ultimate self-policing of the group.

The synchronic approach to history in Garnett is not incompatible with the historical interpretation in that Korsten describes a historical anachronism as metaphor as well as problematising the present. Perhaps the rift or discrepancy that these incongruous performers relay is less of an existential nature specific to their own socio-geographic identity but more of a political historical commentary of the juxtaposition of two moments of history (1968 and 2008) revealing the incongruity of the past in relation to a present determined by capitalist market values. Here, ironically, the song refrain ventriloquises the capitalist mantra in the self-perpetuation of its own status quo, the need to relax and have faith - in the self-regulatory values of capital.

Even considering the significance of the song in 1968, one finds another level of incoherence in relation to its 'revolutionary' role in its musical and political context, where The Beatles were criticised for being the least political band of their era, especially vis-a-vis their nemesis The Rolling Stones, with Mick Jagger and Keith Richards noticeable in the media actively engaged in anti-establishment protest. There are many levels in which by using *Revolution* the artist is able to signify failure, be it historical, political or social.

The chorus in *Everything* achieves the display of failure to comply to cohesion and the analysis by Garnett provides the means to show how. By bringing to the fore questions of the natural and the universal imposed by institutionalised choral singing, the accented and tentative voices of the group subvert the former category while the choice of repertoire thus mis-performed critically highlights the globalised nature of repertoires.

In terms of the prescriptive boundaries imposed by institutional choral singing (bodily control, definition of social identities, discrimination against other genres, moral attitudes of a singer) *Everything* is strongly indicative of its precisely defined social context; in fact the video goes one step further in announcing the presence

and failure of its hegemonic status. Here there is no conductor, the policing relies on the group that has already achieved apparent homogeneity (class, age, background) and by the fact that it takes place in the domestic space, the ultimate institutionalisation brought 'home'. Yet, despite all conditions being in place, the cohesion does not exist in the singing, the chorus fails to produce the naturalised universal, and adherence to the script (of history and of global market) slips away technically and contextually.

These individuals have existed across these two periods and have been caught in the inevitability of a history that has taken its course. But the unglamorous appearance of characters and locations, along with the Norwegian native language and context, provides a critical distancing where not only history resonates, but where the very notion of leisure (as singing together) is undermined. These bodies are one in the incongruity of not becoming one, the discipline of the choir fails and the ideological role of collective singing becomes meaningless.

With ventriloquial singing comes an array of methodologies displaying a purposeful blurring of formal conventions: in Attali's sense we 'hear' the noise of 'code breaking'. This noise can be used to undermine the mechanism's ineffable laws or to disrupt immanent legislations; it might help to focus on the conventional role of singing in relation to the apparatus; it could poise itself to question the institutional role of singing or the nature of singing as leisure. Yet all these strategies can be considered in the context of a broader question, one that considers the role of history, language and the legitimization of power and that ultimately demands *viva voce* to reconsider the notion of individual agency in its historical context.

CONCLUSION

MUVE was born out of the need to create a framework to work with the voice across aesthetic practices. I used the metaphor of ventriloquism to create a critical device that I named ventriloquial object. I was attracted by the complexity offered by the practice of ventriloquism and I was also seduced by the relational potential of this metaphor, suggesting a number of complex dynamics between subject/s and audience. The premise of artificiality behind the performance became a valued asset and my version of ventriloquism rescued it from its connotations of deceit.

This framework had to accommodate a use of the voice that, unlike speech, is not limited by linguistic signification. The verbal and the vocal are two overlapping axes that challenge a paradigm, which assumes that subjectivity cannot exist outside language. Ventriloquial objects perform a critical function where form and ideology operate in tandem. In MUVE the reader journeys via the objects through different critical paradigms. The journey through the three 'galleries' of MUVE are organised according to the three overarching themes that for me evidence a problematic relationship between the verbal and the vocal: the relationship between voice and script; unorthodox forms of translation affected by the vocal and the subversive power of singing.

I celebrate the fact that the voice defies being defined. It spills and asserts its prominent position across many disciplines, like philosophy, music, phonetics, psychology, anthropology, and more. Philosopher Adriana Cavarero acknowledges this quality of the voice:

It is precisely the voice as voice, in its multiple manifestations, that orients an investigation that recuperates – but also puts into crisis – the specificity of various canonical disciplines.²²⁶

My film *Voicings* has contributed to academic debates in national and international conferences, whose subjects covered: performance art, applied theatre, sociology, anthropology, sound in film and translation.

²²⁶ Cavarero, *For More*, 12.

When I made *Voicings* I devised a formal strategy that created a distancing effect. I deliberately intended to avoid generating empathy toward my topic because such response for me creates a disassociation that contributes to the process of othering (the sick other, the starving other, the war stricken other, are all subjectivities exploited by sensationalist media). As the film was underway the research was growing in tandem. These processes mutually affected each other in the sense that through *Voicings* I was able to think and articulate issues upon which I would then expand.

For instance, my choice of utilising the writers' errors, to privilege them and make them stand for the missing writers, made me consider further questions on the role of linguistics and psycholinguistics. Theories of language apprehension contributed to my understanding as to why the actors in *Voicings* struggle to enunciate incorrect expressions. Readings on structural linguistics became the route to address the role of the inner voice (mistakenly assumed as silent verbalisation in one's head) and its role in thought process. While exploring Russian formalists' ideas about how thinking operates, I was able to put forward some substantiated views that thought process is not entirely contained in language. Discovering that the inner voice is a form of thinking 'in pure meaning'²²⁷ led me to align the artwork with this syncretic process. This argument against the all encompassing role of language underscores the project and gives me an opportunity to substantiate my objection to a post-structuralist paradigm that dominated critical theory for many years.

I was already familiar with Silverman's ideas and particularly with the question of isomorphism in classical cinema, where a (female) voice had to match her body to create a coherent 'picture'. For this reason I deliberately avoid naturalistic synchronised speech, as you can experience in the works submitted. Yet, working with *Voicings* made me reconsider Silverman's ideas, particularly when it comes to Benveniste's notion of the chasm between language as a structure and the individual material body. In the film for me the errors become the material evidence of the living bodies, marking their presence in a powerful way, and signifying dissent by not complying with a standardised language. The presence of the errors is

²²⁷ Vygotsky, see p. 97 of this writing.

uncomfortable just as the political position of the migrants is. The conflict between body and structure is played out at the political level of subject and norm. It is important that the writers remain invisible and only manifest as the actors' hurdle in the action of toiling to unlearn their own language.

The area of alienation in language is further developed in chapter II with ideas of a deterritorialized language (originally from Deleuze represented via Byg) and a translation practice that embraces the idea of a productive failure (Benjamin). In addition Byg's arguments using ideas from Brecht and Adorno applied to the work of Straub/Huillet enabled me to develop this area further. This alternative practice of translation opened a territory where the verbal was undermined in favour of the vocal, for instance with the emphasis on prosody.

This in turn informed my choices in making *The News Editor*. I had already made an attempt to make a work on the subject of lie detectors as bogus technology based on a recent BBC news item. The attempt featured my background research on the subject but did not come to fruition because somehow the work had to 'perform' its own incongruity rather than narrate it. In the end it was Straub/Huillet's direct and exclusive use of text and Huang's digital intervention on a translation that influenced my direction. The voice of the performer sounds synthetic by virtue of the edits while her body challenges the viewer with a direct address: the incongruous body echoes the incongruity of the message told directly to the spectator.

The question of spectatorship and hermeneutics underpins this project and gains momentum - after all the audience is the necessary component to the ventriloquist's performance. The notion of a sound apparatus has to instigate a framework for enquiry that questions 'point of speech and audition'. Who wrote the script uttered by that body and to what avail? Whose voice am I hearing? What is my listening position, how do I relate to the content of the utterance? These questions modelled on a phenomenology of sound are also political and ideological questions: as demonstrated in *Voicings*, aesthetic choices and ideology are intertwined.

The position of the spectator is considered via a non-linear historiography concerned with the role of individual and collective memory, and questions how that memory is produced (Adorno, Foucault). The culture industries play an active role

either in a classically intellectual domain (Adorno) or in their countercultural role (Attali). This discussion stretches across chapter II and III and resonates in my two films featured in these chapters: if *The News Editor* re-presents a news item by challenging the gaze of the spectator, *Mi Piace* uses the aural to problematise the 'censored' space outside the frame.

Mi Piace refashions the experience of a singing rehearsal that was shot as a single take. It attempts to re-tell its history in order to question the power dynamics between performer and director. The narrative is complex and open; speech overlap and still imagery are used to avoid the fetishisation of the female singing body (Silverman). Told via its complex and layered soundscape, the film implicates its spectator in deciphering the narrative, and by doing so their ability to identify a 'point of audition' becomes heightened. In a sense, the combination of rigor and openness that reverberates in this film on the voice is a quality sought in this project. At a superficial level, it may appear paradoxical that the gagged singing at the end of *Mi Piace* comes from a suggestion by the performer. On the other hand, this creative, unorthodox translation, affecting the vocal element of the voice, can be read in a Deleuzian sense of resistance. My collaborative contribution to the performer's gesture consists in truncating her sentence to prevent her from wishing to die ('vorrei morir') - with a sound edit that leaves her voice echoing with an open wishing ('vorrei') as the final word.

For me MUVE has succeeded in shaping a framework for an applied use of the voice across aesthetic disciplines. The ventriloquial object has been informed by the metaphor of ventriloquism and developed via the notion of the filmic apparatus, devising ideas such as that of a point of speech and audition. It applies not only to the moving image but also to performance based practices and the expanded field of sculpture. Furthermore, in its use of the verbal and the vocal, the ventriloquial model 'put into crisis' - to use Cavarero's expression - naturalistic uses of the utterance that do not problematise the voice apparatus.

The critical interventions deployed in the journey through MUVE show how the 'the voice, as voice, in its multiple manifestations' (in Cavarero's words again) has the ability to engage in specific critical debates across disciplines. The development of specific paradigms, straddling history, philosophy, linguistics, film theory and

science, has constructed rich foundations for my contribution to the field and for future research and development of my practice as an artist.

In exiting MUVE the reader no longer has the ingenuousness that the original visitor had: the inaugural introduction of a framework and its guided experience have now come to fruition.

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