

*The Gaze of the Voice*

Jane Baker, BA (Hons.), MA (Philosophy)

Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts, SCLA**

Supervisor: Professor David Fancy

Second Reader: Professor Athena V. Colman

Faculty of Humanities, Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario

© Jane Baker 2022

## Table of Contents

Prelude to Beginning a Processual Project of Voice .....	1
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	6
Critique of Barthes: Going Against the Grain .....	6
Cavarero's Critique of Barthes .....	8
Literary voices-in-process.....	10
Excursus I: Dolar on the Story of Soldiers .....	11
Excursus II: Adriana Cavarero on <i>A King Listens</i> .....	13
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	17
Spinoza's Body beyond Binaries .....	17
The Voice in the Mirror .....	21
Lacan's Mirror Stage: .....	22
The Uncanny Voice .....	25
The Voice of Narcissus.....	30
Kristeva's Voice.....	37
Subject-in-process.....	37
Deleuze and Guattari.....	39
The Refrain .....	40
The Virtual and the Actual: rethinking Presence and Absence .....	43
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	45
Hearing My Voice as Song.....	45
Refrains on Operatic Singing.....	47
Provisional Concluding Remarks .....	50
Works Cited .....	52

*I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his [sic] breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation.*

– Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 404

### Prelude to Beginning a Processual Project of Voice

The present project begins in the middle of an always already becoming phenomenon: voice. What this statement means requires the entirety of the present text. In brief, I endeavour to explicate, expound, and articulate the phenomenon of “voice” without reducing the voice to any aspect of its embodied *or* theoretical forms, i.e., without a reduction to a simplistic account of the “material” phenomenon nor a divorce of the voice from its aesthetic-cum-theoretical registers. As such, in this project, I am not just critiquing the history of western philosophy that excludes the voice, nor am I exegetically describing accounts of the voice, but rather, I am asking the question of what it would mean to investigate the voice without “devocalizing” it.<sup>1</sup> This means the project is situated across theorizations, not to reconcile them, but to uncover the voice in the constitution of subjectivity without reifying its uniqueness or, in other words, without devocalizing the voice we are attempting to index in a register of its constitution of subjectivity, as well as the theorization of that constitution and subsequent tracing of the refrain it articulates even as it departs from it.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am drawing on Adriana Cavarero, a thinker mobilized throughout this text. Cavarero also seeks to situate the singularity of the voice without subsuming it into a *logos* which provides it with meaning. Her term “devocalization,” refers to her critique of the erasure of vocal specificity throughout the Western canon – especially where that erasure includes the erasure of the material bodies which speak difference and so results in a form of logocentrism. In her words, “Greek philosophy is seen to privilege the connection between voice and speech, thus imprisoning voice in the realm of *logos*” (Cavarero, “The Vocal Body”, p. 72).

This project is informed by a comparative methodology where a recorded vocal piece in my own voice, which I accompany with written attempts to describe and think that very phenomenon of my own vocality; set in (unreconciled) dialogue with my own ancient texts of myth, modern story-telling, primary theoretical texts and my interpretation of them. The multivocality of comparative sources situates the present form as performative of its content; there are multiple voices without *anyone* voice reconciled as a master narrative. Any totalizing theory of the voice synthesizing all voices into a master theory of the voice would reproduce that which we are trying to overcome, such as ones that look at the voice linguistically, or ones that merely consider the voice in terms of its sound as being good or bad. Resisting this binary without valorizing either side, vis-a-vis theory presumed against or beyond its materiality, generality versus specificity, or by engaging in a method that enables theorizations of the voice in a devocalized form approaching logocentrism. I turn to an aesthetic artifact made from the materiality of my own voice, multiplied in terms of that voice and complicated by its virtual capture so that the voice as phenomena breathes sense into the theoretical choices that best enable us to resist any kind of binarizing theory, such as of the voice itself with the hearing of the voice. Moreover, to frustrate the erecting of the uniqueness of my voice as a new anchor I layer it against itself. I trouble it with its own iteration, staging vocal refrains against and through each other.

There are moments in this work where I will be discussing the singing voice in particular, as a way to extend the exploration of voice, but it is important to make clear that I do not aim to isolate the singing voice as the primary object of study, as that would lapse into an aestheticization of the voice instead of looking into the voice as such. As I will argue, the sense and meaning of voice sought throughout this work discovers a voice beyond Roland Barthes' *grain*, and accordingly also holds that voice cannot be reduced to a particular tone or timbre associated with

any individual, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us in the epigraph above. The priority here is not to listen to the voice solely as a source of aesthetic pleasure, but to rather engage – both in the actual creation of the song as well as in listening and responding to the song – in a practice-oriented methodology which uses my own experience as a site of reflecting on and recounting the voice. The voice, as well as the exploration of the voice turns one back to oneself, which is one of the reasons why I am using my own voice as a site of reflection. A phenomenological account of my own voice happens through a singing voice, but the singing voice in particular is not the intended focus of this work. Indeed, in light of the foregoing considerations, while at work in the realms of *aisthesis*, these disparate attempts wedded by a vocal inquiry do not result in a finalized hierarchy of form and subsequent aesthetic theory. Rather, these texts, moments and mobilized resonances and echoes can be traced in different forms throughout aesthetic ideas that often attempt to reify them. To clarify, I turn to Jacques Rancière:

Art is given to us through these transformations of the sensible fabric, at the cost of constantly merging its own reasons with those belonging to other spheres of experience. ... Thus it [*Aisthesis*] inscribes them **into a moving constellation in which modes of perception and affect**, and forms of interpretation defining a paradigm of art, takes shape. The scene is not the illustration of an idea. It is a little optical machine that **shows us thought busy weaving together perceptions, affects, names and ideas, constituting a sensible community that these links create, and the intellectual community that makes such weaving thinkable.** (Prelude, p XI. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* by Jacques Rancière, emphasis mine.)

The judgement of singing and what constitutes song is already caught up with a judgement of the aesthetic (as a form of judgment) which is not an area I aim to explore here in this chapter. Instead, I will be looking at the singing voice as an attribute or mode of vociferation that provides additional insight into what can be said about the voice as such. This is a basic exploration of the subject's body and capacity to make sound which manifests their perspective and positionality as a subject while also allowing one to perform and make their own subjectivity without collapsing

subjectivity into an identity. While the voice can be considered to be a constitutive factor of subjectivity, there is also a way in which it threatens the very subjectivity it enables. The occurrence of the voice is threatened by its own silence. Not only at the level of communication, but the possibility of losing one's own ability to have a unique voice for themselves. With this project, I am trying to get to the heart of vociferation.

I have organized this project into three chapters. The first chapter provides a critique of Roland Barthes' 'grain' of the voice, which gets close to bringing the materiality of the voice to the forefront, but which ultimately falls short. First, I will provide a critique from my own perspective, which is informed by and will subsequently be supplemented with critiques from Adriana Cavarero and Mladen Dolar. I will then bring in a discussion of two stories by Dolar and Cavarero which situate the complexity and ambiguity of the voice, as well as articulating the kind of voice it is I seek to address in this project.

Chapter two will involve theoretical resources which situate and thematize the voice. I am not aiming to reconcile these perspectives, but to set them up as potential ways of investigating the voice. First, there will be a brief account of Baruch Spinoza's articulation of the human being. This section tracks the legacy of processual subjectivity which is never severed from its embodiment. This will be undertaken in order to set up the perspectives on the body and subjectivity as they are articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, also to provide a way of conceiving of a subject that is always in a state of becoming. I will then move to an articulation of Jacques Lacan's 'mirror stage' to anticipate and ground the subsequent discussions on 'desire', and the 'objet petit a'. There will be a brief account of how Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desire (as plenitude) opposes Lacan's desire (as lack), which will be continued in subsequent moments of the project. From here, I will discuss and relate Sigmund Freud's account of 'the uncanny' to

the voice, which will then lead into talking about the voice in relation to primary narcissism through the example of Ovid's Echo and Narcissus. Next, I move on to discuss Julia Kristeva's subject-in-process, already anticipated in Spinoza and elaborated in Deleuze and Guattari, in order to provide an articulation of the kind of subjectivity I aim to address. I include a consideration of her concept of the 'semiotic chora' in order to show further the ways in which the voice can be considered as an element in the constitution of subjectivity in its ongoing process. Finally, I will attend to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire and the *refrain* as both are key to their articulation of becoming and subjectivity.

For the third chapter, I will provide an autoethnographic reflection on the recorded piece using my voice, supported with the theoretical resources brought up previously. There is a way in which I am doing a mapping of the voice, not just into territories of vocality or to only re-establish the way in which the voice or vocality subtends those territories, but I am also mapping in the possibility for future voices and setting up traces for possible other voices to be heard. There remains some ambiguity with regards to the methods taken up for this project because I am working between those registers, but that becomes the site of the project's purpose, which is new concepts, and new images of thoughts to come.

## Chapter 1

### Critique of Barthes: Going Against the Grain

*... to attach the voice to the body and to endow it with materiality involves all kinds of obstacles—one is ultimately faced with an unbridgeable gap, since the trouble is that the object never fits the body.*

– Mladen Dolar, *Gaze and the Voice as Love Objects*, 10

When I am discussing the voice, I want to resist referring only to a voice that sounds ‘good’ according to Euro/Western-centric notions of what that means. Barthes, in his work “The Grain of the Voice” studies the same phenomenon of the voice which I aim to address, but in his account, he defines the grain in relation to whether or not it sounds ‘good’ to him. The kind of voice I am addressing does not need to speak, as Dolar writes “the sudden inability to use one's voice, the enforced silence—the silence that, all the more, makes the object voice appear, maybe in its pure form, for in its specificity it is, after all, devoid of phonic substance” (*Gaze and Voice ad Love Objects* 15).

In this section, I am inquiring into what is meant (and not meant) by the *grain* of the voice. Barthes first begins this investigation into the grain of the voice by cordoning off a smaller space of examination. After having suggested no amount of adjectives can describe music, Barthes decides not to focus on the “whole of music” (*Image-Music-Text* 181), rather he considers a “precise” space of “*the encounter between language and a voice.*” Whereas language may not be only personal it is surprising that Barthes also contends “the voice is not personal” (*Image-Music-Text* 182). At this point in the text it is unclear if he is referring only to the Russian cantors, who “have roughly the same voice” (*Image-Music-Text* 182). However, this does not mean that there is no individual as he tells us despite the lack of a soul, civil identity or personality, we can hear an individual body. At this point, we receive an early sketch of the *grain*, as “the materiality of the



body speaking its mother tongue” (*Image-Music-Text* 182), but is “not – or not merely – its timbre” (*Image-Music-Text*, 185), which he later seems to connect to what he calls the *geno-song*, which is also characterized by materiality “from within language” (*Image-Music-Text* 182). This *geno-song* seems to be held in contrast or complementary tension with the interpretative style of the performance, which he calls the *pheno-song*, “which is in the service of communication, representation, expression...which forms the tissue of cultural values” (*Image-Music-Text* 182).

We can see how Barthes’ terms *genosong* and *phenosong* are adopted from Kristeva’s *genotext* and *phenotext*. Both are necessary for the signifying process, but they each play different roles. The *genotext* can be considered “as language’s underlying foundation” (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 87) which the semiotic process works through, whereas the *phenotext* is “a structure [that] obeys rules of communication...” and is “irreducible to the semiotic process” (87). The distinction also references Kristeva’s dialectic between the semiotic and symbolic.<sup>2</sup> (Barthes references Kristeva but does not adopt her later terms). And later, Barthes will claim Schubert characterizes *average* mass culture, “borne by a voice lacking any ‘grain’” (*Image-Music-Text* 185). The “grain of the voice” turns out to be elusive and Barthes indicates multiple aspects of this notion. For example, he tells us that Fischer-Dieskau, “an artist beyond reproach” (*Image-Music-Text* 183) accompanies his song with the soul *not the body* (in clear contrast to the Russian cantors). He claims musical pedagogy teaching emotive modes of delivery and the “myth of respiration” (the “stupid organ” of the lung) and fails to teach “the culture of the ‘grain’ of the voice” (*Image-Music-Text* 183). If above the grain was associated with the materiality of the body speaking the mother tongue, now we see a *culture* of the grain; is this the culture of language in the body, which Barthes claims is reduced to emotion and breathing? I think not, it seems Barthes insists on a

---

<sup>2</sup> The notions of the semiotic and symbolic for Kristeva will be elaborated further in subsequent sections.

singing inseparable from words. (Hence, he speaks of enunciation, vowels and consonants “*in order to fulfil the clarity of meaning*” (*Image-Music-Text* 184). Overall, despite his *geno-song/pheno-song*, Barthes seems to slip into a privileging of language as text. He even goes so far as to say *mélodie* is a “theory of the text” (*Image-Music-Text* 186). He tells us at the very beginning that vocal music is the grain only as “the encounter between a language and a voice” (*Image-Music-Text* 181). Barthes’ grain of the voice is ambiguous in his description, i.e., not emotive, stuck in the throat, and requiring enunciation as “the grain is the body in the voice as it sings [and] the hand as it writes” (*Image-Music-Text* 188). With the exception of his claim that the grain can even persist in instrumental music without the voice (*Image-Music-Text* 188), it is unclear how the voice, especially the singing voice, is not subsumed by the text – a servant to the signified it is always bound to. In this way, Barthes seems to cast the fatal blow to his own attempt to move beyond a description of the voice that condemns us to adjectives (*Image-Music-Text* 180). Stuck in language, the voice has no chance in Barthes, to sing against the grain. I think that by limiting himself to the singing voice which itself is accompanied by assumptions of how a voice *should* sound, the emphasis is placed on the voice as an aesthetic object which reduces its scope to be seen through lens of music. Moving beyond Barthes, there are individuals who provide useful critiques which carry these ideas forward in a way that is productive for my analysis.

### Cavarero’s Critique of Barthes

*It is not enough to tune into the sonority, into bodily pleasure, into the song of the flesh, or into the rhythmic drives from which this song flows; this attunement alone will not suffice to pull speech itself from the deadly grip of logocentrism.*

– Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 15

Adriana Cavarero articulates an approach to the study of the voice which distinguishes it from speech and language. This investigation is able to uncover and pay attention to the voice as something not deemed as merely what is left over in speech, but as being an “originary excess” (Cavarero, *For More than One Voice* 13). According to Cavarero, reducing that excess to meaninglessness is a primary vice of logocentric thinking, which “transforms the excess of the voice into a lack” (*For More than One Voice* 13). If the voice is studied as only being the way to get to speech, it cuts off the possibility for the voice itself to have meaning. Throughout the history of western thought, the relation between voice and speech has privileged speech as being the destination of the voice rather than looking at the materiality of voice as a phenomenon itself. As Cavarero says, “The uniqueness of the voice thus goes unnoticed because, methodologically, it does not make a sound. Cut off from the throats of those who emit it, speech undergoes a primary devocalization that leaves it with only the depersonalized sound of a voice in general” (*For More than One Voice* 14). Cavarero’s project is to be attentive uniqueness of vocality from the perspective of the voice itself instead of from speech or through language.

Cavarero’s criticisms of Barthes can be aligned with the critiques provided in the previous section. Her focus on Barthes’ “devocalizing” of the voice, in which he still bases his thinking in a predetermined category of what the voice is in relation to the body reduces the ‘grain’ to something related to communication and an already formed notion of what the voice is in general. According to Cavarero, Barthes’ *grain* of the voice “has to do above all with the way in which the voice, through the pleasure of sonorous emission, works in language” (*For More than One Voice* 15). Although she shows her appreciation for Barthes’ work and the influence he has had on investigations on the voice, she points out that his project is still ultimately founded on a general categorization of the voice and body, which fails to attend to the uniqueness of each voice and

body. For Cavarero, in order to “pull speech itself from the deadly grip of logocentrism” (*For More than One Voice* 15) there must be a disruption at the core of the traditional metaphysics which prioritizes speech over voice in order to focus on the unique and complex relation the voice has to speech. According to Cavarero, “the act of speaking is relational: what it communicates first and foremost, beyond the specific content that the words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices” (*For More than One Voice* 13). While Cavarero’s examination of Barthes enacts an important clarification and intervention, her conceptualization of “relationality” governing the above account of the speech act is also somewhat limited with respect to Kristeva’s psychoanalytic and literary accounts of the subject-in-process in which the relationality of the voice of subject and otherness is already structuring subjectivity as such. She demonstrates this polyglotcity and multivocality as best glimpsed through literature. The excess of language (never apart from the legacy of the bodies which it speaks) comes to full force in the many imaginary identities, eclipses, forms of literary lacuna and excess parading and extending the formation of subjectivity in its vocal and stylistic arcs.

### Literary voices-in-process

In the section that follows, I will turn, first, to Dolar’s, *A Voice and Nothing More*, to focus on its poignant and heuristic retelling of a story about voice that demonstrates, *only by way of its telling*, a tale of multiple and conflicting interpretations, i.e., contradictory significations of the phenomena of voice, (actual embodied experience versus the meanings generated from its reception, and the false dichotomy assumed between that generates an ambiguity pitching on laughter). Without reducing voice to being an aesthetic object or an instrument of communication, Dolar provides us with a generative articulation of what exactly is at stake in *theorizing* the voice. With this story, we are given an account which illustrates the (at least double) register of the voice

and the difficulty in distinguishing speech from the voice itself, and what it would mean to look at the voice without reducing it to being one or the other (of subject/grammatical position/s). This brief account will be read in tandem and tension with another literary example by Cavarero. These two stories about voice elucidate a differentiated structuring of the voice - and its voices – within and beyond their literary or aesthetic theorization.

Importantly, my turn to ‘voice/voices’ in the literary register is meant in multiple senses and travels along many lines. First, literary sources already imply a heterogeneity of vocality in their very creation and material elaboration. What I mean by this, is that literary creation allows material imaginaries to be inscribed in their multiplicity – *and, of course, in their stylistic/material form* – without reconciliation to a singular or stable notion of the subject which authors them. Authoring literary voices and fictive worlds of the real is possible from “one” subject because subjectivity is already multiple. As such, the very form of comparative literatures and arts is already expressed as internal to the very project organizing this thesis.

#### Excursus I: Dolar on the Story of Soldiers

*The voice is the flesh of the soul, its ineradicable materiality, by which the soul can never be rid of the body; it depends on this inner object which is but the ineffaceable trace of externality and heterogeneity, but by virtue of which the body can also never quite simply be the body, it is a truncated body, a body cloven by the impossible rift between an interior and an exterior. The voice embodies the very impossibility of this division, and acts as its operator.*

– Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 71

The story in question consists of Italian soldiers who fail to recognize and act upon the orders called out by their commander because of an inherent ambiguity – funnily, because they recognize and do not recognize the phenomena of the voice they hear at the same time. That is to say, the soldiers in the story show the signification of the voice in contradistinction and in unfettered sympathy with its beauty. To be sure, the aesthetic assumption of beauty “on the side”

of the truth, i.e., the position that implicates the hierarchical and militaristic ordering is held in tension with the unfettered appreciation of a pure vocality that registers only because it sings ethereal in the same Italian language. Thus, one can see the humour and poignancy of this story unfolds through the voice in its interpretation of an order (duty) held against the enjoyment of its pure beauty (pleasure).

In this story, the commander of story yells, “Soldiers, attack!” multiple times with no response or action – until one of the soldiers replies, “What a beautiful voice!” (The joke is completed here). In this story there are two ways in which a failure in communication happens between the soldiers and the commander, or- to put the point more forcefully, in which an (at least double) meaning is registered as both recognition (communication) and misrecognition (miscommunication).<sup>3</sup> The first interpretation of the story involves a failure on behalf of the soldiers’ recognition of their duty and the second (which builds on the first and cannot be separated from it) is that in which the failure of recognizing themselves as soldiers occurs and outstrips their duty to return to a unifying signification of those who appreciate the beauty of a voice of the other – and appreciation which cancels out the message (and demand) it calls out. On the one hand, there is the assumption that Italian soldiers are not courageous and use beauty as their alibi in lieu of an attack. On the other hand, being Italians associated with a “culture,” namely, one that has an enhanced appreciation for beauty (in this case, appreciation of the “singing” voice), the soldiers also exceed command and appreciate the vocality of another outside of its signification.

Again, with this story, Dolar says that the soldiers heard the voice as being a source of aesthetic pleasure rather than a duty to obey. In that moment, the soldiers do not recognize the meaning of what is being said, nor do they recognize themselves in relation to the meaning of the

---

<sup>3</sup> By emphasizing *recognition* and *misrecognition*, I am foreshadowing the dialectic outlined in Lacanian imaginary articulated in the *mirror stage*, which I turn to in the next chapter (cf., Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 80).

words. They only recognize the sound of the voice, without having any symbolic meaning or trace. This, according to Dolar, is what he wants to focus on in this text – “[t]he aesthetic concentration on the voice loses the voice precisely by turning it into a fetish object; the aesthetic pleasure obfuscates the object of the voice...” (*A Voice and Nothing More* 4). This adds, according to Dolar, a third moment of the voice, which is not reducible to what is said or what is heard, nor can it be reduced to linguistic study. To look into this third level of the voice further, Dolar says that we must turn to psychoanalysis. This psychoanalytic turn according to Dolar, brings us to Lacan in order to look at the voice as the object of desire, which will be articulated further in subsequent sections of this project.

#### Excursus II: Adriana Cavarero on *A King Listens*

*By breaking through the confines of his exclusively acoustic role, the king is in fact inspired to make of himself a source of sonority. Momentarily deaf to the din of the realm, he discovers a new world where human voices communicate to each other first of all their uniqueness.*

– Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 7

Cavarero’s reading of Italo Calvino’s *A King Listens* is, most notably, also read in Dolar. Although they are addressing the same story, they have different perspectives on how they interpret this text in terms of its signification of the voice, and I take this divergence of interpretations on the literary account of the meaning of the voice to be emblematic. As Dolar says in a footnote in his chapter from the text *After Lacan: Literature, Theory, and Psychoanalysis in the Twenty-First Century* titled “Voice After Lacan”, “I am indebted to her reading of this story, although my take on it sharply differs from hers” (40). Their readings do not reach completely incompatible conclusions, but each of their interpretations seem to address slightly different aspects of the story in relation to the voice. In other words, the degrees to which they read the voice into “A King

Listens” seems to me to be the apex of their differences. In brief, the storyline entails a symbolic of the materiality of the centrality of his voice as architecturally inscribed in the narrative. That is to say, this story is an inverse of the soldiers in the previous excursus. In this story, the King (the seat of power) is positioned in the very centre of his palace from which he listens for the voices of his guards to inform his situation of threat. The King hears/anticipates/orders the voice only in terms of its concomitant positions of military strategy and signification of an action or a non-action (as an action) in the same fashion. This fictive “symbolic” is only interrupted when he hears the voice of a singing woman. Upon hearing the singing of the woman his receptivity to the meaning of the voice shifts and he attempts to ‘join her in song’ of the moment and not reduce her singing to a strategic move on the board of politics. This unabashed singularity of his own (bad) singing voice – initiated by an attempt at mimetic and synthetic singing with the woman he hears – is read by Cavarero as an initiation and return to the singularity of the subjectivity signified in its material singing voice. She understands this as connected to the mother which bears birth to the possibility of subjectivity and subject position as such.

She begins her reading by setting up the important details of the ways in which the king listens from his isolated and authoritative position from within the palace, “which, like “a great ear, has pavilions, ducts, shells, [and] labyrinths” (*For More than One Voice* 1). The voices that come into the palace are turned artificial and cold, as the ear of the king is “amplified to a level of perception that is as acute as it is impotent” (*For More than One Voice* 1). The king is unable to hear the voices of the words that come into the palace, until he hears the voice of a woman singing. In that moment, he is struck with awe, and “rediscovers in her voice an object for his long-lost desires” (*For More than One Voice* 2). It is not the song itself nor the woman herself that enamours him. It is that her voice which presents more than just a sonorous emission or words of warning; it is a



manifestation of uniqueness of particular to that very entity. He listens to the voice not for the sake of assessing a potential threat, but he enjoys her voice as something bodily and unique to her being. For the king, this voice is heard not for the sake of deciphering a specific message, but it is an instance of enjoyment of the voice as being only a voice. This voice comes into the palace and is heard by the king, “[a]live and bodily, unique and unrepeatable, overcoming with her simple sonorous truth the treacherous din of the realm, a woman sings” (*For More than One Voice* 2). In the palace, the words heard by the king reflect the uncertainty and constant potential threat he is faced with. The voices that come into that political space are depersonalized and reduced to being listened to only from within the order that controls them. The king does not hear voices as being individual or unique, they are deadened to the point of being no different than the sound of a slamming door. Given that he is working within the political sphere, he does not hear voices as voice itself but only as a dry relay of information that can be either fought against or discarded. The voice of the woman is heard differently as she is the other and remains outside of the political realm. Just like from within the whole of the political sphere itself, the voices that speak are rarely attended to as if they are coming from a unique human being.<sup>4</sup> The king attempts to join the voice in song, to unite his voice with hers to be a part of the pleasure he feels, but he is unable to. In this moment he hears the voice not only as sound to be confronted by being decrypted, but as something from a inimitable body that entails a response from him as another being with a unique bodily existence. At this realization, he loses the title of king and becomes a corporeal being “rooted in his fundamental ontological condition” (*For More than One Voice* 7).

---

<sup>4</sup> Cavarero speaks to how the story addresses the act of hearing rather than of seeing, which bear on the mirror stage. She says “[A]s long as the ear shows its natural talent for perceiving the uniqueness of a voice that is alone capable of attesting to the uniqueness of each human being, the one who emits that voice must remain invisible. Calvino’s text is precise. No appearance of a face corresponds to the phonic emission. Sight does not even have the role of anticipating or confirming the uniqueness captured by the ear” (2).

For Cavarero, being able to listen to the voice as voice reveals the uniqueness of the entity that emits it. In Cavarero's words, "[t]he phonic emission exalted by the song, the voice that sends itself into the air and makes the throat vibrate, has a revelatory function... it communicates. What it communicates is precisely the true, vital, and perceptible uniqueness of the one who emits it" (*For More than One Voice* 5). In her reading, I understand her to be saying that the voice grants immediate access to perceiving another entity in terms of their unique and bodily existence. This is where Dolar's reading differs from Cavarero, as he posits that the voice does not immediately reveal the uniqueness of the vocalizing entity, but that it is a result of the perceivers translation of the voice into the imaginary. According to Dolar, Cavarero's reading actually divides the voice into being either an instance of presence or absence, which he thinks misses the instance of the real, within which the uniqueness of the vocalizing being is revealed. As Dolar puts it: "Isn't the dive into pure materiality and uniqueness a dive into pure fantasy? Doesn't the alternative "either sense or presence" present a choice between the symbolic and the imaginary, the third term missing in this being precisely the real? But where does this real emerge?" (*Voice After Lacan* 34). This difference does not necessarily sever their projects from each other, but rather they pursue different aspects of the story in terms of its relation to the voice. Cavarero directs her focus to the voice as providing a way into perceiving the uniqueness of another human being, whereas Dolar spends more time on how that perceiving potentially occurs. I will conclude this section with a quote from Dolar, which reads:

The voice which literally embodies the dividing line is something that one can never quite claim as one's own, one can ultimately never speak in one's own voice: it may seem to be the most intimately mine, my own innermost possession, the inner treasure, but it is also something which disrupts our self-presence, the very notion of the self, and refers it to virtuality. (*Voice after Lacan* 35).

## Chapter 2

In this chapter, I will provide an articulation of the theoretical resources invoked for this project, curated for their insights into processual subjectivity in terms of registering an account of vocality and the voice. These perspectives will be taken up in order to think through the voice and subjectivity – not with the aim of reconciling them – but as a way to investigate vocality without taking away its voice. The concepts I will attend to, will help to ground the study of the recorded vocal piece I created by providing descriptions of the voice and the constitution of subjectivity in its multivocality.

First, I will do some work on Spinoza because it will allow me to set up a conception of the human being which will be compatible with a notion of subjectivity that is always in the process of becoming. I will then provide an overview of Lacan's mirror stage, as well as some work from Dolar which connects the voice to Lacanian object-petit-a, which will then lead into an articulation of Kristeva's subject-in-process and chora in relation to a reading of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire and how it differs from traditional psychoanalysis, and what that means for the notion of the voice being the object petit a (when desire is plenitude instead of lack), then describe their notion of refrain while also explaining their 'body without organs' and how it is similar and different from Kristeva's chora. Ultimately all of these theorizations provide us with tools and instruments to think about the voice as a constitutive factor of subjectivity.

### Spinoza's Body Beyond Binaries

*The human mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected*

– Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, 131

Theorizing beyond the Cartesian dualism of mind-body, which become the binary of theoretical-material, Spinoza details an account of the subject in its processual and heterogenic form. For Spinoza, the formation of universals such as “Man” arise out of the attempt to make sense of and determine the human body in relation to the affects it undergoes. What is of import for this present undertaking is what Spinoza means by ‘body’. Following Spinoza, I aver “the human mind is united to the body... but no one will be able to understand it adequately, *or* distinctly, unless he first knows adequately the nature of our body” (*Spinoza Reader* 124). Further, according to Spinoza, “*Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance*” (*Spinoza Reader* 125). Here Spinoza is indicating that bodies are defined not by their boundaries in a corporeal form, i.e., anatomical form. They are not defined from one another in relation to the space between them that separates them – there are not solid boundaries of where one body ends, and another begins. Bodies are defined in terms of their movement and their capacity to move and be moved. As Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus*, for Spinoza, “You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects” (262). I interpret Spinoza’s conception of the body to be saying that it is not defined by what a body *is* but rather it is what a body *does*. Thus, perceptual experience cannot be associated with a precise part of the body, it involves the entirety of the body as it affects and is affected. Brian Massumi’s reading of Spinoza with Deleuze and Guattari focus on their unique notion of *affect*, he writes:

By ‘affect’ I don’t mean ‘emotion’ in the everyday sense. The way I use it comes primarily from Spinoza. He talks of the body in terms of its capacity for affecting or being affected. There are not two different capacities- they always go together...A body’s ability to affect or be affected –its charge of affect - isn’t something fixed. (Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 3-4)

To clarify, “[p]erception will no longer reside in the relation between a subject and an object, but rather in the movement serving as the limit of that relation, in the period associated with the subject and object. Perception will confront its own limit; it will be in the midst of things, throughout its own proximity, as the presence of one haecceity in another, the prehension of one by the other or the passage from one to the other: Look only at the movements” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 282). To say that the human mind attempts to make sense of the *affects* of the body collapses the complexity of the human being into an all-encompassing concept of a self (Man). In doing so, “these terms signify ideas that are confused in the highest degree” (*Ethics* 140). This simplification of affect assumes a Cartesian separation between the mind and the body which Spinoza contrasts by saying that the two are not distinct substances but rather that there is only one substance (God or nature), and that anything that appears to be distinct is merely an extension of that one substance. Spinoza articulates this point further in his *Ethics* saying that “I think that the human body is a part of Nature. But as far as the human mind is concerned, I think it is a part of Nature too. For I maintain that there is also in Nature an infinite power of thinking, which, insofar as it is infinite, contains in itself objectively the whole of Nature, and whose thoughts proceed in the same way as Nature itself, its object, does” (84). In line with this claim, we can go on to assume that the universalized conception of human subject does not exist outside of the bodies which determine it. Instead of positing that there is simply some kind of unity between the mind and body as separate things, Spinoza says that “whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that” (*Ethics* 119). As Spinoza articulates further, “[f]or the body has been affected most [NS: forcefully] by [what is common], since each singular has affected it [by this

property]. And [NS: the mind] expresses this by the word *man* and predicates it of infinitely many singulars. For as we have said, it cannot imagine a determinate number of singulars” (*Ethics* 140). To reduce affects as being the expression of an already determined subjectivity, is to capture their movement for the sake of a supposed understanding. Affects themselves are not static or concrete, they are continuously in becoming and constantly opening up potentialities for creation by the subject and of the conception of subjectivity overall.

Some further articulation on ‘affect’ is important to clarify what the term implies and its importance for the project overall. One must be cautious to not conflate affect with emotion, as collapsing these terms would result in an identitarian gesture that would erase pre-individual intensities by already capturing them in an pre-formed subject. First, to pull emotionality away from affect so that it is considered as a kind of epiphenomenal second stage to affective intensities which then express themselves in individual human subjects as that which is emotional. To clarify this distinction further, I will refer to Brian Massumi’s introduction Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, and Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Massumi makes clear in his introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* that affect and/or affection is not a “personal feeling”, but that it is a pre-individual intensity that then becomes its expression in the subject. It is a “prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (*A Thousand Plateaus* xvi). Affect is prepersonal, which is to say it has yet been developed to the stage of being associated with and correlated to a sensation in particular, it does not have a biographical history held within it as being already categorized as a specific feeling. It has not yet been related to a kind of sensation which then becomes a subjective emotion, but it occurs before that designation is made. For example, an infant may appear to express feelings and emotions, but they lack the personal history and the

language necessary to define these sensations as particular feelings. At this level, they are purely affects. The infant might seem to present emotions or feelings, but they have yet to interpret the experience in comparison to others, which enable for those sensations to be deemed emotions and/or feelings. The *affect* of an infant would be purely an expression of an intensity. The body of the human is not known in advance of the affects it experiences, but rather, in Spinoza's words, "*The human mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected*" (*Ethics* 131). Affect does not need awareness of the body to occur, one does not need an already established sense of self as a body to be felt, but rather, it constitutes the body as it affects and as it is affected.

With Spinoza's grounding (but not foundational) notion of becoming human being in processual form in hand, I will now turn to iterative modern French theorizations of human becoming that index the voice in their theorization of the embodiment of the constitution of subjectivity.

### The Voice in the Mirror

*... the discourse of the unconscious, devious and difficult to hear, cannot be articulated in its own voice*

– Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, 114

Through Lacan's mirror stage, I can uncover and investigate the imaginary register in relation to the subject-in-process, and, moreover, in relation not just to sonority but also to the voice. In light of the imaginary field of vocality (textually argued in subject positionality above), I explore the relation between the preobjectal voice and the motor possibilities for the *infans*. As a figurative and fictive conjecture, I anticipate the contour of theorizing the subject in process in the

multiplicity of voicing through a thought-experiment: I wonder how the difference between the misapprehension of a whole self that is seen in a mirror, e.g., the illusory whole self presence in the mirror stage compares, or rehearses, the phenomenon of hearing one's own voice altered in the subjectivity of one's own constitution. By this I mean, both the symbolic language and the imaginary form used in the articulation of one's *subject-position*. I am not concluding subjectivity, as such, is different in these modalities of embodied mapping. Rather, I am speculating that *perhaps* such a thought-experiment-as-inquiry provides us with another way to articulate the subject who remains in a constant state of becoming. In other words, I ask: is the experience of the self-presence of the voice different from, or iterative of, the initial encounter (even as a *méconnaissance*) with the imaginary the mirror stage tracks? This question goes to the heart of the nature of otherness at the core of the subject-in-process.

In the following section, I will examine the voice as a factor in the formation and accomplishment of primary narcissism that, we have seen, is necessary for subjectivity to be constituted and re-constituted. I read this problematic in terms of the ambiguity of the encounter of one's subjectivity in hearing one's own voice (in the Lacanian register of the imaginary) that I argue can evoke an experience of Freud's uncanny.

#### Lacan's Mirror Stage:

Lacan's early conception of the mirror stage favours the gaze as being the model of the Imaginary; it was not until later theorizations that he considered the voice as well as the gaze to both be vital manifestations of the *objet petit a*. To articulate Lacan's *objet petit a*, it would be helpful to first provide a brief description of desire and drive. To clarify, the drives are not the same as instincts, as instincts follow a pattern of lack and temporary attainment, whereas the drive on the other hand, as Elizabeth Grosz quotes Lacan in *A Feminist Introduction to Lacan*, "has no



day or night, no spring and autumn, no rise and fall. It is a constant force” (74). The drive is never able to reach attainment or satisfaction, as the object to which the drive is aiming is always being substituted for another once it is satisfied. The object attained perpetually reveals another one which is the new aim, thus the actual object is irrelevant to the drive. The object is a mere stand in for a fleeting and illusory satisfaction of the drive. Lacan represents this object as the *objet a*, and this ever-receding *objet a* is the “*cause of desire*” rather than the object of the drive (Grosz 75).

The voice seems to be a more elemental instance of self-recognition, a fundamental moment of the structure of narcissism that would precede the visual gaze in the mirror stage. As Dolar says about the voice in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*,

It is the first "self-referring" or "self-reflective" move, but as pure auto-affection at the closest of oneself—an auto-affection that is not reflection, since it is seemingly without a screen that would return the voice, a pure immediacy, where one is both sender and receiver in one's pure interiority. (13)

Following Dolar’s claims, the voice seems to be an instance of auto-affection<sup>5</sup> saying ‘illusion’ of self presence, it does not quite capture the depth of the claim, as, if we are to continue with Dolar and take this up through Lacan, the voice object actually “embodies the very impossibility of attaining auto-affection, it introduces the scission, the rupture in the middle of the full presence and refers it to a void” (*Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* 16). Instead of a reflection, a pure and immediate self-presence, as there is not yet an external image to see one’s reflection in. Structurally, the relation between the voice and ear, and the eyes and sight are quite similar, but by conceiving of a notion of hearing that understands the entire body to be an ear (as a sensory

---

<sup>5</sup> Dolar’s use of “auto-affection” seems to differ from Luce Irigaray’s, which she articulates through an examination of women’s lips (of the mouth and labia), as the unsealed opening that enables ‘auto-affection’ as she perpetually touches herself and it inseparable from herself while at the same time there is an unending gap that constantly morphs to her continual becoming. More on this can be found in her text *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1973), p. 233. It seems to me that Irigaray’s account of auto-affection would aid in extending Dolar’s use of the term, but this thought can perhaps be articulated further in another project.

apparatus) we invite the possibility for auto-affection more fully. Lacan already asserts this in his conception of the gaze, as the gaze is illustrated through instances involving hearing as well as seeing, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's example in *Being and Nothingness* describing a hunter hearing approaching footsteps (an example to which I will return). The ear is not necessary as a mediator for hearing, nor is the eye necessary to mediate the gaze. But there is a difference between how the gaze and how the voice operates in the instance of misapprehending oneself, as unlike the mirror stage, the experience of the voice as a misapprehension of self-presence does not need require an external object (a mirror).

For Lacan, signification and the symbolic precede the possibility of what the subject can articulate, whereas there is sense that for Kristeva there is *always* going to be a battle of interiority and exteriority versus fusion happening which means that there is always a voice happening outside of signification, even though it seems to be caught up with the symbolic when we engage in retrospective analysis of it. In *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, Elizabeth Grosz quotes Kristeva as she states the ways in which she adds an articulation of the pre-oedipal left unelaborated by Lacan, saying:

What I wanted to do was two things. First, to make more detailed the archaic stages preceding the mirror stage because I think that the grasping of the image by the child is the result of a whole process. And this process can be called *imaginary*, but not in the specular sense of the word because it passes-through voice, taste, skin and so on, all the senses yet doesn't necessarily mobilise sight. (160)

Kristeva expands the description of the stages of the formation of identity prior to there being any separation from the mother's body, and before there is a distinction of inside and outside. We cannot remember being a subject or not, but we only get clues to that constitution of subjectivity through various neuroses or symptoms. Sometimes what is repressed comes to the surface in

instances that show an unconscious tracing of the moments preceding the process of the constitution of subjectivity, for example, the occurrence of Freud's 'uncanny'.

### The Uncanny Voice

*The uncanny lays bare the fissures of fragmentation within our subjectivity. It uncovers the play of the strange and foreign, or the merging of the borders of reality and fantasy. It even uncovers our constant desire, the very path of desire, to go into the source of fragmentation in order to destabilize the borders and boundaries that we erect to ensure our attempts at stability; interruption can emerge at any time and so too can total discontinuity – death.*

– Athena Colman, *Lacan's Anamorphic Object: Beneath Freud's Unheimlich*, 64

Lacan's notion of the 'gaze' incorporates all sensation without cordoning off the senses into categories such as seeing or hearing. To provide an account of this, I will turn to Athena Colman's work which discusses Sigmund Freud's essay *The Uncanny* in "Lacan's Anamorphic Object: Beneath Freud's *Unheimlich*". According to Colman, much of the work on Freud's articulation of the uncanny has understood the uncanny to be related to the visual register. To reconcile this, Colman offers an analysis of Lacan's 'gaze' which she claims is able to provide an elaboration of the uncanny without reducing it to an ocularcentric model. As an example of the uncanny occurrence of the voice, I will reference Dolar's account of the 'speaking machine' created by Wolfgang von Kempelen (1734-1804) which was the first anatomically based voice synthesiser.<sup>6</sup> The machine is able to produce sounds that strikingly resemble the human voice, which, according to Dolar's observations evoked sensations of the uncanny in those who listen. With this discussion, I claim that there seems to be (at least) a dual structure to the voice in relation to subjectivity. The hearing of one's own voice in infancy brings on a moment of self (mis)recognition and primary narcissism which precedes Lacan's mirror stage, while also, the

---

<sup>6</sup> [This video shows a replica of the machine being used.](#)

hearing of one's own voice (or hearing a voice from something such as Kempelen's 'speaking machine') conjures up an experience of the uncanny which appears as a double which poses a threat to one's subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> The voice can be experienced as both the possibility for the formation of subjectivity, as well as a something that threatens it.

I will first provide a brief articulation of Freud's conception of the uncanny. In his 1919 essay, *The Uncanny*, Freud begins by giving an etymological tracing of various translations and definitions of the word 'uncanny'. He does this in order to show the broad scope of the term and to avoid it being reduced to meaning simply 'unfamiliar'. The German word *heimlich* translates to "familiar" or "belonging to the home", whereas its opposite *unheimlich* is "uncanny", or that which is not known or familiar. Freud makes it clear that for the uncanny, the lack of familiarity comes from the return of something previously known, but that presents itself as being unfamiliar. In Freud's words, "the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition" (*The Uncanny* 15). Colman provides a succinct articulation of this point, saying:

The co-incident with its opposite is not in an oppositional structure as such, but rather in a structure of *ambiguity* and *oscillation*. The vacillation between the familiar and unfamiliar is vital to our understanding of the uncanny. Both the familiar and unfamiliar must be both present (and hence absent) in some way in order for the experience of the uncanny to arise. (Colman, 56)

The uncanny does not occur as something explicitly frightening or completely unknown, but it is the return of what which has been repressed which shows itself as an absent presence. There is a negation of what is familiar or homey in the term *unheimlich*, but this negation represents a repression of that which is familiar. In the second half of the essay, Freud invokes the story of

---

<sup>7</sup> I would like to potentially extend this point by using the example of hearing a crow or raven mimic one's own voice, or for another example, talk about the mutant bear in the movie *Annihilation* (2018) [which takes voice of its victims as its own – which makes for a particularly frightening scene in the film.](#)

The Sandman (1817) by E.T.A Hoffman through which he explains the uncanny. Even though the tale is centered around the uncanny in a visual sense, the uncanny is not limited to what can be seen. In brief, the story is about a child named Nathaniel who grows up with a recurring fear of a figure named the Sandman. The threat of the Sandman is used to deter the young boy from getting out of bed during the night, as his mother warns him that he will throw “handfuls of sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding. Then he puts the eyes in a sack and carries them off to the moon to feed his children” (*The Uncanny* 5). Nathaniel rebels and goes downstairs and sees his father’s lawyer Coppelius as being the Sandman, who yells at him “Here with your eyes!” to which Nathaniel screams in horror, causing Coppelius to grab the boy and attempt to throw hot coals into his eyes but his father intervenes and convinces him to spare his son. The story picks up again later in Nathaniel’s life during his encounter with an optician named Giuseppe Coppola (who Nathaniel suspects is actually Coppelius) who gives him a pocket-telescope which he uses to look into the window across the road where Professor Spalazani lives. Here, he sees Professor Spalazani’s “beautiful, but strangely motionless daughter, Olympia” (*The Uncanny* 6). Nathaniel does not know that she is an automaton, until the Professor removes the eyes from Olympia (which were installed by Coppola who got them from Coppelius) and throws them at him. This drives Nathaniel into a state of madness, and the tale concludes with him throwing himself off the ledge to his death.

With Freud’s analysis, we see that what makes the story uncanny is not figures such as Olympia the lifelike doll, but it is with the anxiety of castration that is repressed in the character Nathaniel vis a vis the relationship with his father, and how it is brought back to life repeatedly in his encounters with the various figures throughout the tale. Ideally, that kind of fear is repressed as one learns to function in a non-oedipal structure, but it can still linger and create a complex

which can be expressed in various ways in relation to that repressed anxiety. According to Freud, the uncanny can be considered to represent the process of repression as the sensation that comes as a result of attempting to push away anxieties but then having them re-emerge. Experiences of the uncanny seems to evidence the existence of the unconscious in its occurrence as it brings forth that which was repressed, alongside what is actually in reality. With that being said, there still remains ambiguity in regard to if the occurrence of the uncanny, as it seems to happen in the threshold between the unconscious and conscious. It is an unconscious reminder of one's own repressed impulses, which present themselves as being incongruous with reality. If there was no unconscious, there would be no conflict between what is real and what is repressed in perceiving something which causes the uncanny to occur, and without the conscious, there would be no way to distinguish what is unconscious.

As mentioned previously, the gaze is not merely related to the visual. Colman explains the import of the example of a hunter hearing footsteps approaching which Lacan picks up from Sartre by saying that it “evokes an embodied shift in the sense of space and the concomitant meaning which, as a result of that shift arises, in the hunter's experience” (Colman 53), as well as emphasising that this example cannot be reduced to a visual metaphor (Colman 53). Further, Colman points out that for Lacan, the gaze is “unapprehensible” (Colman 52) in that it cannot be located in a specific register of the bodily senses, nor can it be positioned in either the unconscious or the conscious. According to Colman, this makes Lacan's ‘gaze’ a productive device to discuss Freud's uncanny. Colman articulates Lacan's scopic drive as not being defined by visual perception by saying:

The essence of the scopic drive is captured in the *split* between the eye and the gaze, the manifest and the possibility, or condition of all that can be seen, is identified as a drive realized at the level of the scopic field. The scopic *is not the visible* but rather the drive which makes visibility and being-seen possible. (Colman 53)

Thus, as brought up previously in this project, the gaze in relation to Lacan's mirror stage does not revolve solely around seeing, but rather, it is the scopic drive which involves all modes of sensation without splitting them into particular categories of sensing.

In terms of the uncanny and its relation to the voice, the question of their connection lies in how certain voices (e.g., hearing a recording of one's own voice, the voice of a machine that is almost human, a human voice coming from an animal, etc) are heard as both familiar and unfamiliar. Hearing one's own voice in a recording is commonly experienced as unpleasant and cringe worthy. Not merely because it exposes the disparity between how one thinks they sound and how one actually sounds, but I believe there is something more at play in this discomfort. To follow the arguments set up in Freud's articulation of the uncanny as being a threat, hearing one's own voice from outside oneself brings up the possibility of being reproduced, and thus of losing one's – albeit illusory – complete self. Similar to how a doppelgänger poses a threat to one's own identity, hearing a reproduction of one's own voice seems to conjure up the same kind of anxiety about one losing their subjectivity. Further, hearing one's voice when it comes from an entity outside of one's own body creates unease as the apparent autonomy of one's own ability to vocalize is no longer exclusively their own or in their control. The fear of losing one's sense of identity hovers over us in numerous circumstances, such as the annoyance-aggression experienced when facing a copycat (i.e., in speaking or in the replication of style). Or, one might add, the discomfort about the possibility of artificial intelligence being able to attain consciousness or sentience.

It is possible that the uncanny sensation of hearing one's own voice also harkens back to the moments preceding the mirror stage in which the voice was the first instance of there being an apparent self-presence. This exposure to the fragility of one's sense of self reveals the precarious

and perpetually becoming status of subjectivity, as if it were actually stable and fully formed, it would not be so easy to be threatened by its dissolution.

### The Voice of Narcissus

*The “narcissistic subject,” like or as Echo, catches the words, or simply the sounds, of the Other and delights in repeating, reproducing, and sending back the music that her ears have caught. In this archaic or primary identification, one finds a dominance of the oral—of the mouth, lips, and tongue.*

– Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism*, 73

A discussion of the Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in particular, the myth of *Echo and Narcissus* can provide for us with a way to talk about the role the voice plays in the constitution of subjectivity. The classic tale recounts the Western (Greek) historical explanation of a voice’s duplication in its sound without re-vociferation from the subject, or an explanation of an echo. The myth involves a beautiful, desirable boy who (in the retelling that becomes equivocal with its mythology) falls in love with his own image in a reflecting pond, i.e., a “mirror” of his image. In most versions a (female) nymph is destined to duplicate the self-love of the boy in repeating his word because she falls in love with his image. Most accounts of the story retell how the boy himself finds his image to be so beautiful that he falls in love with this other (which repeats him only through the vocal function of the nymph). While the story - inflected the 19<sup>th</sup> century versions of Greek stories) describes the so-called moral dangers of “self-love,” as self-obsession, the psychoanalytic reading, becomes a tale about the dangers of vanity, the psychoanalytic account thematizes its problematization of re-vocalizing the stable subject, sexual difference, repetition, and the illusory aspects of the uncanny mirror-image. To be sure, the story is importantly marked by an otherness outside of a circuit of *auto-eroticism* in psychoanalytic readings, which I take to



be fundamental to thinking the complexity of the voice – in its materiality and signification, or reiteration.

Dolar makes a brief reference to the Ovidian myth, showing how it involves both the gaze and the voice, in order to draw attention to how the voice both provides the first instance of self-presence and of primary narcissism while it at the same time poses a threat to narcissism. In *The Right to Narcissism*, Pleshette DeArmitt provides accounts of the Ovidian myth of Narcissus and Echo from various perspectives from thinkers such as Kristeva and Jacques Derrida. I will be focusing on DeArmitt's reading of Narcissus and Echo through the work of Kristeva. In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva provides an analyses of Echo and Narcissus through which she emphasises the element of the voice and of hearing the voice as the initial moment of primary narcissism preceding the mirror stage. This will lead us into the next section in which I will discuss Kristeva's concept of the subject-in-process and 'chora'.

As we have seen in the previous section, the gaze is not limited to the visual register. To think about a kind of self-presence that goes beyond just hearing with the ear but includes the vibratory nature of the apprehension of a sonic resonance involving the entire body, we are able to say that the ear is not necessary as a kind of mediator, as with vision the mediation of the eye and the external image are key modes of seeing one's reflection. The double seen in the mirror seems to differ from the apparent simultaneity of hearing one's own voice, as the one who hears herself is the one who also generates the sound – there is no exterior needed and there is no implication of the Other. The voice is felt as it resonates in the body of the one who hears it. There is a direct and immediate relation to one's own body as the source of the voice while the voice emerges out and away from the body. In paying attention to the removal of the ear as the mediator of hearing, we have a notion of sound that is available in a distributed fashion across the body before the

developmental pathway of the ear has been formed. The notion of a reflective surface and the mediating role that the eye plays are different than the resonant surface and the mediating role played by the ear – in that, we do not need the ear as a mediator for resonance to occur, but there is a more complex dialecticism here than the antagonism of the reflection in the mirror. According to Dolar, “The moment there is a surface which returns the voice, the voice acquires an autonomy of its own and enters the dimension of the other; it becomes a deferred voice, and narcissism crumbles” (*A Voice and Nothing More* 40). For Dolar, the echo of a voice kills narcissism. Dolar goes on to provide the example of the story of Narcissus and Echo, which contains the gaze and voice as it illustrates the perishing of both narcissus and love. Echo can only repeat the words of others, she is only an echo. Narcissus can only hear himself, so when Echo adoringly cries out to him, he is unable to hear her since the voice is not his own. He refuses her presence, as he welcomes death more than he welcomes the voice of the other. Echo dies, leaving only a trace of her existence, an echo. In sum, according to Dolar, “Inside that narcissistic... dimension of the voice... there is something that threatens to disrupt it: a voice that affects us most intimately, but we cannot master it and have no power or control over it” (*A Voice and Nothing More* 40). An echo does not occur on a surface in the same way an image reflects in a mirror; it occurs as a relation between the surface and a voice, it does not show itself as a reflection, but it bounces off - and is heard from within, the space it simultaneously fills with its occurrence.

Akin to the departure from the elusive stage Lacan terms the Real, which precedes the introduction to the mirror stage, once the infant hears itself as an object, the voice becomes the impossible fulfillment of the perpetually empty hole that is subjectivity. For Lacan, the lack of the subject is not pure negation, but the void where the voice is able to resound. As represented in ‘Graph II’, the voice *supplements* the empty subject, providing the negative subject with a positive

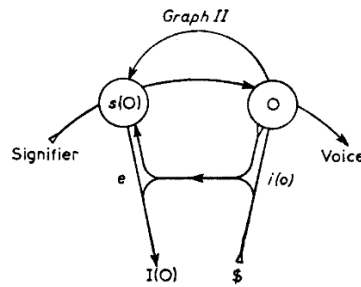
which therefore constitutes a relation to presence. The subject has no property in itself, it is “only represented by a signifier for another signifier” (*A Voice and Nothing More* 36), which is exactly what allows it to be given a structure from something else. For Lacan, it is when the object (i.e., that being the voice or gaze) presents itself as a moment of self-recognition that there can no longer be the voice as self-presence. According to Lacan, the encounter with the voice as something that comes from the self, and is present within the self, collapses. For him, the same way as there is a mis-recognition of a unified self in the infant’s mirror image, the voice gives the subject a kind of misapprehension of self-presence that is impossible to actually achieve. With the intervention of the notion of hearing as not being limited to the register of the ear, an echo is not tied to the surface in the same way seeing a reflection is tied to a mirror. Even after the mirror-stage, the voice seems to remain as an opportunity for self-presence. The echo of the voice may kill narcissism, but it does not kill a pure and immediate self-presence (even if it is fleeting), as this self-presence is not to a presence with an identitarian self but to a relational and ever-becoming self. With Lacan, the separation and misidentification is the source of lack. Narcissism presumes separation, whereas a pure and immediate self-presence presumes relational connection through resonance.<sup>8</sup> Dolar makes clear that there is a stark difference in the “physics” of the visible and the audible, in his words,

... the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance. The voice is elusive, always changing, becoming, elapsing, with unclear contours, as opposed to the relative permanence, solidity, durability of the seen. (*A Voice and Nothing More* 78-79).

---

<sup>8</sup> The voice becomes a continued possibility for the engagement for the Kristevan semiotic. This point could be included and extended in further work.

In the second chapter of *A Voice and Nothing More*, titled “The Metaphysics of the Voice”, Dolar brings in Lacan’s graph of desire to show the relation between the signifier and the voice. In the graph, we see a line going from the signifier (on the left) to the voice (on the right).



The graph shows the chain of signification through which voice comes to be as residual or excess.<sup>9</sup> The voice is not something that cuts through the chain or operates as if already developed but rather it operates as both the producer of and as the division between the body and a signifier. The voice cannot be divided into a binary such as interior or exterior, language and body, the subject and Other, as it is the constituting factor which makes possible these distinctions while also being the thing that generates the overlapping between them. Or in other words, as the following quote from Dolar says:

The voice stems from the body, but is not its part, and it upholds language without belonging to it, yet, in this paradoxical topology, this is the only point they share—and this is the topology of *objet petit a*. This is where we could put Lacan’s pet scheme of the intersection of two circles to use in a new application: the circle of language and the circle of the body, their intersection being extimate to both. (*A Voice and Nothing More* 73).

The presence of the voice is perceived to be fleeting, as the sound dissipates in the air the moment it comes to be. It is in this way that the voice embodies both presence and absence. It does not have a substance to itself but it simultaneously becomes itself as itself and can exist in no other way.

<sup>9</sup> I note here this grapheme is another form of material inscription of the vocal register, approaching but not reducible to musical notation.

The voice may seem to be an instance of immediate self-presence, but it appears to exist only momentarily because of the negativity it simultaneously produces and fulfills. This instance that seems to be one of self-presence is similar to the misrecognition of a self that is founded in the mirror stage – a point that will be extended upon in later sections. In the same way that the constitutive lack at the core of subjectivity is not a negative and empty space, silence is not a negation of the voice – but it is the source from which the voice is able to resound. Similarly, hat the gaze does not refer to what is merely seen, the voice is not only the noise of speech, but it is at the same time the unheard silence between utterances - it is an excess and residual which exceeds symbolization.

DeArmitt's reading of Kristeva does not oppose Dolar's account of Echo and Narcissus. Through Kristeva, DeArmitt elucidates how the Ovidian myth exemplifies the double nature of the voice, as it is that which constitutes primary narcissism, while simultaneously posing a threat to it. DeArmitt's re-articulation of narcissism emphasizes 'primary narcissism' as being the necessary investment in the ego which makes subjectivity possible. According to DeArmitt, for Kristeva, primary narcissism is not a developmental stage or phase, but rather it is the intrasymbolic structure which enables symbolization. In order for the child to enter into the symbolic, there must be that narcissistic structure which precedes oedipalization. For Kristeva, the moment of primary identification is transformed as the third, which is the Imaginary Father<sup>10</sup>, enters into the dyad of mother and child, shifting the impact of the loss of love to being the impossibility of completely attaining the love of the mother which is now directed toward the Other. The Imaginary Father, which precedes the Oedipal, prohibitive father, inhibits the fusion of

---

<sup>10</sup> The position of the Imaginary Father is not necessarily one that is taken up by the infant's biological father, it is important to note that for Kristeva, the third, or Imaginary Father "is not grasped as a real person by the infant" but rather as "something that is here that cannot be here—the possibility of absence, the possibility of love, the possibility of interdiction but also of a gift" (DeArmitt, 71).

mother and child and this separation gives way to the possibility for narcissism as the child can gain a sense of independence outside of the mother. In this moment there is also a kind of transference<sup>11</sup> as the infant “identifies with and incorporates the speech of the third” (DeArmitt 59). This means that for Kristeva, primary identification with the Imaginary Father is not symbolic, since it is not directed toward an object, but rather, it is semiotic, as it is directed toward something prior to there being a lingual structure in place. This point will be expanded in the later section on Kristeva’s ‘chora’. For Kristeva, narcissistic identification is dependent on the sonorous, which means that, according to DeArmitt, Kristeva’s subject-in-process (which will be explained in later sections) relates more to Echo than to Narcissus, as Echo is associated more with orality and voice whereas Narcissus is more reliant on the visual image. As DeArmitt articulates with Kristeva, “[a]lthough primary identification will serve “as the lining of the visual” and will set up the conditions for speculation, it must take a detour through speech, or should we say, through a certain echolalia. Kristeva points out that “*empirically*, the first affections, the first imitations, and the first vocalizations...are directed toward the mother” (DeArmitt 72). While the entrance of the Imaginary Father or Other is necessary for primary identification, a potential threat emerges simultaneously, as, according to Kristeva as articulated by DeArmitt, the presence of the mother still has the potential to interrupt the separation and thwart the possibility for that primary identification to occur. Thus, for Kristeva, “abjection”<sup>12</sup> of the maternal, in all its ambiguity, is a

---

<sup>11</sup> This first moment of transference for the infant, according to Kristeva, is what makes “therapeutic transference” possible, DeArmitt articulates further that for Kristeva it is this “*first experience* (if we can rightly call it an “experience,” since there is not yet an “I” to take account of it, or “first,” since the “I” only comes to know anything of *this* transference through later ones) of love- of being loved and of loving oneself- is a movement of transference.” (DeArmitt, 59).

<sup>12</sup> In the moment of ‘abjection’, before the entrance into the *symbolic*, there is a pushing away of the mother’s body. The child is only able to enter into the symbolic because of the narcissistic structure that comes before oedipalization. This kind of repulsion is necessary in order to become individuated and severed from the maternal body. This is a process of establishing corporeal boundaries, determining a position that is first of all distinct from the body of the mother, and continues to develop in order to have a separable sense of self that is other than its surroundings. For example, Kristeva notes the preliminary relation between the abject and uncanny. See (Powers of Horror, pp. 5-10).

necessary precondition for any narcissism; that is, in order for the “I” to be *like* an other, to identify with a loving third party, it is essential that it also “separate, reject, ab-ject” the maternal” (DeArmitt 66, quoting Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*). Similar to the child repeating the sounds of the Other, Echo excitedly repeats the words of Narcissus which establishes the possibility for Echo to be constituted as a subject as it relies on her ability to use the words of Narcissus as her own. According to DeArmitt, “the delight that a child displays in verbal repetition reveals that the child loves herself through learning her mother tongue” (73).

### Kristeva’s Voice

*The complex, opulent, sensual mingling, made up of meanderings, pleasurable incantations, expressive vocalizations, spasmodic windings, or, on the contrary, bearing on supple groups of words, constitute in fact the first encoding of the singer's amorous transports, the tokens of his [sic] joy or foi.*

– Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 281

### Subject-in-process

The subject I am describing in this project is not the autonomous Cartesian subject, but it is a subject that is always in a (non-teleological) process of becoming. Kristeva’s articulation of the subject-in-process provides us with a way of conceiving of subjectivity without reducing it to a static identity, while it also allows us to think through how the generation of subjectivity relates to language and the voice.

Kristeva’s concept of the subject-in-process (*sujet-en-proces*) describes the evolution of the subject in relation to the evolution of language. This subject is always in motion, and it is always in becoming. For Kristeva, subjectivity is always in process, and this process starts even before Lacan’s mirror stage. The subject-in-process develops like language, in the dialectic between the registers of the semiotic and the symbolic which Kristeva calls the signifying process. The signifying process is the relation between the symbolic and the semiotic in which there is a

fluctuating dialectical process always at work between the symbolic and the semiotic dispositions that operate from and through language. The symbolic refers to the grammar or syntax which relates to referential meaning in language, whereas the semiotic is associated with the pre-Oedipal union with the maternal body within which the rhythms and undulations were felt by both the mother and child. Neither the semiotic or symbolic are chronologically prior to one another. There is always residue of the semiotic in the process of signification, and a semiotic element in the symbolic. The functioning of the semiotic embodies the provisional formulation of meaning in the *chora*, meaning that is it intimately linked to the symbolic function, but becomes displaced. According to Cavarero Kristeva articulates,

The vocalic practice of the semiotic—in which the child is immersed, in the free play of the articulation and differentiation of sounds, tones, and rhythms—ends up being indispensable to the phonematic system of language. Language, in short, exploits, reduces, and regulates the marvelous exercises of the infantile voice. Stripped of its excesses and its imagination, the infant's emission is frozen into the syllables and tones that language permits. (*For More than One Voice* 133)

For Kristeva, the rhythmic relation of the infant and the maternal body provides the grounds for there being a perpetual entwinement between the semiotic register and the meaning that arises from the *chora*. The semiotic *chora* is representative of the productive genesis of the subject-in-process, within which the process of signification is in continuous flux charted within the constant pulsations of the drives. For Kristeva (differing from Lacan and Freud), the entry into the symbolic is a function of both the maternal and paternal as its origin is not exclusively out of the rupture which occurs in oedipalization, but it begins earlier than that, in a pre-Oedipal stage. In Kristeva's articulation, she provides an account of the pre-thetic stages which precede the acquisition of language and addresses the moments prior to the separation from the mother's body, where the infant finds a pre-objectal and primary identification with the pattern of the mother's love (Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* 24-26). The signifying process which Kristeva calls



*signifiante* is not wholly founded in the mother or child's body, but from within the generative spacing that breaks out between them. This spacing is constantly being negotiated as the symbolic is always shifting in accordance with the semiotic, meaning that the subject is never completely formed but it is perpetually in the process of becoming. It is never fully separated nor connected. It is a continuous struggle of the corporeal semiotic register to become and speak itself within the symbolic order. The dimensions of subjectivity and meaning are perpetually oscillating in dialectical relation with each other. Thus, the signifying process is both one of stasis and expulsion. Both are necessary for the composition of language, as there is the closing off of the signifier, and the multiplicity of signification.

The voice plays a crucial part in Kristeva's articulation of the pre-oedipal stages. According to Kelly Oliver in *Reading Kristeva*, "[p]rior to its constitution as a subject, let alone a speaking subject, the infant makes "music" as a direct release of drive. It expels sounds in order to release tension, either pain or pleasure, in order to survive... One such sound is laughter" (Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva* 35). The sounds the infant makes are not yet tied to any kind of syntactical system, but they are free vocalizations which occur in relation to words they hear as sounds. There is a positionality of the voice that cannot be reduced to a level of grammar. For the child to learn to speak, they must be surrounded by voices speaking. Language finds its ground in the voice. As the child develops, she incorporates words gradually into her own voice.

### Deleuze and Guattari

*Becoming is like the machine: present in a different way in every assemblage, passing from one to the other, opening one onto the other, outside any fixed order or determined sequence.*

– Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 347

Even though Deleuze ultimately reject the *chora*, I would like to bring in aspects of his (and Guattari's) perspectives on subjectivity in dialogue with Kristeva's, as both placing emphasis on consideration of it being a process rather than an achievement. Regardless of the differences and similarities between the thinkers, by exploring and incorporating these various claims and concepts I aim to develop a discussion of the voice that centers around how the voice can continue to be theorized in terms of being a constitutive factor in the processual formation of subjectivity. Kristeva's perspective will help thematize the voice as being an integral aspect in the process of the constitution of subjectivity. As Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror* states, for Kristeva, the voice "... is a way of designating the cleavage that separates the speaking subject from the subject of its speech—a cleavage which is nowhere in greater evidence than at the site of the voice itself, vehicle of both the cry and the word" (86).<sup>13</sup> The notion of the *refrain* by Deleuze and Guattari, which I turn to in the next section, will be instrumental in finding some connections between the voice and music, without collapsing the two into each other.

### The Refrain

Deleuze and Guattari's refrain is a key concept in their notion of becoming and subjectivity. The *refrain* constitutes a stabilizing force amidst chaos. There are three facets which make up the refrain: "A point of stability, a circle of property, and an opening to the outside" (*Deleuze on Music and the Arts*, Bogue, 17). The first is one of territorialization which acts as a stabilizing and cohering force that sets up a structuring in a discernable form, for example, in a song that consists

---

<sup>13</sup> I still have to extend this into an actual articulation of the *chora* and relate it more clearly to the voice. I would also like to potentially bring in an account of how the uncanny can be discussed in relation to the voice – for example, the experience of listening to one's own voice in a recording, there is a weird kind of replication but not quite a copy, there is a historical sedimentation of our relation to that which we can trace through first hearing ones voice in a recording – which has to do with the positionality of the voice and the problematic of the interior and exterior which is theorized in those pre-oedipal moments as articulated by Kristeva.

of verse/chorus/verse/chorus. It is in the relation between the various parts which set up the possibility for there to be moments of resolution or rest. With the second aspect, the content of the refrain is organized in that territory which was set up in the first moment. With the third aspect, the territory opens up toward further potentialities – it is in this last aspect that the territory is opened into the future. these three moments do not always happen in the same order and/or duration. Dividing the refrain up into the three aspects allows us to understand the relationality inherent to the constitution and make-up of the refrain but should not act as a successive step follow but rather, the refrain “makes them simultaneous or mixes them: sometimes, sometimes, sometimes” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 312). Deleuze and Guattari summarize the three aspects of the refrain:

Sometimes [first] one goes from chaos to the threshold of a territorial assemblage... Sometimes [second] one organizes the assemblage... Sometimes [third] one leaves the territorial assemblage for other assemblages, or for somewhere else entirely... And all three at once. Forces of chaos, terrestrial forces, cosmic forces: all of these confront each other and converge in the territorial refrain. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 312)

With the notion of the refrain, we are able to form a connection to the voice and to music, without there being a conflation of the two, or a reduction of one to the other. I do not intend to imply that the voice comes before music or that music comes before the voice, but similar to the refrain, they are moments that can inform and generate each other without there being a successive order to follow. For Deleuze and Guattari, music is not necessarily tied into an aesthetic or fetishistic object, but rather, “[m]usic is a creative, active operation that consists in deterritorializing the refrain” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 300). Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the refrain operates through chaos and rhythm, which occurs as a difference without repetition. They clarify that “It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition, which nevertheless produces it: productive repetition has nothing to do with reproductive meter” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 314). Refrains permeate and are permeated

by the world. A refrain is the border of a style. The refrain reaches its culminative point in relation to the deterritorialization of the territory it draws.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, “we call a refrain any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains). In the narrow sense, we speak of a refrain when an assemblage is sonorous or "dominated" by sound—but why do we assign this apparent privilege to sound?” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 323). With the refrain, for Deleuze and Guattari, there is a univocal one substance continues to express itself via differentiation. The refrain is a coming into being of the new, not through the foundation of a new anchor or a new substance, but via differential expression. The refrain is the mechanism by which expression occurs, or, in other words, it is the dynamic by which structuration can be understood to occur. It is that mechanism inherent to substance itself (there is no Aristotelian ‘prime mover’ here), but rather a dynamic process of valence (refrain) that causes that substance to express itself in recognizable coherences. The voice has a refrain-like capacity to create me, but not just through sound because there is a similar dynamic across my entire field as a being. Sound does not have a monopoly on the refrain, but the refrain constructs coherences, such as what we call subjectivities. The refrain is not simply sonorous, but it is a model for all ontology. Accounting for what it means for ‘signature to become style’ is important to the project in order to discuss what it means for sound to become music. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that in *signature becoming style* it circumscribes a fresh territoriality and launched itself beyond pure materiality and into a quality of timelessness outside within that moment of territoriality. It is not only creative, but it is also artistic. The voice has an expressive quality that goes its beyond face value in that what is being expressed is not reducible to words or tonal quality of the voice. It generates a kind of expressivity that refers not

to the subjective or emotional effect that it potentially conjures up, but these expressive qualities “find an objectivity in the territory they draw” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 317). With this, the voice itself goes beyond what it *is* and can be conceived of in terms of what it *does*, as “No longer signatures, but a style” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 318). A signature is the construction of a territory, either within or beyond itself. The style is when that becomes singularly reflexive and recursive and then its expression becomes almost a metalevel of expression, and it is artistic. If we think about the adage of living one’s life as a work of art, there is such creativity in the way in which we construct ourselves. In this case, I am looking at how the voice plays a part in this. We move beyond signature, and it is my subjectivity that is an expression of style. The process of living and individuation is made up of refrains. One takes up a style from the world and every repetition is its difference, which is also made available as a possibility of a different territorialization (or a different style).

### The Virtual and the Actual: Rethinking Presence and Absence

According to Deleuze, there is a mutually constitutive multidirectional relationship between the virtual and the actual, and similarly between the intensive and extensive. As Deleuze states in *Difference and Repetition*, “the affinity between extrinsic differences and intrinsic conceptual differences already appealed to the internal process of a *continua repetitio*, grounded upon an intensive differential element which ensures the synthesis of continuity at a point in order to engender space from within” (*Difference and Repetition* 26). With this, we can say that the virtual relates to the actual and seems to be in opposition to it because of the inequality of repetition through difference, and the intensive relates to the extensive in opposition because of difference’s inequality towards repetition.

There is an (at least) double-directionality in the actualization of the virtual which reinforces each moment of the voice. When something goes from virtual to actual there still remains an excess, and it is important to point out the way the in which the actualization and the extensive then reinforces the virtual and intensive with another set of fresh potentialities. Each moment is an infinite chain of events which differ with each repetition, always as an isolated but conjunctive and disjunctive series of variation and potential. If the series were solely conjunctive, then it would be just a synthesis, but if it is simultaneously conjunctive and disjunctive, then there is a complex dialecticism and a mutual enriching and opening up for potentialities. Each moment of the voice draws the future and the past into it as a moment of now, but it also constitutes a marker of the movement toward the virtual as it holds with it a series of forces of intensities which shoot toward an infinite future as potential. It is not one fluid motion, but rather a multiplicity of pulsating undulations which overlap and intertwine with each other. There is a series of present moments in each voice which are never still or captured but are always actively opening toward the new.

## Chapter 3

### Hearing My Voice as Song

*This resonance, begun by the duet between mother and infant, is not simply music—it is the music of speech, the specific mode for which speech sings musically. It is, in other words, the musical way in which the speaker cannot help but communicate him or herself by invoking and convoking the other. The fact that there does not exist a language without music, without accents or rhythms, depends on this law of resonance that lies at the origin of all communication. Speaking does not have in the voice a mere instrument; rather, it has in the voice the sense that was maternally destined to it.*

– Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 180

Attached here is a file of the recording I am referring to:



In this chapter, I will be reflecting on my experience creating this song embodied an immediate self-presence with and of my own voice, as well as enacting the relationality of the voice as I sang out of my own voice with my voice. Further, this recording can be considered to be a gesture toward the kind of voice considered to be “senseless and threatening” (*Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* 17), as it is a (perhaps) feminine voice with no words. In the second portion of this section, I will be invoking Deleuze and Guattari’s *refrain*. As I reflected on the creation of this song, I concept of the *refrain* could be applicable, as it can potentially help in simultaneously illustrating the relation I have to my voice, as well as to aid in an articulation of the refrain by connecting it to the voice. This final chapter will lead into some concluding remarks, as these discussions on the voice bring together the concepts and ideas which bind the notions of voice and the constitution of subjectivity.

To compose this recording, I began singing on one vocal track with a swirling echo effect,

and then I added two more vocal tracks using that same effect. I then made another track but used an effect that pitched my voice down to create a low ‘bass’ layer to the song. I then added some basic reverb to the whole track to blend it all together. I did not have an idea or melody in my head before, I just kept layering my voice onto itself and it built up to be a song – not necessarily one with a discernable or consistent beat, but an experimental exploration using my voice in such a way that it is in a dialogue with itself. Each track I sang seemed to just flow out of the previous one to fit in with the other. I used my voice to respond to itself on each track and in the echo effect. I could hear the echo ringing out in the monitor as I sang it, and I thought about it as a kind of call and response. At about two minutes in, there is only two voice tracks – a low one sighing and groaning, and a high warbling one – both sang until I ran out of air to project. The high tone at about 3:24 was not intentional, it seems to have come out of some kind of harmonic resonance between the two tracks and the echoes. The final note is a slow build dragging upward, as I catch my breath in the other track. It begins with a cry that turns into a sustained note, the voices echo and harmonize with each other which causes the tail ends of each note to become entangled with each other in a swirling metallic sound. With this I was singing myself into a relation with myself, mediated by my voice. I was responding to myself in multiple modalities – even in writing this reflection. I allowed my voice to meander on top of and through itself in the other tracks, without rehearsing or planning – I tried to make it quickly so I wouldn’t have time to revise myself. I would characterize what I did as a kind of experiment of a methodology where I am responsive to the very experience of my own voice on multiple registers. As I made decisions about making this piece, there was an experimental and a kind of feedback loop – a responsiveness to each sound as it unfolds from itself – and this involved listening back to myself as I was creating it with each track. I vocalize and from that vocalization comes another, as it draws a territory from which the



next voice can emerge. I sing, I hear myself, I respond to myself, and through this, I create myself.

## Refrains on Operatic Singing

*The voice imitates, or makes itself into, a musical instrument. But then it becomes music, not song. All the more with opera, the distinction between music and song is in fact necessary, not only because without song, opera would not be a melo-drama, and thus would not be at all, but above all because this popular scene, where the femininity of the phonic takes the masculinity of the semantic head on, would disappear. In this sense, opera comes to show that the reality of speech does not coincide, immediately and exclusively, with its semantic substance, or with the urgency to signify that goes back to the videocentric sphere of the signified.*

– Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 127

As I embarked on this project, I wanted to explore possibilities of my own voice through different styles and practices. I began taking opera lessons as a way to develop other registers of my voice through which I would be able to further theorize the specificity and complexity of the voice. I am fortunate to have a teacher, Jenn McKillop, who is able to use such illustrative metaphors for the sensation of operatic singing – especially while singing with medical grade masks on as we continue to go through the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of this hurdle, I find the lessons to be extremely instructive.

One of the first steps to finding the operatic register was to locate where that voice was to come from in my body. Different than regular singing, in terms of where the voice seems to project from, the operatic voice comes from the cavity behind the nose. It is not in the nasals or in the throat. While singing scales there would be brief moments where I could feel and hear that it was in the proper place. For higher notes, my throat seemed to habitually want to take over the task, but my teacher suggested that I focus my voice into where I feel it resonate. As I did this, it surprisingly seemed to help hold the voice in the correct place in behind my nose. The sound that

came out was much larger than the regular singing notes, it seemed to fill the room and the position of it was not as direct. The location of the operatic voice is not relegated to that space behind the nose (this was just a way to develop the tone itself) but it emanates throughout the entire body. In order to find the proper tone, it was crucial that I focused my attention on my breath, and that that breath was not shallow in my lungs, but that it came from my entire torso – the belly, the diaphragm, the pelvis – as if these areas were indistinguishable from each other.

When Jenn (my teacher) would sing, I was amazed that it seemed as if she was almost throwing her voice – it seemed to be all encompassing and at the same time unlocatable. The sheer power and force of this kind of voice sends vibrations into the body of the listener. It has great volume, but it does not strike the ear as an unpleasant noise, but rather it surrounded me in its weight. Regularly, my teacher would remind me not to think about depth when singing – as this seems to cause fluctuations in volume – and she instead told me to imagine drawing consistent circles of warm breath in front of me as I sang sliding scales. The idea was to not imagine that lower tones were down by the floor and higher tones were above my head, but that they were all on the same plane. Attempting to sustain operatic tones posed quite a challenge. At times, when singing in an operatic tone, I can feel the vibration of my voice tickling my teeth and nose. Jenn would say to put as much breath into each note, and that will help to give more breath into its continuation. This seemed contradictory, but somehow, it worked extremely well. She told me to imagine that there is a string of pearls coming out of my mouth, each beat of the note succeeding into the next in consistent volume. At this point in the lessons, I have only just begun to learn the actual lyrics and their translation. Even without know what is being said, there seems to be a massive emotive capacity in this extension of the voice. Similar to any other voice, it is not what is being said that presents the specificity of the subject who speaks or sings or screams. The voice

itself carries with it a uniqueness that cannot be reduced to a semantic level. Since starting opera lessons, I have become more aware of the body from which my voice comes.

In reference to the Cavarero epigraph at the beginning of this section, the operatic voice seems to operate on a level which shows to us that there is more to the voice than its relation to speech. In opera, there is an excess of voice which spills into and overflows out of the semantic register. As with all voices, the operatic voice is not only destined to speak, but its phonic quality has importance in itself. As I mentioned before, despite not knowing what the lyrics to the songs were, the operatic voice still conveys something which cannot be reduced to language. Further, the operatic voice exemplifies the ways in which the voice is not locatable in the a specific area of the body. In the experience of both singing and hearing opera, the entire body is engaged. To reiterate, I am not claiming that the operatic voice presents us with something more or different than the voice itself does, but rather that the operatic voice is able to present particular features of vocality in a more distinguishable way. Experiencing the operatic voice (as with the voice in general) is not limited to only the act of hearing it. The body as a sensory apparatus perceives the voice throughout itself across registers of feeling. It hears, it touches, it feels, and it sees the voice all at once. The voice simultaneously connects us with ourselves, while also providing a capacity to express ourselves. It simultaneously points inward and outward as it projects from and injects into and throughout the body of the emitter and the audience.

Through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the refrain, we can look at how the artistic aesthetic is part of the constitution of subjectivity. The act of vocalizing or singing creates a territory out of chaos, as Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "[t]he song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos" (311). This stability is not stagnant or concrete, but it is an anchor in the form of a fluctuating self which then

allows one to be expressive, and through this expression – a voice, a song – the self continues to be generated as a territorialization of chaos, which then turns into a style. The voice is the way we engage with the world, and through the vibratory engagement of the voice, we are able to create a tune as a territory which then becomes a style as it is the expressive capacity of the voice to render chaos intelligible in the form of a style or subjectivity. With the intensity of the voice, there is a conduit of between one's virtual and one's actual in terms of the constitution of subjectivity. By engaging with the voice as a modulatory expressive intensity, we can see the aggregation of the refrain as not being something static, but rather as something that continuously becomes itself through and from itself.

### Concluding Remarks

In this project I have attempted to bring together and expand upon theorizations of the voice which do not reduce the voice to a level of semantics nor to a level of aesthetic judgement. The acoustic resonance of the voice is something that speaks to the uniqueness of the one who vocalizes, and to consider it only in terms of what is being said or how it sounds fails to account for the actual embodied singularity the voice brings presents. By looking at the voice *as* voice, and nothing more,<sup>14</sup> we are able to investigate potential reasons why the voice itself is well deserving of specific attention. The voice, in its uniqueness, resists universalization, making it difficult to hold still enough to study, but through the works of various theorists such as Dolar, Cavarero, Kristeva, Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari, we are able to catch glimpses of the ways in which the voice can be thought about and theorized without devocalizing. There is no singular theory that can provide an adequate explanation of the voice, as to objectify the voice would be to strip it of

---

<sup>14</sup> A nod to Dolar's title *A Voice and Nothing More*

the elusiveness that makes it unique. Instead of building a definition of what the voice is, it has been more appropriate to go through and address what the voice is *not* from already formed assumptions. By doing this, we are able to chip away at the assumptions of the voice in order to reveal aspects which may not have been able to come to be without the formation of those assumptions in the first place. It is important to resist attempts to capture the voice into a singular definition, or reduce it to a level of semantics, as both would nullify the uniqueness that the voice presents us with.

With our voices, we are able not only to communicate but to express. Similar to how the communicative ability of the voice cannot be reduced to words alone (i.e., without consideration of tone, gesture, volume, etc.), the expressive capacity of the voice is not locatable in a singular or fully formed entity. Vocality constitutes and expresses a subjectivity that is always in motion and cannot be captured into a logocentric theory of language or speaking. The voice is not only defined by what it sounds *like*, but there is a value in the voice itself without comparing or reducing it to another form. If we are to consider the voice as something only correlated to communication, we miss the excess that spills out of the categories we create for the sake of our own understanding. By paying vigorous attention to the uniqueness that each voice signals toward, we may be able to create new potentialities for voices to speak up and be heard in a way that they have never been heard before. Opening up new ways of conceiving of the voice can provide us with new ways of conceiving of ourselves, others, and the world.

## Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice." *The Sound Studies Reader*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 504–10.
- Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. 1970.
- Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*. Routledge, 2014.
- Buchanan, Ian, and Marcel Swiboda, editors. *Deleuze and Music*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Stanford University Press, 2005.
- . "The Vocal Body: Extract from A Philosophical Encyclopedia of the Body." *Qui Parle*, vol. 21, no. 1, June 2012, pp. 71–83, <https://doi.org/10.5250/quiparle.21.1.0071>.
- Colman, Athena V. and Philosophy Documentation Center. "Lacan's Anamorphic Object: Beneath Freud's Unheimlich." *Janus Head*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2011, pp. 49–66. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.5840/jh201112228>.
- Cox, Christoph. *How Do You Make Music a Body without Organs? Gilles Deleuze and Experimental Electronica*. p. 25.
- DeArmitt, Pleshette. *The Right to Narcissism: A Case for an Im-Possible Self-Love*. First edition, Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Deleuze, G., et al. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Verso, 1998, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=04KsxqTAGDYC>.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Penguin, 2009.
- . *Difference and Repetition*. Columbia University Press, 1994.
- . *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. [English ed.], Continuum, 2003.
- . "The Smooth and the Striated." *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Athlone, 1988, pp. 474–500.

- Dolar, M. *A Voice and Nothing More*. MIT Press, 2006,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=Wg38DwAAQBAJ>.
- Driscoll, Catherine. *The Woman in Process: Deleuze, Kristeva and Feminism*. 2000, pp. 80–94.  
*ResearchGate*, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474400527-004>.
- Fancy, David. “Difference, Bodies, Desire: The Collaborative Thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.” *Science Fiction Film & Television*, vol. 3, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 93–106. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.3828/sfftv.2010.6>.
- Freud, S., et al. *The Uncanny*. Penguin Adult, 2003,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=2zNwT00s0tcC>.
- Genosko, Gary, and Eugene B. Young. *The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary*. p. 381.
- Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Athlone, 1988.
- Goodman, Steve. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. The MIT Press, 2009. *ocul-bu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com*, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/7999.001.0001>.
- Grosz, E. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. Taylor & Francis, 2002,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=j0QT4rriiPwC>.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 136 Pages.
- Hall, Wyatt C., et al. “Language Deprivation Syndrome: A Possible Neurodevelopmental Disorder with Sociocultural Origins.” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, vol. 52, no. 6, June 2017, pp. 761–76, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-017-1351-7>.
- Hallward, P. *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. Verso Books, 2006,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=q9IFCCm6ppAC>.

- Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. 1974,  
<https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9780801416637/speculum-of-the-other-woman/>.
- . *To Speak Is Never Neutral*. Routledge, 2003.
- Jourdain, R., and Robert Jourdain. *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy: How Music Captures Our Imagination*. Unknown edition, William Morrow Paperbacks, 2008.
- Kainz, Howard P. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right, with Marx's Commentary: A Handbook for Students*. Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.
- Kristeva, J., et al. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Columbia University Press, 1984,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=ZvXKcF-rawsC>.
- Kristeva, J., and K. Oliver. *The Portable Kristeva*. Columbia University Press, 2002,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=0jb5x7Kl\ 90C>.
- Kristeva, J., and L. S. Roudiez. *Tales of Love*. Columbia University Press, 1987,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=sF5\ 44olSDQC>.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. 1984. DOI.org (Crossref),  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3684782?origin=crossref>.
- Krucker, F. *Reclaiming Calliope: Freeing the Female Voice through Undomesticated Singing*. North Atlantic Books, 2022, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=QEJMEAAAQBAJ>.
- Lacan, J., et al. *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2006,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=3lPGQgAACAAJ>.
- Linklater, K., and D. Florian. *Freeing the Natural Voice*. Drama Book Specialists, 1976,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=f8cNAQAAMAAJ>.
- Manning, Erin. *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. U of Minnesota Press, 2007.



- Massumi, B. *Politics of Affect*. Polity Press, 2015,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=ZbdUCgAAQBAJ>.
- Merleau-Ponty, M., et al. *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*. Northwestern University Press, 2007,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=z5jXaQFHmiEC>.
- Messiaen, Olivier, and Claude Samuel. *Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel*.  
Amadeus Press, 1994.
- Mukherjee, Ankhi, editor. *After Lacan: Literature, Theory and Psychoanalysis in the Twenty-First Century*. 1st ed., Cambridge University Press, 2018. DOI.org (Crossref),  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108650311>.
- Negri, Antonio. *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*. University  
of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Oliver, K. *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind*. Indiana University Press, 1993,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=slRL2hgJwAsC>.
- O'Sullivan, Simon. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. Palgrave  
Macmillan, 2006.
- Petek, Polona. *Echo and Narcissus: Echolocating the Spectator in the Age of Audience Research*.  
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021.
- Ranciere, J., and Z. Paul. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. Verso Books, 2013,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=ZDSFYo2HVt4C>.
- Salecl, Renata and Zizek, Slavoj. *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. Duke University Press, 1996.
- Sartre, J. P., and H. E. Barnes. *Being and Nothingness*. Washington Square Press, 1992,  
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=L6igUcpDEO8C>.
- Schrift, Alan D. *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*. Routledge, 1997.

Shouse, Eric. “Feeling, Emotion, Affect.” *M/C Journal*, vol. 8, no. 6, Dec. 2005. *journal.media-culture.org.au*, <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2443>.

Spinoza, Benedictus de, et al. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

Strumbl, Melanie. “Voice, Affect, Grain: Their Relevance in Bodily Aesthetic Experience and Popular Singing Styles.” *Cultural History*, vol. 7, no. 2, Oct. 2018, pp. 205–25. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/cult.2018.0174>.

Tamsin Lorraine. *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*. Cornell University Press, 2018.