View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by ScholarlyCommons@Penn

Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies

Volume 2

Article 1

2019

"SONUS QUI NON EST VOX:" SOUND AND VOICE IN THE BODY POLITIC

Alison Cornish

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant

Part of the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons, Italian Language and Literature Commons, and the Medieval History Commons

Recommended Citation

Cornish, Alison (2019) ""SONUS QUI NON EST VOX:" SOUND AND VOICE IN THE BODY POLITIC," *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Journal of Dante Studies*: Vol. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol2/iss1/1

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol2/iss1/1
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Bibliotheca Dantesca, 2 (2019): 1-25

"SONUS QUI NON EST VOX:"
SOUND AND VOICE IN THE BODY POLITIC

ALISON CORNISH, New York University

From the knocking on the gate after Macbeth's murder of Duncan to the sound of Ugolino's teeth on the skull of his enemy, the suicide's violent excretion of words and blood, Calvino's "king who listens," the Sicilian bull and the heavenly talking eagle, this essay considers the difference between the sound made by a voice and sounds that are merely instrumental or artificial as a feature of the body politic indicative of tyranny or justice.

Keywords: Sound, Voice, Dante, Body Politic

In her essay, "'When Every Noise Appalls Me:' Sound and Fear in *Macbeth* and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*," Evelyn Tribble points to a "complex acoustic pattern," a soundscape, in Shakespeare's plays, in which "off-stage sounds were particularly likely to be noted in promptbooks and in stage directions." In *Macbeth* these include things like "thunder and lightning," "a Bell rings," "a flourish," "an alarum." Tribble remarks that because of an 1823 essay by Thomas De Quincey the sound of MacDuff's knocking on the gate after Macbeth and his wife have done their fell deed "is probably the best known of any in Shakespeare."[1]

> Whence is that knocking?
> How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
> …
> I hear a knocking
> …
> Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would thou couldst!
> …
> Knock,

---

[1] Evelyn Tribble, "'When Every Noise Appalls Me:' Sound and Fear in *Macbeth* and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*" *Shakespeare* 1 (2005): 75-90. Tribble (81) also quotes film theorist Michel Chion who observes how sound penetrates the body: "we have no ear-lids to close it off: '[…] there is always something about sound that overwhelms and surprises us no matter what.'" Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 33.

> knock, knock! Who's there, i' th' name of
> Belzebub?
> …
> Knock,
> knock! Who's there, i' th'other devil's
> name?[2] (*Mac.* II. 2-3)

In that brief essay, De Quincey observed that, "Murder, in ordinary cases, where the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror," but a poet "must throw the interest on the murderer" on the raging "storm of passion, jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look."

> Hence it is that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced: the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.[3]

At the end of *Macbeth*, it is the off-stage "cry of women" that announces the death of Lady Macbeth, to which the protagonist now fails to react (Tribble [82] calls it a "lack of somatic response"). And despite the fact that this event spurs his famous speech about life as mere "sound and fury, signifying nothing," the sounds of the scene are all significant, prompting him to ask what they mean.

> *A cry of within, of women*
>
> **MACBETH**
> What is that noise?
>
> **SEYTON**
> It is the cry of women, my good Lord.
> *Exit*
>
> **MACBETH**
> I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
> The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
> To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
> Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir,

---

[2] *The Arden Shakespeare*, eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thomson and David Scott Kasten (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson & sons, 1988), 779-780.

[3] Thomas De Quincey, "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," in De Quincey, *The Collected Writings*, ed. David Masson (London: A. & C. Black, 1897), 391.

> As life were in't; I have supp'd full with horrors:
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once start me.
> *Re-enter SEYTON*
> Wherefore was that cry?
>
> **SEYTON**
> The Queen, my Lord, is dead.[4]

Unlike the bell that is rung just before Duncan's murder and the knocking at the door immediately afterwards, the cry of women is the sound of voices, even if inarticulate ones. They herald bad news even before it is given precise shape through the tongue of a messenger.

Another example of the hellish horror of sound, following upon a parenthesis in which the poet, in the words of De Quincey, "throws interest on the murderer" on the raging "storm of passion, jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look," is the episode of Ugolino at the bottom of Dante's Hell. The Count's monologue ends not with the awfully ambiguous, but nonetheless articulate line—"then fasting did more than grief could do" ("Poscia, più che 'l dolor, poté 'l digiuno" [*Inferno* 33.75])—but with the sound of his teeth hitting hard against the skull of his enemy.

> riprese 'l teschio misero co' denti,
> che furo a l'osso, come d'un can, forti. (*Inf.* 33.77-78)[5]
>
> He took up again the wretched skull with his teeth, that were loud against the bone, like those of a dog.

The parenthesis of heightened drama, as De Quincey would say, is closed; and the ineluctable reality of everyday life in Hell resumes.

The whole episode of Ugolino pivots around speaking and silence, what it is possible or preferable to say and what is unspeakable. It is the promise of spreading infamy for his enemy that pulls Ugolino off his bloody repast ("se le mie parole esser dien seme / che frutti infamia" [33.7-8]), stopping, fastidiously, to wipe his mouth on the hair of the half-eaten head before he speaks. The poet, for his part, has promised to keep his side of the bargain: "if that with which I speak does not dry up" ("se quella con ch'io parlo non si secca" [32.139]). What *is* that feminine thing—*quella*—

---

[4] *Macbeth* V.5, 795.

[5] Citations of the *Divine Comedy* are from Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, ed. Nicola Fosca (Canterano: Aracne, 2018). [Translations mine]

"with which I speak"? Is it his mouth ("*bocca*"), like that of Ugolino, eternally employed now in eating, not speaking? Or is it something that survives his mouth, something we would call "voice," that he can rely upon to speak even to us, continuing to spread the promised seed of Ruggieri's infamy, if it has not in the meantime "dried up"?

By "voice" we mean not just the articulate sound Dante could once make with his anatomical equipment, but the written trace of that voice, what Stephen Nichols called "the sign of the voice that survives the voice once it falls silent."[6] Even before our present, sonic age, where audible voices can be as enduring as written ones, voice was not even then, thanks to the technology of writing, as mortal as its original, fragile sounding-equipment; it could survive the shift in medium, provided it always had a new performer to animate a set of verbal signs. The reason we still call a dead author's voice a voice is because it is associated with, it belonged to, a particular historical body. It was not the sound of an instrument used by a living being, but *of* that living being itself. When Ugolino turns back to eating, we no longer hear his voice: rather he makes significant sound by means of the bone of his victim. Here the body of another becomes his sounding instrument.[7]

What is the difference between voice and sound? Both have to do with bodies, and even violence, since, as a thirteenth-century commentator on Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul* explains:

> For the generation of sound [three things] are required: something hit, something doing the hitting, and a medium. The body that initiates the vibration is as much an active cause of the sound as the body that vibrates, because the first is the active cause of sound in so far as it breaks the air, yet the vibrating body holds the air and does not let it get out easily. Air is the subject of that breaking and that breaking is sound. [8]

---

[6] Stephen Nichols, "Augustine and the Troubadour Lyric" in *Vox Intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, eds. C. B. Pasternack and A. N. Doane (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1991), 137-161, 152.

[7] This is also the case with Master Adam, the counterfeiter, whose belly, deformed by circulatory disease into the shape of a musical instrument ("fatto a guisa di lëuto"), is played not as a stringed instrument, but like a drum, when Sinon the Greek punches him in the belly ("Quella sonò come fosse un tamburo") *Inf.* 30.49, 103 .

[8] Simon de Faversham (c.1260–1306), *Quaestiones CXIV in Aristotelis libros de anima* [Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 10 135, fols. 87r–118r, second half fourteenth century], in *Vox atque Sonus. Studien zur Rezeption der Aristotelischen Schrift "De anima" und ihre Bedeutung für die Musiktheorie*, ed. Michael Wittmann, 2 vols. (Pfaffenweiler, 1987), 2, 38: "In generatione soni requiruntur percussus et percutiens et medium. Et tam verberantis quam verberatus est causa activa soni, quia corpus verberans est causa activa soni in quantum frangit aerem,

Sound is precipitated by violence, produced out of what Algazel called a vehement percussion or separation.[9] Although the act of eliciting the sonorous potential out of matter is natural, the conditions of sound-making essentially require violence.[10] Indeed for the commentators on the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, sound is a suffering (*passio*) of the air, caused by the collision of solid bodies.[11] Voice (*vox*) is a special kind of sound, Aristotle specified, emitted by an animate being accompanied by some sort of image, intent, or desire to signify something either naturally or conventionally.[12] The soul is the principal agent of the voice, using air as its instrument. The soul is the *percutiens* (the striker), the vocal chords are what is

---

corpus autem verberatum retinet aerem et non permittit ipsum faciliter ire. Aer ergo est subjectum illius fractionis et cetera talis fractio fit sonus."

[9] Algazel, *Physica* 4, *De anima vegetabili et animali et humana* 3.3, in *Algazel on the Soul*, ed. Eva St. Clair, *Traditio* 60 (2005): 47-84, 64: "Sonus vero est quiddam quod fit in aere propter undationem accidentem aeri ex motu fortissimo proveniente ex vehementi aliquorum inter se percussione vel separatione. Tunc autem contingit ex percussione cum concurrunt sibi fortiter duo corpora, et aer qui erat inter ea excluditur violenter; tunc vero contingit ex separatione, cum movetur aer violenter inter duo corpora quae separantur, et fit sonus cum commotus aer pervenit usque quo pervenit motus commotionis." See also Albertus Magnus, "Quid sit sonus?"*Summa de creaturis* 2.24.1, in Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia*, ed. August Borgnet, 38 vols. (Paris, 1896), 35, 233.

[10] Albertus Magnus, "Utrum generatio soni sit naturalis vel violenta?" *Summa de creaturis* 2.24.3, 35, 236: "Illa est falsa, quod omnes conditiones circumstantes generationem soni, sunt violentae. Sunt enim conditiones soni ex parte materiae: actus enim sonativus educitur de potentia materiali, et proportio illius ad ipsam non est violenta, sed naturalis. Sed verum est, quod conditiones agentis violentae sunt."

[11] Pietro d'Abano, *Expositio Problematum* 11.1, quoted in Charles Burnett, "Sound and its Perception in the Middle Ages," in *Second Sense*: *Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgement from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Charles Burnett, Michael Fend and Penelope Gouk (London, 1991), 43-70, 66 : "Est autem sonus passio vel accidens ex motione aeris causata collisione corporum solidorum auditu proprie percepta."

[12] Aristotle, *De anima*, 402b5-6 and 420b31-2, *Translatio antiqua* in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on* De anima 2.18, in *Doctoris angelici divi Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, eds. Stanislas Fretté and Paul Maré, 33 vols. (Paris, 1875), 24, 111: "Vox autem sonus quedam animati […]. Non enim omnis sonus animalis, vox est, sicuti diximus. Est enim et lingua sonare, et sicut tussientes. Sed oportet, et animatum verberans et cum imaginatione aliqua. Significativus eni quidam sonus est vox, et non respirati aeris, sicut tussis." An anonymous commentator adds that the image accompanying the sound should come with the desire to signify either naturally or conventionally: Anonymous, *Quaestiones super Aristotelis libros* De anima I-III [Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 3016, fols. 65r–162v, fourteenth century], in *Vox atque sonus*, 2, 90: "Ad hoc enim quod sonus dicatur vox seu dicatur fieri ab anima inquantum huius requiritur, quod sit cum ymagine et appetitu intendente ad aliquid significandum, quia omnis vox est significans naturaliter vel ad placitum."

struck (*percussum*), and breathed air is the medium of the sound.[13] Pietro d'Abano, commentator on the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* explains that "voice is caused by the striking of the air breathed from the soul through the windpipe with the intention of signifying something."[14] Animals also have voice, through which they express happiness or sadness, comfort or discomfort, as does a barking dog.[15] What is necessary to voice is soul, even an animal soul. Although all living things have souls, not all of them have voice. Fish, for example, can make noise with their fins, but because they lack breath, Aristotle says, they are making sound but have no voice. There is a distinction then, not just between bodily voice and written traces, but between sounds made by means of instruments and voice that requires the breath of an animate being, not necessarily human.

In her 2014 review of scholarship since the 1990s addressing the status of the voice within, anthropologist Amanda Weidman gestures toward its "host of associations between voice and individuality, authorship, agency, authority, and power" and isolates "the idea of voice as guarantor of truth and self-presence, from which springs the familiar idea that the voice expresses self and identity and that agency consists in having a voice."[16] All of these associations—the guarantee of truth and self-presence and the expression of self, identity, agency, authority and power—are discernible in the places where Dante highlights sound and voice. There is a further distinction worth making, and which I believe Dante makes, between a voice produced by the soul of a particular body with that body, and an instrumental sound—a sound that is not voice. This sound that is not voice can be, as we shall see, the opposite of voice, a hollow sound, and a reduction of the human to mere instrument, but Dante also proposes it as a metaphor for the political community. Contrary to the suspicion that the sonic and material qualities of voice have been erased by or subsumed into an abstract and silent logos, as we find in Adriana Cavarero and her followers, we find, in Dante, at least, a persistent concern for the mechanics of sound production, natural and artificial, even in the representation of the body politic in the abstract.

---

[13] Anonymus, *Quaestiones*, [Vat. lat. 3016], *Vox atque sonus*, cit., 2, 90-91: "Et dictis patet, quod in formatione vocis anima est principalis agens et utitur aere ut instrumento ad formandum vocem. […] Anima igitur in formatione vocis est percutiens et arteria percussum et aer respiratus est medium."

[14] Charles Burnett, "Hearing and Music in Book XI of Pietro d'Abano's *Expositio Problematum Aristotelis*" in *Tradition and Ecstasy: The Agony of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Ottawa, 1997), 153-190, 156.

[15] Blasius Pelacanus de Parma, *Vox atque Sonus*, 2, 116: "brutis animalibus inest vox, per quam solummodo explicant laetitiam aut tristitiam, seu conveniens seu disconveniens, sicut latrans canis." The harpies who live in the wood of the suicides are ambiguous part animal, part human beings; they too have voice, perched in the trees like birds, they make their "laments": "fanno lamenti in su li alberi strani" (*Inf.* 13.15).

[16] Amanda Weidman, "Anthropology and Voice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 37-51, 39: "The Western metaphysical and linguistic traditions have bequeathed us two powerful ideas about voice. One is the idea of voice as guarantor of truth and self-presence, from which springs the familiar idea that the voice expresses self and identity and that agency consists in having a voice. This is coupled with a second idea: that the sonic and material aspects of the voice are separable from and subordinate to its referential content or message, an assumption that underlies much of modern linguistic ideology."

Voice is a subset of sound. Not all sound is voice. This ancient philosophical distinction can be found even in a fourteenth-century musical treatise, contemporary with Dante, where we learn that harmonic music is the sound that is made by the sound that is voice, which is to say through the voices of men and animals. The sound that is voice is the sound of air reverberating with breath. It is audible to the sense of hearing, and it is only formed in "natural animal instruments," which Marchetto of Padua names as lung, throat, palate, tongue, front teeth, and lips, although some animals, like birds, can make sound without teeth. The indispensable instruments for the production of voice are lungs, throat, palate, and lips.[17] By contrast, the sound emitted by instruments, by stringed instruments, percussive instruments, and even by expressive musical instruments filled with human breath, is not voice.

> Sound that is not voice can be formed without natural instruments, with the breath or the impulse of air set in vibration alone, as is manifest in all artificial instruments in which sound is produced with some sort of breath – as in the trumpet and the organ. [18]

What we would call "instrumental" music Marchetto calls "organic," which is made by means of the sound that is not voice, even if it is produced by human breath, as in trumpets, pipes, organs, and the like.[19] What we would call "vocal" he calls "harmonic," produced by the sound that is voice—that is, by the voices of human beings or animals."[20] The sound that is voice is more perfect than the sound that is not voice. [21]

---

[17] *The Lucidarium of Marchetto of Padua: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. and ed. Jan W. Herlinger (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 68–106, ch. 9, 90-91: "DE SONO QUI EST VOX sonus aeris spiritu verberati, sensibilis auditu, solum in naturalibus instrumentis animalis formatus: Instrumenta enim naturalia vocis dicimus quod ad plus sunt sex, scilicet pulmo, guttur, palatum, lingua, dentes anteriores, et labia, licet sine quibusdam ex istis quedam animalia possint formare vocem, scilicet aves, que non habent dentes, sed necessaria instrumenta omnino ad formandam vocem sunt pulmo, guttur, palatum, et labia; sine istis enim sonus qui est vox nullatenus esse potest."

[18] *Lucidarium*, ch. 13, 98-99: "Sonus qui non est vox formari potest etiam sine naturalibus instrumentis, solum enim cum anhelitu et impulsu aeris verberati, sicut patet in omnibus instrumentis artificialibus in quibusdam enim fit talis sonus cum quodam anhelitu, sicut in tuba et organo."

In a much older and highly influential treatise on music, the sixth-century Roman senator Boethius wrote there were three kinds of music: *mundana, humana,* and *organica* or *instrumentalis.* Only the last of these is audible, because what Boethius seems to mean by *musica humana* is not vocal music as opposed to instrumental, but rather an inner harmony, an affective union between body and soul, in turn modelled on the music of the universe, the *musica mundana*, an a priori structure, or order, that underlies all being, which according to tradition was the harmony produced by the turning of the crystalline spheres that carried the planets and the stars. Audible music appeals to our senses precisely because of its resemblance to our inner *musica humana*, which Hugh of St. Victor in his *Didascalicon* describes as a "natural friendship by which the soul is bound to the body by incorporeal bond."[22]

This is the bond of natural friendship that is broken—betrayed, actually—in the act of suicide, and Dante dramatizes this in the thirteenth canto of the *Inferno* in the way the suicides speak. They have become trees who speak only when broken, with words and blood exiting the wound, like pent-up vapor escaping a burning log.

> Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
> da l'un de'capi, che da l'altro geme
> e cigola per vento che va via,
> sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme
> parole e sangue (*Inf.* 13.40-45)

---

[19] *Lucidarium*, ch. 12, 96-97: "Musica organica est, que fit per sonum qui non est vox, et tamen cum anhelitu hominis seu aeris fit, ut in tubis, cimellis, fistulis, organis, et hiis similibus."

[20] *Lucidarium*, ch. 8, 88-89: "Musica armonica est illa que fit per sonum qui est vox, hoc est per voces hominum et animalium."

[21] *Lucidarium*, ch. 13, 98-99: "Sonus qui est vox plus continet de perfectione quam sonus qui non est vox."

[22] Boethius, *De institutione musica* I.ii. Hugh of St. Victor, Didascalicon II.12, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). See Francesco Ciabattoni, *Dante's Journey to Polyphony*, 47-48, 92; Chiara Cappuccio, "Quando a cantar con organi si stea' (*Purg.* IX, 144). Riflessi danteschi della polemica contro la polifonia?" *Tenzone* 8 (2007): 31-64. On *musica humana*, see also Hyun-Ah Kim's recent *The Renaissance Ethics of Music: Singing, Contemplation and Musica Humana* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015).

> As from a green branch set on fire from one end, that groans from the other and creaks with the wind that is departing, in the same way from the broken splinter issued both words and blood.

In the uncured log thrown on the fire, the sound it produces is described as a meteorological event. Dry heat encountering moist cold produces a wind that then needs to escape from its confinement. It is, like all weather, a matter of flatulence. From the simile of the hissing log, Leo Spitzer concluded that "the language of the plant-men is mere *flatus vocis*, wind-begotten speech," that the genesis of this speech is a "purely material process" and, most memorably, that speech has become simply a matter of "bodily discharges"—an involuntary effluence of words out of the body, like blood.[23] It *escapes* from the body, providing relief, just as the suicide sought release by hoping to escape his own body, which had become a prison to his soul.

The suicide thus has a Platonic view of the soul: that it is simply "housed" or "clothed" or "imprisoned" by the body, from which it longs to be free – a view readily accessible even in the *Aeneid* where Anchises explains how souls in Hades are imprisoned in the dark prison of the body:

> ….neque auras
> dispiciunt clausae tenebris et carcere caeco
>
> Imprisoned in the darkness of the body
> They cannot see clearly heaven's air[24]

Pier delle Vigne was actually *in* a dark prison, accused of treason against the Emperor, where he was blinded and eventually killed himself by beating his head against the wall. Suicide appeared to be a way out. As he puts it, in one of the many convoluted phrases in his speech,

> L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,

---

[23] Leo Spitzer, "Speech and Language in Inferno XIII," *Italica* 19 (1942): 81-104, 89: "The fact that Dante chose to describe a hissing, guttering fire-log by way of characterizing the genesis of speech in his *uomini-piante* shows that he conceived this as representing a purely physical process: the issue of blood and cries is on the same low 'material' level as is the issue of sap and hissing sound from a fire-log. Indeed, the fact that we have to do with speech of a non-human order, with speech that is a matter of bodily discharges, was already suggested by the terrible line *usciva inseme parole e sangue*." See also Alison Cornish, "Words and Blood: Suicide and the Sound of the Soul (*Inferno* 13)," *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (2016): 1015-1026.

[24] *Aeneid* 6.733-734. The *Aeneid of* Virgil, Books 1-6, ed. R. D. Williams (London: MacMillan, 1972), 148. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1981), 185.

> credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
> ingiusto fece me contra me giusto. (*Inf.* 13.70-72)
>
> My mind, with disdainful gusto, believing to flee disdain by dying, made myself unjust against my just self.

These lines are remarkable for their splitting of the single self of Pier (*me contra me*) into guilty perpetrator and innocent victim and for the obvious impossibility of a disdainful soul to flee disdain by fleeing its body, since disdain and its effects reside in the soul itself.

For Aristotle, unlike for Plato, the soul is not a mere inmate or even the driver of the body, but its *substantial form*, which means it is completely and wholly in all of it. The soul is not simply housed, clothed, imprisoned or trapped by the body. As Thomas Aquinas explains in the *Summa Theologica*, some philosophers

> said that the entire nature of man is seated in the soul, so that the soul makes use of the body as an instrument, or as a sailor uses his ship: wherefore according to this opinion, it follows that if happiness is attained by the soul alone, man would not be balked in his natural desire for happiness, and so there is no need to hold the resurrection. But the Philosopher sufficiently destroys this foundation (*De anima* ii, 2), where he shows that the soul is united to the body as form to matter.[25]

Which means, as Thomas explains elsewhere, it is the soul that gives the material body its existence, "for the form is that through which a thing is the very thing that it is."[26] The relation of soul to body is precisely *not* that of a trumpet player to his trumpet, or a sailor to his ship, even if it is the soul that "makes the percussion" on the vocal chords in the formation of sound by means of inhaled air, because the soul is the substantial form of the body.[27] The body is what it is because of its soul, and is therefore a *sign* of it, not a container for it. Voice is not simply a sound the body makes or can be made to make. It is the sensible *sign* of the soul, the soul that *is* that body.

---

[25] *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed, 1920. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Online Edition Copyright © 2017 by Kevin Knight. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici, *Summa Theologica*, Supplementum, Quaestio 75, Art. 1, Respondeo, *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. edita*, vol 12, Tertia Pars Summae Theologiae (Rome: 1906), 170: "Quidam vero posuerunt totam hominis naturam in anima constare, ita ut anima corpore uteretur sicut instrumento, aut sicut nauta navi. Unde secundum hanc opinionem sequitur quod, sola anima beatificata, homo naturali desiderio beatitudinis non frustraretur. Et sic non oportet ponere resurrectionem. —Sed hoc fundamentum sufficienter Philosophus, in II *de Anima*, destruit, ostendens animam corpori sicut formam materiae uniri."

[26] Thomas Aquinas, *Questions on the Soul*, trans. James H. Robb (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984), 9.

[27] Anon., *Quaestiones super Aristotelis libros* De anima I-III. Vat lat 3016. 14th c. fols. 65r-162v, fol. 109v; *Vox atque Sonus*, 91: "Anima igitur in formatione vocis est

This broken relationship between body and soul is dramatized in Pier's production of speech. Words exit his split bark like sound escaping from a green log on the fire, like blood spurting from a wound. To sustain the dialogue he must however "blow hard" through his trunk to get more words to come out, for that wind to be changed into voice.

> Allor soffiò il tronco forte, e poi
> si convertì quel vento in cotal voce (*Inf.* 13.91-92)
>
> So the trunk blew hard, and then the wind was converted into such a voice

The soul in fact uses air, not the body, but air, as its instrument to produce voice. But inanimate things, even those inflated with human breath, can only have the semblance of voice.

> if anything inanimate is said to have a voice, it is by analogy, the way a flute or a lyre or other instruments are said, by analogy, to have voice.[28]

What Pier has now for a body is a hollow wooden casing into which he can force air to produce sound, a kind of musical instrument—a woodwind. The suicide, in his tree, like the suicidal, feels "trapped" or imprisoned inside a body that is a mere instrument, rather than the sign, the expression, the *signature* of his soul.

The suicide's desire for escape from the body, like air leaving a balloon, is, like all infernal desires, both granted and intensified by the eternal punishment. The suicides in Dante's Hell are the only ones who will not get their bodies back. Or rather, the suicide

---

percutiens et arteria percussum et aer respiratus est medium Deinde dicitur quae est in his partibus, quia licet anima sit tota in tota in toto, ut est forma substantialis, tamen secundum quod motiva principaliter est in corde sive secundum quod motum corporis." [Therefore in the formation of voice the soul is the one that makes the percussion and the chords are the thing struck and breathed air is the medium. Finally it is said that [the soul] is in these parts, because even though the soul is completely in all parts in the whole, as it is the substantial form, nonetheless insofar as it is the mover or movement of the body, it is principally in the heart.]

[28] Anon., *Quaestiones super Aristotelis libros* De anima I-III. Vat lat 3016. 14th c. fols 65r-162v, (fol. 109v); *Vox atque Sonus* cit., 88: "vox est sonus animati corporis[…]si aliquod inanimatum dicatur habere vocem hoc est secundum similitudinem, tamen sicut tibia et lir et alia instrumenta similitudine dicuntur habere vocem."

will get his body back, but he will not be able to "put it on." In other words, he will not be able to be incarnated by it: it will just drape over his branches like a lifeless body hanging from a tree, or as W. B. Yeats would say, "a tattered coat upon a stick."[29]

> Come l'altre verrem per nostre spoglie,
> ma non però ch'alcuna sen rivesta,
> ché non è giusto aver ciò ch'om si toglie.
> Qui le trascineremo, e per la mesta
> selva saranno i nostri corpi appesi,
> ciascuno al prun de l'ombra sua molesta. (*Inf.* 13.103-108)
>
> Like the others we will come for what we shed [the bodies we took off], but not so that any of us should be reclothed with them, because it is not just to have that which one takes from himself. Here we will drag them, and throughout the sad wood will our bodies be hung, each one from the thorn of its own wounded shade.

In treating his body as something that can be shed, the suicide rejects the essential identity of soul and body, which is what he in fact aims violently to break. The rupture between signifier (body) and signified (soul) is clearly cognate with the rupture between speech and belief central to this canto, a rupture that causes the character of Dante unwittingly to commit his own violence by raising his hand against the wounded soul.

> Cred' ïo ch'ei credette ch'io credesse
> che tante voci uscisser, tra quei bronchi,
> da gente che per noi si nascondesse.
> Però disse 'l maestro: 'Se tu tronchi
> qualche fraschetta d'una d'este piante,
> li pensier c'hai si faran tutti monchi.'
> Allor porsi la mano un poco avante
> e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
> e 'l tronco suo gridò: 'Perché mi schiante?' (*Inf.* 13.25-33)
>
> I believe that he believed that I believed that so many voices were coming out from among those trunks from people hidden from us. For that reason the master said, "If you break a twig from one of these plants, your thoughts you have will be all cut off. So I stretched out my hand a little and picked a little branch from a great thornbush, and its trunk cried out, "Why do you tear me apart?"

---

[29] W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," 9-12: "An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick, unless Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing / For every tatter in its mortal dress."

The character Virgil, rather incredibly, apologizes to the broken tree-soul on Dante's behalf, blaming his failure to believe not in the authority Virgil's words spoken just a moment ago, but in the third book of his epic poem where he recounts a similar scene of broken branches eliciting screams of pain (*Aeneid* III.13-65):

> 'S'elli avesse potuto creder prima,'
> rispuose 'l savio mio, 'anima lesa,
> ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima,
> non averebbe in te la man distesa;
> ma la cosa incredibile mi fece
> indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa' (*Inf.* 13.46-51)

> If he had been able to believe before, replied my sage, 'O wounded soul, what he had only seen with my rhyme, he would not have lifted his hand against you; but the incredible thing made me induce him to do something that weighs on me as well.'

When Pier swears by the new roots of his tree that he never broke faith with his lord, who was so worthy, he is essentially indicting the emperor Frederick II for having broken faith with *him*.[30]

> Per le nove radici d'esto legno
> vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
> al mio segnor, che fu d'onor sì degno (*Inf.* 13.73-75)

> By the new roots of this tree, I swear that I never broke faith with my lord, who was so worthy of honor.

And whether or not Pier is innocent of breaking faith with that lord— from whom, like St. Peter from Christ, he received the keys to lock and unlock his heart—he is certainly guilty of breaking faith with another, worthier Lord, who never breaks faith, that is, Christ.[31]

> Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi
> del cor di Federigo e che le volsi
> serrando e diserrando, sì soavi […] (*Inf.* 13.58-60)

> I am he who held both the keys to the heart of Frederick, and who turned them so smoothly, locking and unlocking […]

---

[30] *Inf.* 13.73-75: "Per le nove radici d'esto legno / vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede / al mio segnor, che fu d'onor sì degno." For the historical Pier's idolatrous eulogy of Frederick II, equating him with Christ, see Stephany, "Pier della Vigna's Self-fulfilling Prophecies."
[31] *Inf.* 13.58-59: "Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi/del cor di Federigo."

In fact his lifeless body, after the resurrection will eventually hang from the tree, an unmistakable iconographic echo of the fate of Judas.[32] At the root of the suicide's despair is a deafness to the Incarnation, the Divine Word become flesh, which Augustine compares to our own acts of speech:

> Just as when we speak, in order that what we have in our minds may enter through the ear into the mind of the hearer, the word which we have in our hearts becomes an outward sound and is called speech; and yet our thought does not lose itself in the sound, but remains complete in itself, and takes the form of speech without being modified in its own nature by the change: so the Divine Word, though suffering no change of nature, yet became flesh, that He might dwell among us. [33]

Because voice, the *authentic* voice, is a sign of soul, speech is essentially the incarnation of the divine in the human.

In her 2003 book, *A più voci*, translated as *For More than One Voice* by Paul Kottman in 2005, Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero makes a political claim about the embodied nature of voice, that it presents a unique individual needing to be rescued from formalized, universal, abstract, and also *written* systems such as the law, governmental arrangements, tradition that might metaphysically efface that voice. Her book begins with a retelling, in her own voice, of a story by Italo Calvino, "The King Listens" [*Un re in ascolto*]:

> In the palace, which, like 'a great ear,' has 'pavilions, ducts, shells, labyrinths,' every sound is a sign of either fidelity or betrayal. There are many hidden spies to interpret: whispers, rumors, vibrations, crashes, oceans of silence. Naturally, there are also human voices in the palace. But 'every voice that knows it is heard by the King acquires a cold glaze'; it becomes a courtly voice, artificial, false – not so much for what it says, but in its very sonorous materiality. […] The courtiers' throats 'are no longer able to emit the true and unmistakable voice of life—namely, the voice that 'involves the throat, saliva, infancy, the

---

[32] On the iconographic resemblance of the suicides to Judas, see Robert Hollander, "Pier delle Vigne and Judas Iscariot: a note on "Inferno" XIII," *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America* (2014) [http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/]; Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 46-56. On the significance of voice in the canto of the suicides, see Anne C. Leone, "'Tante voci […] tra quei bronchi': Authorical Agency and Textual Borrowing in *Inferno* XIII," *Le tre corone* 2 (2015): 111-130.

[33] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.13.26, trans. and ed. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1995), 22-25.

> patina of experienced life, the mind's intentions, the pleasure of giving a personal form to sound waves.'[34]

Calvino's king's palace resembles nothing so much as the court of Frederick II, where envy inflamed the courtiers against Pier delle Vigne to put an accusation of treachery in the ear of the emperor. The monarch, who is unable to trust, listens for treachery, and hears only inauthentic sound, not real voice which, as Calvino puts it, signifies a living person with "throat, chest, feelings, who sends into the air this voice, different from all other voices."[35] The essential point of Calvino's poetic observation, for Cavarero, is that the individual voice is singular. It is therefore never fully represented, if not indeed completely erased, by the silent "logos of the law." As Elisabetta Bertolino puts it in her recent study:

> For Cavarero, the voice communicates the uniqueness and corporeality of each one of us and resonates in the flesh of one's throat. In one's voice there is the experience of a singular being in relationality. In contrast, the voice of law is the voice of the general, silent and visible Logos that organizes the disembodied substance of the signified of law.[36]

Nothing could resemble more Cavarero's and Bertolino's notion of a formalized, universal, abstract, and also *written* voice of law, government, authority and just plain *meaning* (that Cavarero puts in opposition to "sonorous materiality" or "phonic substance") than the gigantic, talking eagle, symbol of Empire, that Dante installs in the heaven of Jupiter in his *Paradiso*. Readers of the poem will recall that the souls appearing in this heaven, representing justice, and in this planet, associated with tempering the extremes of hot Mars and cold Saturn, first spell out a written text, one letter at a time, while singing in unison. They form one letter after another, for a total of 35 vowels and consonants, not all at once, but over time, with one shape necessarily dissolving in order to build the next, as in a spectacular (think Times Square) or like a spell-out in a football stadium ("give me an *M*"). The message they spell out is: "Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram" [Love justice, you who rule the earth], a quotation from the first verse of the Book of Wisdom pronounced in preachers' sermons, included in motets, and inscribed in municipal paintings in central and northern city-states in this very period.[37]

---

[34] Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. P. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Original text in *A più voci: Filosofia dell'espressione vocale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003), 7-8: "Nel palazzo che, come un grande orecchio, ha 'padiglioni, trombe, timpani, chiocciole, labirinti,' ogni suono è un indizio di fedeltà o congiura. Molte e incerte sono le spie da interpretare: sussurri, rumori, vibrazioni, tonfi, laghi di silenzio. Ci sono naturalmente anche voci umane el palazzo. Ma 'ogni voce che sa d'essere ascoltata dal re acquista uno smalto freddo, una vitrea compiacenza'. Insomma, diventa una voce cortigiana, artefatta, falsa: non tanto per quello che dice, ma proprio nella sua materialità sonora. […] non sono più capaci di emettere la voce vera e inconfondibile della vita, ossia la voce che 'mette in gioco l'ugola, la saliva, l'infanzia, la patina della vita vissuta, le intenzioni della mente, il piacere di dare una propria forma alle onde sonore.'"

[35] Calvino's epigraph to *Un re in ascolto*: "Una voce significa questo: c'è una persona viva, gola, torace, sentimenti, che spinge nell'aria questa voce diversa da tutte le altre voci." Cavarero, *A più voci*, 10.

[36] Elisabetta Bertolino, *Adriana Cavarero: Resistance and the Voice of Law* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 14. For a thought-provoking critique of Cavarero, see Dominic Pettman, "Pavlov's Podcast: The Acousmatic Voice in the Age of MP3s," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22 (2011): 140-167. See also Shane Butler, *The Ancient Phonograph* (New York : Zone Books 2015).

> Mostrarsi dunque in cinque volte sette
> vocali e consonanti; e io notai
> le parti sì, come mi parver dette
> 'DILIGITE IUSTITIAM', primai
> fur verbo e nome di tutto 'l dipinto;
> 'QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM', fur sezzai. (*Par.* 18.88-93)
>
> They showed themselves then in five time seven vowels and consonants; and I noted the parts so that, as it seemed they were saying "LOVE JUSTICE," first were the first verb and noun of all the painting; "WHO JUDGE THE EARTH" were the rest.

Since the soul-lights composing the letters were just rulers, they literally *mean* what, together, they say, write and sing: they *are* the message. Just rulers are the medium and the message of just rule—which is what the eagle stands for. J. L. Austin has written famously about speech that performs an act; here it is the actions of many that, read together over time, throughout history, perform an utterance.[38]

---

[37] Ovidio Capitani, "L'incompiuto 'tractatus de iustitia' di fra' Remigio de' Girolami (d.1319)," *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio muratoriano* 72 (1961): 91-134, 125. Rosa Maria Dessì "'Diligite iustitiam vos qui iudicatis terram' (Sagesse I, 1). Sermons et discours sur la justice dans l'Italie urbaine (XIIe-Xve siècle)," *Rivista internazionale di diritto comune* 18 (2007): 197-230. Rachel Jacoff, "'Diligite iustitiam': Loving Justice in Siena and Dante's *Paradiso*," *Modern Language Notes* 124, no. 5 (2009): S81-S95. Eleonora Beck, "Justice and Music in Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel Frescoes," *Music in Art* 29 (2004): 38-51. Jacopo da Bologna (fl. 1340 – c. 1386) wrote a motet "Lux purpurata/Diligite justiciam."

[38] Denys Turner puts Austin's idea of "performative" utterances alongside Wittgenstein's "uttering performances" in "How to Do Things with Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante's *Commedia*," in *Dante's* Commedia. *Theology as Poetry*, eds. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, 2010), 286-307.

In Dante's light show, the focus on media is intensified when the temporal alphabetical sequence resolves into a graphic sign. The final "M" (last letter of the accusative "*iustitiam*") then morphs from letter to picture, becoming first a lily and then an eagle. Since the lily is the symbol both of Florence and of the kings of France and the eagle is the symbol of the Roman empire, the dissolution of one into the other indicates the way a lesser, more geographically specific political entity yields to and is absorbed by an over-arching, universal one. In Dante's ideal, this is the acknowledgement of a higher political order that circumscribes smaller ones. The eagle formed out of the "M" of the message itself begins to speak, and takes pains to say that its voice is *of* the entire conglomerate, not one speaking *for* the many.[39] Yet when this composite bird falls silent, instantly (*subitamente*) the souls that constitute that shape begin to sing with their own various voices. The singular, individual voice is not therefore erased in the conglomerate. The disintegration of the unison voice of the talking eagle into the multiple voices of its constituent members is not rendered as cacophonous, but their songs are nonetheless marked as temporal and evanescent (*labili e caduci*), slipping from the poet's memory

> come 'l segno del mondo e de' suoi duci
> nel benedetto rostro fu tacente;
> però che tutte quelle vive luci,
> vie più lucendo, cominciaron canti
> da mia memoria labili e caduci. (*Par.* 20.8-12)

> When the sign of the world and of its leaders was silent in the blessed beak; because all those living lights, radiating ever more, began songs that slip and fall from my memory

Dante's eagle is not God, nor is it *an* or *the* Emperor, or any historical or even possible earthly polity. It is rather a sign, the "sign of the world and its leaders," the symbol of the ideal form of world government, which Dante believed would be transnational, and universal, yet it is a symbol composed of actual historical individuals. These people are portrayed as luminous visual objects as well as sounding entities. They sing (hence they have voices) but they are also described as musical instruments, "flutes," played with the breath of holy thoughts

> O dolce amor che di riso t'ammanti,
> quanto parevi ardente in que' flailli,

---

[39] *Par.* 19.10-12: "ch'io vidi e anche udi' parlar lo rostro, / e sonar ne la voce e 'io' e 'mio', / quand' era nel concetto e 'noi' e 'nostro.'"

> ch'avieno spirto sol di pensier santi! (*Par.* 20.13-15)
>
> O sweet love who mantles yourself in a smile, how you seemed ardent in those flutes[40], who had the breath only of holy thoughts.

In these lines, the individual voices seem to emerge *from* the voice of the eagle, yet the voice of the eagle is itself a conglomeration of all these separate voices, sounding in unison (as in the motto *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one) as will be even clearer in the following image.

In the next lines the singers, described as precious stones ornamenting the planet of Jupiter, impose silence on their "angelic chimes" (again suggesting artificial instruments rather than organic voices) and the eagle begins again to speak. The sound begins as a murmur, with the sound of a river falling on rocks, because in fact it is "splashing" off the "brilliant, precious stones" that "bejewel" this heaven. This sound is natural, percussive, but also meaningful: because its power indicates the abundance of its source.[41]

> Poscia che i cari e lucidi lapilli
> ond' io vidi ingemmato il sesto lume
> puoser silenzio a li angelici squilli,
> udir mi parve un mormorar di fiume
> che scende chiaro giù di pietra in pietra,
> mostrando l'ubertà del suo cacume (*Par.* 20.16-21)
>
> After the shining, precious stones with which I saw the sixth light bejeweled had imposed silence on the angelic chimes, it seemed I heard the murmuring of a river that falls clear from rock to rock, showing the abundance of its source.

In the watery image, the river falls down, whereas the speech it describes is gurgling upward in the throat of the eagle, as we can see in these next lines. The sound starts deep down in the murmur of the many souls forming the body of the eagle and takes on the form of articulate speech only as it converges up in its hollow-seeming neck. From there, sound becomes voice, to form words issuing from the beak, words that Dante wrote first in his heart and then in the lines of *terza rima* that follow.

---

[40] Dante's word for "flutes" (*flailli*) is a hapax, that is, a word not found elsewhere in records of the Italian language. It is thought to derive from Old French words for "flute (*flavel*) or "flame" (*flael*). The fourteenth-century commentator Benvenuto da Imola says it derives from Latin *flatus*, meaning "breath."

[41] etymology of music from moys, water.

> E come suono al collo de la cetra
> prende sua forma, e sì com' al pertugio
> de la sampogna vento che penètra,
> così, rimosso d'aspettare indugio,
> quel mormorar de l'aguglia salissi
> su per lo collo, come fosse bugio.
> Fecesi voce quivi, e quindi uscissi
> per lo suo becco in forma di parole,
> quali aspettava il core ov' io le scrissi. (*Par.* 20.22-30)
>
> And just as the sound of the stringed instrument takes form at its neck, and as the wind that penetrates the pipe does at its opening, in the same way, without any delay, that murmuring of the eagle rose up through the neck, as if it were hollow. There it became voice, and from there it issued out of the beak in the form of words, awaited by my heart where I wrote them down.

This passage is markedly musical because of the specific instruments it names, the *cetra* and the *sampogna*, with attention to how each forms its particular sounds. The fourteenth-century commentator on Dante, Benvenuto da Imola, observes that sweet sound is gathered in the cithara by the many chords that are formed on its neck, just as the sweet voice in the eagle is formed in its neck out of the many voices of the souls; or as the wind that has collected in an inflated skin then passes through a smaller opening of the pipe.[42] *Sampogna*, moreover, is a vernacularization of the word *symphonia*. Both instruments, then, indicate a unification of the many in one.[43]

---

[42] Benvenuto da Imola (The Dartmouth Dante Project) *ad locum* : "sicut in cithara colligitur dulcis sonus ex multis chordis qui formatur in **collo**, ita dulcis vox in aquila colligebatur ex multis vocibus animarum et formabatur in**collo**. Et adducit aliam comparationem, dicens: **e sì come vento che penetra**, idest, pertransit per foramina collectus primo intra pellem inflatam, supple et repete, prendit suam formam, **al pertugio della sampogna**, idest, ad formam symphoniae in **collo**; et est etiam haec propria comparatio; quia sicut in symphonia exit dulcis sonus ex aere collecto intra pellem, et erumpit per foramen fistulae, ita a simili in aquila ex spiritu concepto inter ipsam exalabat vox dulcis per collum et emittebatur per os."

[43] Early commentators gloss Dante's stringed instrument, *cetra*, as *cetera*, *chitarra, liuto, cithara, citra*. Isidore of Seville (d. 636) notes that the form of the cithara, a rhythmic instrument "having to do with strings and striking," was "originally like that of the human chest." The strings also have an allegorical valence: "The ancients called the cithara *fidicula* and *fidicen*, because the strings are in good accord with each other, as befits men among whom there is trust (*fides*)." Moreover the word for strings, *chordae*, come from the word for heart (*cor*), "because the striking of the strings of the cithara is like the beating of the heart in the breast." William Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: Norton, 1965), 153. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 22.1-6, *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, vol. 82 (Paris, 1844), col. 167A-C: "Tertia est divisio rhythmica pertinens ad nervos et pulsum, cui dantur species citharарum diversarum….Forma citharae initio similis fuisse traditur pectori humano….Veteres autem citharam fidiculam vel fidem

The focus on how sound is formed in the hollow of the eagle's neck by forces stirring below is strikingly anatomic (on an eagle that is so two-dimensional that he only has one eye), in a sense deflating the nobility of this majestic talking bird. The comparison with instruments makes the sound clearly involuntary on the part of the eagle, willed by others who direct the sound, like the guitarist on the strings or the trumpet-player on the wind-holes. The enormous eagle, sign of imperial authority, is a mere vessel, a hollow object, a musical instrument, as opposed to a living thing with its own voice. This odd attention to the production of sound in the eagle's neck in fact resembles nothing so much as the terrible image of the brazen bull back in *Inferno* 27— which was an ingenious instrument of torture and a symbol of tyranny.

> Come 'l bue cicilian che mugghiò prima
> col pianto di colui, e ciò fu dritto,
> che l'avea temperato con sua lima,
> mugghiava con la voce de l'afflitto,
> sì che, con tutto che fosse di rame,
> pur el pareva dal dolor trafitto;
> così, per non aver via né forame
> dal principio nel foco, in suo linguaggio
> si convertïan le parole grame. (*Inf.* 27.7-15)
>
> As the Sicilian bull that first lowed with the cries of him who (and that was just) had smoothed it with his file, it lowed with the voice of the one suffering inside it so that, though it was made all of bronze, it still seemed pierced by pain; in the same way, having no other path or opening from their origin in the fire, the wretched words were transformed into its language.

As I have written elsewhere, this metal bull, in which a living man could be roasted over a slow fire, transforms the natural expression of raw human pain into what seems the inarticulate voice of animal, but is instead an artificial instrument. [44] In the eagle, sound becomes voice. In the bull, voice becomes sound. Or rather, in the bull, human voice becomes sound resembling animal voice.

I think that this resemblance of the talking eagle of the heaven of justice to the horrible device employed by the tyrant, Phalaris, is deliberate, rather than accidental, so that we are made

---

nominaverunt, quia tam concinunt inter se chordae ejus, quam bene conveniunt inter quos fides sit….Chordas autem dictas a corde, quia sicut pulsus est cordis in pectore, ita pulsus chordae in cithara." See discussion in Ciabattoni, *Dante's Journey to Polyphony*, 190.

[44] Alison Cornish, "Music, Justice and Violence in *Paradiso* 20" *Dante Studies* 134 (2016): 112-141.

to think about what distinguishes just government from tyranny—since from the perspective of power they might look like the same thing. Both involve instruments and voices. Both are artificial but employ the individual voices of real humans. In the one case a single human is made, through force, to scream—thus causing the ingenious instrument to produce a sound that resembles the voice of an animal. In the other, the various songs (*canti*) of individual human beings are both natural, like the sound of water splashing on rocks, and artificial like the sound of flutes (*flailli*) or chimes (*squilli*), and when they join together by means of the instrument of the eagle they themselves form together, the sound they produce is transformed into a voice, not the voice of an animal or even of a man, but of a collectivity in which the sound "I" means "we." It is not the silent logos of the law, but the unison voice of the polity.

The eagle is a musical instrument to be played by an entire political corpus. It is not the image of a "just and merciful prince,"[45] nor Hobbes' leviathan, the ultimate sovereign ruler, but rather a hollow shell, a tool needing to be used, an instrument needing breath (the breath of "holy thoughts") or tactile percussion in order to make a sound, tell its tale, or pronounce its judgment. In medieval political thought, even monarchists take it for granted that legitimate authority has its source in the people. Society has no existence independent from the individual human beings that make it up.[46] The political point of this image is not that it is headed by one ruler (although certainly that remained Dante's idea of best government) but that it is universal: that the many who compose it function as a single organism. They have their own voices, but, taken together, on occasion, or over time, they can produce a clear and unified message, indeed, a song.[47]

---

[45] As Massimo Verdicchio suggests in *The Poetics of the Paradiso* (Toronto, 2010), 111.

[46] Jean Dunbabin, "Government" in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350–c.1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 515: "All medieval authors took it for granted that legitimate authority was grounded in the people." Anthony Black, "The individual and society," in the same volume, 588-606, 601: "In the later Middle Ages an academic consensus that *social entities have no reality apart from the individual human beings that compose them*." (Emphasis in original.)

[47] This ideal musical view of the polity contrasts significantly with Jacques Attali's notion of music as the "channelization" of the violence that is noise, "and therefore a simulacrum of sacrifice and ritual murder." See Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 26-28; Adam M. Koehler, *A Sound Form of Knowledge: Composition and the Rhetorical Problem of Music* (2008 Madison Wisc. English Ph.D. dissertation); and the recent reassessment by Eric Drott, "Rereading Jacques Attali's *Bruits*," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (2015): 721-756.

Is "song" the equivalent of "voice"? Calvino, quoted by Cavarero, calls attention to the "voice *as* voice, as often happens in the case of a song" and associates singing with the feminine, thinking (presumably silent) with the masculine. [48] The great medievalist and scholar of orality, Paul Zumthor, was keenly interested in voice especially with regard to the primary product of the Occitan troubadours: *canso*. In Stephen Nichols' paraphrase, "Zumthor construes voice not simply in a utilitarian sense, as an *instrument* for public communication, but as part of the body's 'signature' or imprint on poetry through performance." Zumthor wrote that:

> When the poet or his interpreter sang or recited […]voice alone conferred authority on the text. But when the poet gave an oral recitation from a book, the authority came rather from the book. [49]

In his treatise on the vernacular language, Dante proposed models for the best kind of vernacular in poetry (particular poems by Dante) and particularly in those long compositions called *songs* or *canzoni*. *Cantio*, he says, is an act of singing, just as *lectio* is an act of reading. *Active* singing is something created by an author (as Virgil uses the word in the first line of the *Aeneid*, "I sing of arms and the man." *Passive* singing refers to the occasions on which this creation is performed, either by the author or by someone else, whoever it may be, either with musical accompaniment or without. A *canzone* is an action of the person who composes it; not the person who performs it. And proof of this, Dante says, is that we never say, "that's Peter's song" when referring to something Peter has performed, but only to something he has made."[50] Thus when Casella sings one of Dante's *canzoni* on the shore of Purgatory ("Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona"), it is not Casella's song, but Dante's.[51] In the "passive" sense of the word *cantio*, however, it is the performer that is acted upon by the song.[52] The singer of someone else's song becomes an *instrument* of that song that uses that particular singer as a vehicle for getting sung, for sounding out.[53]

---

[48] Cavarero, 8: "questa 'voce in quanto voce, come si offre nel canto'"; and 12: "Femminilizzati per principio, l'aspetto vocalico della parola e, tanto più, il canto compaiono come elementi antagonisti di una sfera razionale maschile che si incentra, invece, sull'elemento semantico. Per dirla con una formula: la donna canta, l'uomo pensa." See Pettman's discussion, "The Acousmatic Voice," 148-149.

[49] Stephen Nichols, "Augustine and the Troubadour Lyric," 138. Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics* (University of Minnesota, 1991), 35. See also Emma Dillon 'Sensing sound,' in *A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 96-114.

[50] Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* 2.8.4 (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 80: "Signum autem huius est quod nunquam dicimus, "Hec est cantio Petri" eo quod ipsam proferat, sed eo quod fabricaverit illam."

[51] *Purg.* 2.76-117. Still, when the the sweetness that lasts, that still "sounds within" seems to be the sweetness of that particular performance, of Casella's beautiful voice, not simply of the song written by Dante. Martin Eisner made this point, that it is not

In this regard, it is interesting to note a remark the late antique Roman senator and educator Cassiodorus makes about the psalms.

> Whoever recites the words of a psalm seems to be repeating his own words, to be singing in solitude words composed by himself; it does not seem to be another speaking or explaining what he takes up and reads. It is as though he were speaking from his own person, such is the nature of the words he utters.[54]

Every psalm, that is, becomes Peter's song.

Or Dhuoda's song. In the handbook she wrote for her son William, the ninth-century matron Dhuoda connected the famous incipit of Wisdom (*Diligite iustitiam* "Love justice you who rule the earth") with the theme of justice that runs through the Psalms:

> 'Love justice,' so that you will be known as a just man.[…] For the 'just Lord has loved justice' [Ps. 10.8] and loves it always. […] You therefore, son William, beware and flee iniquity, love righteousness,

---

"Casella's song" in his presentation entitled, "Dante's Song: Reconsidering the Significance of 'Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona' in *Purgatorio* II, at the conference on *Dante and Music* at the University of Pennsylvania, in November 5-6, 2015. See also Albert Ascoli, "Performing Salvation in Dante's *Commedia*" *Dante Studies* 135 (2017): 74-106; and Thomas Peterson, "From Casella to Cacciaguida," *Bibliotheca Dantesca: Annual Journal of Research Studies* 1 (2018), Article 12.

[52] Dante, *DVE* 2.8.4, 78-80: "Circa hoc considerandum est quod cantio dupliciter accipi potest: uno modo secundum quod fabricatur ab auctore suo, et sic est actio -- et secundum istum modum Virgilius primo Eneidorum dicit "Arma virumque cano" --; alio modo secundum quod fabricata profertur vel ab autore vel ab alio quicunque sit, sive cum soni modulatione proferatur, sive non: et sic est passio. Nam tunc agitur, modo vero agere videtur in alium et sic tunc alicuius actio, modo quoque passio alicuius videtur. Et quia prius agitur ipsa quam agat, magis, immo prorsus denominari videtur ab eo quod agitur, et est actio alicuius, quam ab eo quod agit in alios. Signum autem huius est quod nunquam dicimus, "Hec est cantio Petri" eo quod ipsam proferat, sed eo quod fabricaverit illam."

[53] But even the maker of the *canzone*—at least a good one—has to be acted upon by other songs, by rules of composition and by the words themselves. Dante's advice to would-be poets is to "make the practice of such constructions habitual, to read the poets who respect the rules, namely Virgil, the Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*, Statius, and Lucan, etc. Dante, *DVE* 2.6.7, 74: "Et fortassis utilissimum foret ad illam habituandam regulatos vidisse poetas, Virgilium videlicet, Ovidium Metamorfoseos, Statium atque Lucanum."

[54] Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms,* trans. P. G. Walsh, vol. 1 (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 41.

> practice justice. Dread hearing the Psalmist's words: 'Who loves injustice hates his own soul.' [Psalm 10.6][55]

In her letter, William would have heard the voice of his mother, who in turn reminds him of what is written and what, whether he wants to or not, he will be bound to hear—with dread—if he does not follow Biblical precepts, the Psalmist's words, which have now become hers, and ought to become his.

In these remarks I have been thinking about sound as it relates to voice and what both suggest about the human person and the configuration of human persons we call a community, or a *polis.* In the voice of the eagle played, like a musical instrument, by all the individual voices that constitute it, there is the possibility of a voice of justice that speaks not *for* all but *by means of* all the individuals who make up a polity, and for Dante the only polity that really mattered was the polity of the whole human race. It is the love of justice, or of musical *justesse*, that turns the noisy cataract of abundant multitude into the controlled musical voice of well-tempered justice, to which we are called to attune ourselves.

In our present-day world, where most of our communication does *not* happen by means of live voice, theorists from Paul Zumthor to Adriana Cavarero have been trying to get us to remember what Roland Barthes termed, "the grain of the voice," which Barthes defined as "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue." Dominic Pettman, in a wonderfully titled article, "Pavlov's Podcast: The Acousmatic Voice in the Age of MP3s," concludes:

> As our existence is increasingly experienced within digitized networks, the challenge is not only to rescue the grain of the voice but also to be attuned to the voice of the grain, to listen attentively to the environment, an environment that includes both paradises and parking lots.[56]

---

[55] Dhuoda, *Handbook for Her Warrior Son: Liber Manualis*, ed. Marie Anne Mayeski (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 155: "*Diligite iustitiam*, ut iustus esse videaris in causis. Nam *iustus Dominus iustitias dilexit* [Ps. 10.8] diligitque semper: *aequitatem videt vultus eius* [Ps.10.8]. Valde eam, eo tunc in tempore, diligebat et diligi admonebat ille qui dicebat: *Diligite iustitiam, qui iudicatis terram.* [Sap. 1.1] Et item alius: *Si iustitiam loquimini, recte iudicate.* [Ps.57.2] Scriptum namque est: *In quo enim iudicio iudicaveritis,* et. cetera. [Matthew 7.2] Tu ergo, fili Wilhelme, cave et fuge iniquitatem, ama aequitatem, sectare iustitiam, time audire Psalmographi dictum: *Qui diligit iniquitatem, odit animam suam.* [Psalm 10.6]."

[56] Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice" in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179-189, p. 182. Pettman, "Pavlov's Podcast," 154.

or, in another age: poems, psalms, *canzoni*, songs, and the music of the spheres.