

I

What I Say Goes

My voice comes and goes. For you, it comes from me. For me, it goes out from me. Between this coming from and going towards lie all the problems and astonishments of the dissociated voice.

My voice comes from me first of all in a bodily sense. It is produced by means of my vocal apparatus—breath, larynx, teeth, tongue, palate, and lips. It is the voice I hear resonating in my head, amplified and modified by the bones of my skull, at the same time as I see and hear its effects upon the world. It must surely have something to do with the fact that the voice issues from the sternum—with the pushing out of breath from the lungs—that the emotional being is commonly said, in the West, at least, to be located not in the head, but in the heart. If my voice is one of a collection of identifying attributes, like the colour of my eyes, hair, and complexion, my gait, physique, and fingerprints, it is different from such attributes in that it does not merely belong or attach to me. For I *produce* my voice in a way that I do not produce these other attributes. To speak is to perform work, sometimes, as any actor, teacher, or preacher knows, very arduous work indeed. The work has the voice, or actions of voice, as its product and process; giving voice is the process which simultaneously produces articulate sound, and produces myself, as a self-producing being. Here, now, I speak; now, again, it is I speaking still. If, when I speak, I seem, to you, and to myself as well, to be more intimately and uninterruptedly *there* than at other times, if the voice provides me with acoustic persistence, this is not because I am extruding or depositing myself with my voice in the air, like the vapour trail of an aircraft. It is my voicing of my self, as the renewed and persisting action of producing myself as a vocal agent, as a producer of signs and sounds, that asserts this continuity and substance. What a voice, any voice, always says, no matter

what the particular local import may be of the words it emits, is this: this, here, this voice, is not merely *a* voice, a particular aggregation of tones and timbres; it is voice, or voicing itself. Listen, says a voice: some being is giving voice.

I distinguished a moment ago between qualities which attach to me, and the produced nature of my voice. How firm is this distinction? For is not every one of my qualities or attributes potentially also a way of producing myself? I can work on my other attributes and characteristics to turn these into productions, exaggerating, transforming, or disguising them—dyeing my hair, getting a suntan, walking with a limp, slimming or pumping iron, searing my fingertips. But these transformations modify certain given conditions. When I disguise my voice, I am producing differently something which is in the first place an active production and not a mere condition of my being. Unlike my hair colour, gait, or fingerprints, my voice is not incidental to me; not merely something about me. It is me, it is my way of being me in my going out from myself.

All this is to say that my voice is not something that I merely have, or even something that I, if only in part, am. Rather, it is something that I do. A voice is not a condition, nor yet an attribute, but an event. It is less something that exists than something which occurs. Maurice Merleau-Ponty finds in the act of speaking a kind of bodily singing of the world. ‘The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning a world’, he declares in *Phenomenology of Perception*.¹ For Merleau-Ponty, phonetic gesture is not a form of representation, or mimicry of pre-existing thoughts, but a way of bringing the speaker’s world into being.

What then does language express, if it does not express thoughts? It presents or rather it *is* the subject’s taking up of a position in the world of his meanings. The term ‘world’ here is not a manner of speaking: it means that the ‘mental’ or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that the thinking subject must have its basis in the subject incarnate. The phonetic ‘gesture’ brings about, both for the speaking subject and for his hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern of my bodily behaviour endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others. The meaning of the gesture is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon.²

My voice, as the passage of articulate sound from me to the world—usually, though by no means invariably, the social world—is something happening, with purpose, duration, and direction.

If my voice is something that happens, then it is of considerable consequence to whom it happens, which is to say, who hears it. To say that my voice comes

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 84.

² *Ibid.* 193.

from me is also to say that it departs from me. To say that my voice is a production of my being is to say that it belongs to me in the way in which it issues from me. To speak is always to hear myself speaking. Learning to speak depends upon being able to hear myself in this way. This kind of reflexivity is neither as necessary or as marked in other senses and bodily operations. Undoubtedly, I learn how to see, learn how to touch, grasp, and manipulate, but I do not need to watch myself doing these things in order to learn how to do them. By contrast, I cannot speak without putting myself in the position of the one who hears my voice; without becoming, in principle at least, my own interlocutor. And yet I must participate in my voice only by coming apart from it: indeed, it is only because I am always apart from my voice that such participation is possible. To speak without my voice ever leaving me to become audible would be impossible. Even profoundly deaf people may have a proprioceptive sensation of their voice as audibly belonging to them, through the transmission of its vibrations across the bones of the skull.

This is to say that the voice always requires and requisitions space, the distance that allows my voice to go from and return to myself. The very possibility of a world of coming and going, the fact that I am able to learn that my voice both comes from me and goes from me, may be programmed in part by the exercise and experience of my voice. This is to surmise that the voice is not merely orientated in space, it provides the dynamic grammar of orientation. First of all, the voice establishes relations of facing and frontality. More even than my gaze, my voice establishes me in front of things and things in front of me. It is not just that I aim my voice at the world ranged in front of me, typically in an arc of about 30 degrees; for my voice also pulls the world into frontality, and disposes it spatially in relation to this frontality. When I speak, my voice shows me up as a being with a perspective, for whom orientation has significance, who has an unprotected rear, who has two sides. The sight of me speaking underlines the fact of my visual inhabitation of the world. When children cry out to warn Mr Punch of who is behind him, his unawareness of what is invisible to him is much more striking and funny if he is speaking at the time. As I speak, I seem to be situated in front of myself, leaving myself behind. But if my voice is out in front of me, this makes me feel that I am somewhere behind it. As a kind of projection, the voice allows me to withdraw or retract myself. This can make my voice a persona, a mask, or sounding screen. At the same time, my voice is the advancement of a part of me, an uncovering by which I am exposed, exposed to the possibility of exposure. I am able to shelter behind my voice, only if my voice can be me. But it can be me only if it has something of my own ductility and sensitivity: only if it is subject to erosion and to harm. My voice can bray and buffet only because it can also flinch and wince. My voice can be a glove, or a wall, or a bruise, a patch of inflammation, a scar, or a wound.

A voice also establishes me as an inside capable of recognizing and being recognized by an outside. My voice comes from the inside of a body and radiates through a space which is exterior to and extends beyond that body. In moving from an interior to an exterior, and therefore marking out the relations of interior and exterior, a voice also announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and the environments in which they have their being. The voice goes out into space, but also always, in its calling for a hearing, or the necessity of being heard, opens a space for itself to go out into, resound in, and return from. Even the unspoken voice clears an internal space equivalent to the actual differentiation of positions in space necessary to the speaker and the hearer of a voice. We sometimes have the experience of suddenly hearing ourselves speaking, hearing actual words falling from our lips, when we thought that we were merely thinking. We may be shocked or embarrassed by having spoken, as we say, 'out loud' things that we thought were safely sealed inside us. But this kind of reverberation within the self is always in fact brought about by the act of speaking, the effect of which is always to apportion the self to the positions of speaker and hearer. The phrase 'out loud' suggestively couples the exteriority of the voice and its quality of forcefulness and distinctness. The corresponding French expression 'en haute voix', adds the dimension of height to those of exteriority and volume: in French, it appears, the voice which is outside me is also lifted away from me. The louder, and more forcefully I speak, the further out from me my speech reaches, and the more separate from me my voice seems to be. In English, the notion of elevation is to be found in the idiom 'at the top of my voice'. This idiom interestingly draws on the idea of the voice's own scale, equating loudness with elevation of pitch. One moves as it were within the compass of the voice itself, which seems to be provided with its own vertical space. At the same time, to speak at the top of one's voice is to release or separate one's voice from oneself. It is to stretch oneself up into the voice that exceeds one.

Perhaps all vocalized thoughts are in a sense 'out loud', too, since they require an internal spacing and division between what is inside and outside. If I hear my thoughts as a voice, then I divide myself between the one who speaks, from the inside out, and the one who hears the one who speaks, from the outside in. This reverberation seems to scoop out within the unextended space of the self the contrasts between an imaginary 'in there' and 'out here', or an imaginary 'in here' and 'out there'. This is not, as those who follow Derrida's account of the phenomenon of *s'entendre parler*, or '(over)hearing oneself speak', will often imply, a disabling 'splitting' of the self. There would be no self to split unless the self were already at least in principle distinguishable in terms of what it says, and what it hears, or imagines it hears itself saying. To say that we produce ourselves in voice is to say that we stage in our voice the very distinction between speaking and hearing which provides the setting in which the voice can resound.

So here is the essential paradox of the voice. My voice defines me because it draws me into coincidence with myself, accomplishes me in a way which goes beyond mere belonging, association, or instrumental use. And yet my voice is also most essentially itself and my own in the ways in which it parts or passes from me. Nothing else about me defines me so intimately as my voice, precisely because there is no other feature of my self whose nature it is thus to move from me to the world, and to move me into the world. If my voice is mine because it comes from me, it can only be known as mine because it also goes from me. My voice is, literally, my way of taking leave of my senses. What I say goes.

Perhaps the commonest experiential proof of the voice's split condition, as at once cleaving to and taking leave from myself, is provided by the experience of hearing one's own recorded voice. This experience became available for the first time in human history only after Thomas Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1876 and became common only after the popularization of tape-recording technology after the Second World War. Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* helps to date this popularity. The play, which concerns an old man listening to the tape-recorded diaries he has made throughout his life, was written in 1958; in order to make it possible for Krapp to have amassed a lifetime of such recordings, the play had to be given a setting in time that is unique in Beckett's writing, '[a] late evening in the future'.³ Once the voice has come apart from the moment of its product, all voices will henceforth be out of time in the same way.

The most striking thing about the popularization of the tape-recorder is the experience that it made familiar of the unfamiliarity of one's own voice as heard by others. The effect not only of unfamiliarity but also of perturbation was the subject of psychological investigation by Philip S. Holzman and Clyde Rousey who reported their findings in a paper entitled 'The Voice as Percept' in 1966.⁴ This paper confirmed experimentally the everyday observation that subjects hearing their own voices on tape either failed to recognize them or showed displeasure or discomposure at the recognition. The commonsensical explanation for this phenomenon would seem to be that the taped voice we hear pushed out into the air from a loudspeaker has a very different sound quality from the voice we hear conducted through the bones of the skull. But this difference in sound quality alone does not seem enough to account for what Holzman and Rousey call the 'complex confrontation experience' brought about by the 'loss of anchorage . . . [and] loss of the cathected familiar' (p. 84). The ingenious suggestion offered by the authors is that this experience may result not so much from

³ Samuel Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 215.

⁴ Philip S. Holzman and Clyde Rousey, 'The Voice as a Percept', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4 (1966), 79–86.

the unfamiliarity of the voice, as from its familiarity. 'It is possible', they say, 'that the voice-confrontation experience unexpectedly forces on the subject a momentary awareness of aspects of his personality which are mirrored in his voice' (*ibid.*).

The suggestion is that, in listening to our own voices under normal circumstances, we are continuously monitoring them for signs of what we might be letting slip about ourselves. This is necessary precisely because of the extreme expressiveness of the voice; the larynx contains the highest ratio of nerve to muscle fibres of any organ in the body and is therefore 'exquisitely responsive to intraorganismic changes' (p. 85). The discomposing effect of hearing one's own voice as others hear it—as an object of perception rather than a medium of expression—therefore derives from the fact that 'among the things subjects heard in their voices they heard something they had not wanted to hear, something expressed which they had wanted not to express but which nevertheless had been conveyed by speech qualities' (p. 85).

The implication of Holzman and Rousey's paper is that we must simultaneously hear and not hear our own voice. We must listen to it closely and continuously, in order not only to keep it in tune with what we mean to say, but also to detect what it might betray of what we do not mean to say—or mean not to say. What is more, we conceal the monitoring from ourselves, in that doubling of the operation of repression defined by Freud, in which we both censor and censor the awareness of the act of censorship. In speaking, we listen intently to our own speaking voice, in a complicated feedback loop, or duet of utterance and response; we eavesdrop on our own speech, but do not, as it were, hear ourselves listening.

On its own, however, this would not explain the phenomenon of discomposure. For why should listening to oneself through one's skull be less effective as a means of monitoring than listening to one's voice through the air? One might have thought that the sensory information available to the one hearing himself or herself speak under normal conditions was in fact much greater and much richer than the information derived from a loudspeaker. After all, in normal speaking, one has available the evidence of air-conducted and bone-conducted sound together, as well as the kinaesthetic and proprioceptive sensations coming from the vocal apparatus itself. Why should the confrontation with an acoustically and sensuously poorer version of our voice bring an intensified awareness of the timbral quality of the voice not available under normal circumstances of self-hearing?

I think the uninvestigated implication of Holzman and Rousey's paper—uninvestigated either by the authors themselves or, as far as I know, by subsequent researchers—is that the voice that one hears while speaking is not merely suspected, and subject to careful monitoring, but also deeply cathected, or

invested with strong feelings of recognition, pleasure, and love.⁵ People who hear their own recorded voices do not find them merely unfamiliar; they usually also find them alien—ugly, piping, thin, crude, drawling, barking, or otherwise unattractive. When we hear such a changeling voice we may, as we say, ‘make a face’: a mug, or mask, or grimace. Do we make a face that is so obviously not our own, in order to match the voice that we wish thereby to disclaim, and to declare to be equally obviously not our own? I am not that voice’s face, says our face, *this* would be that voice’s face. The outward grimace and the accompanying inward wince or adjustment of response that Holzman and Rousey found even in those more habituated to the experience of having heard their own recorded voices seem to testify, not just to a cognitive mismatch between what one expected to hear and what one in fact hears, but to an affective crisis, in which a large amount of strong feeling, which is normally attached to the voice and is momentarily deployed in relation to the tape-recorded voice when it is recognized but not acknowledged as one’s own, must quickly be retrieved and drawn back into oneself.

In fact, the normal conditions of hearing-oneself-speak are conditions not only of monitoring, but also of pleasurable autostimulation. One misrecognizes one’s own voice, not through any deficit of information, but because of the surfeit of pleasure involved in taking one’s voice as one’s own. This pleasure is much more than auditory, consisting as it does in a rich composite of auditory and other sensory gratifications. As we listen to our own voice, we feel as well as hear its vibrations, feel the complex, self-caressing dance of tongue, palate, and lips, counterpointed with the pleasurable muscular rhythms of the breath being

⁵ Psychological inquiry into the voice has tended to focus on the cognitive rather than the affective aspects of self-recognition. See e.g. the experiments into self-deception reported by Ruben C. Gur and Harold A. Sackheim in a series of papers from 1978 onwards, as summarized in their ‘Voice Recognition and the Ontological Status of Self-Deception’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48 (1985), 1365–8. Although Gur and Sackheim concentrated on the cognitive aspects of self-recognition, the registering of affective response (through the measurement of changes in the condition of the skin) was crucial to the interpretation of their experiments. They claimed to have established, for example, that ‘when subjects failed, by self-report, to recognize the voice of self, they displayed, nevertheless, the characteristic *augmented* psychophysiological response that accompanied correct self-recognition. When subjects incorrectly identified voices of other as self, they displayed, nonetheless, the characteristic *diminished* psychophysiological response that accompanied correct recognition of others’ (p. 1365). Interestingly, another pair of researchers found that the same discrepancies between what subjects reported about the tape-recorded voices they heard and what their galvanic skin responses seemed to demonstrate they were feeling about them were found in cases when the voices were not the subjects’ own, but those of near acquaintances: see William A. Douglas and Keith Gibbins, ‘Inadequacy of Voice Recognition as a Demonstration of Self-Deception’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44 (1983), 589–92. This seemed to Douglas and Gibbins to demonstrate that self-deception was not really involved.

drawn in and released. When we hear a song that we enjoy, we find it hard not to sing along, seeking to take it into our own bodies, mirroring and protracting its auditory pleasure with the associated tactile and proprioceptive pleasures. Perhaps we cannot enjoy the sound of a voice without the sound having begun to offer the prospect of this quasi-tactile self-caress. Nor are the pleasures of the voice confined to the actual processes of voice production. For the exercise of the voice animates the whole body, in particular the head, hands, and arms, but also, in proportion, and according to circumstance, portions of the body more removed from the centres of consciousness and speech production, in a tender labour of gesture. Even as I type these words, I find myself performing a little dance in my seat, shifting and bouncing, rocking my head in time to the voice that I can hear saying the things I am writing, a voice that does not seem to stand before them as their source, but to be sung out by them. The voice does not merely possess phonetic measure and pattern; it works to confer a dynamic shape on my whole body.

Nor is this process confined to individual bodies. For as we have seen the voice also possesses the capacity of 'singing the world', as Merleau-Ponty puts it.⁶ Children develop very early on a pleasure in vocally reproducing the sounds of the world—the creaking of doors, the wailing of sirens, the pattering of rain. This is more than onomatopoeia, which is to say, more than mere imitation. When one vocalizes a sound, one gives it to one's own voice, in order to give it *its* own voice. What is imitated in onomatopoeic voicing is the world's own capacity to give voice, in an enactment of the possibility that things in the world might be capable of and characterized by speech, and that the sounds of the world might be being uttered by it. I do not merely borrow, or capture this speech in reproducing the noises of the world; I seem to give the world the same kind of interior self-relation as is possessed by all entities that have a voice, a self-relation founded on the capacity of voice to shape a being in the air. I give the world an animate life by taking it as a voice; but the voice is not merely the sign of this animation, it is the very means by which animation is accomplished.

This animating power of the voice is strikingly visible in the arts of cartoon animation. The quality of movement of cartoon characters after the coming of sound to film is markedly different from what it had been before. All of a sudden, cartoon characters develop an enormously enlarged repertoire of gestures and movements, which represent a kind of filling or inundation of bodily movement by articulate sound. Of course, the movement of cartoon characters before the coming of sound, like that of actors in silent film, was already extravagantly significant, since the characters were required to take up positions and gestures directly and immediately expressive of their states of mind: surprise, anger,

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 187.

sadness, etc. But after the coming of voice cartoon characters are no longer subordinated to this miming imperative: the fact of speech gives them new movement and new possibilities of movement, including the possibility of impossible, or fantastic kinds of movement, as the body stretches and contorts into the postures dictated by its utterance. Now, the soaring note of incredulity will stretch and attenuate the body; the 'WHHHHAAAATT!' of shocked surprise will render the body of the character spiky and horrent, the note of misery will drag the body down into a sagging, flattened bag. In voiceless animation, the voice is subordinated to the need for visible display; in sound cartoons, the voices of the characters determine the nature of what we see. Indeed, in cartoons, voice is able to go everywhere, and become everything. The combining of auditory attack and physical violence in cartoons is a transposition from painting to film of that intersensory transposition so remarkably depicted in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, in which the power of utterance is represented by its very capacity to bend and buckle visual and spatial forms. The voices of cartoon characters not only seem to cause the smashing, stretching, and compression of the bodily form, but are themselves subject to similar processes of attenuation and pulverization, most particularly in the bumping, swooping, screeching, abruptly broken-off nature of the raucous music that comes to be typical of Warner Brothers and Disney cartoons. This display of the power of the voice to mutate and mutate into bodily form will be important at all stages of what follows.

The effect of the animation of space by voice is the opposite of the effect that has been noticed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the case of badly synchronized or failed sound in film:

When a breakdown of sound all at once cuts off the voice from a character who nevertheless goes on gesticulating on the screen, not only does the meaning of his speech suddenly escape me: the spectacle itself is changed. The face which was so recently alive thickens and freezes, and looks nonplussed, while the interruption of the sound invades the screen as a quasi-stupor.⁷

The moving image provided with a voice, by contrast, is suddenly given life, dimension, actuality, colour: in short, it is animated. Though the sound of a recorded voice, and in particular one's own recorded voice, is not, as in Merleau-Ponty's example, a body bereaved of its voice, but a voice amputated from its body, the effect is similar. A recorded voice that is supposed to be mine, but which I merely *hear*, and which has been cut off from all the rich, composite play of sensations involved in hearing my voice as I speak it, appears to be an abomination. It is not merely alien, but ugly, which is to say it is a disfigured or defiled version of what nevertheless seems to be some vital part of me, what normally gives me my vitality. At the same time, the separation of the voice from one's own

⁷ Ibid.

body may actually serve to accentuate the liveliness which cannot fail to reside in the voice. The voice's continuing power to animate, in the absence of a body which it should both be animating and be animated by, is distasteful and unnerving. The life that continues to reside in and emanate from the voice is a hostile life, which seems to be throttling the loved voice that is one's own by its grotesquely defective imitation of it.

Vocalic Space

At the beginning of this chapter, I pointed to the inalienable association between voice and space. I want to say now that the voice takes up space, in two senses. It inhabits and occupies space; and it also actively procures space for itself. The voice takes place in space, because the voice *is* space.

The experience of space is primary and primordial, but it does not, so to speak, stay that way. The bodily or phenomenological conditions of the voice determine and are themselves determined by cultural and historical orderings of space. These orderings have been subject to intense and energetic examination in recent decades, and cultural historians have done much to show the ways in which space, far from being the neutral or unchanging background for human actions, the mere space in which action takes place, is actively and dynamically produced, under differing historical conditions. Indeed the differential production of space has come to seem one of the most important ways in which to chart the emergence of such differing historical conditions. I would like the inquiry into voices at a distance from their source which I have undertaken in this book to contribute to an as yet insufficiently elaborated subtheme of the history of the social production of space, namely the conception of 'vocalic space'. I mean to signal with this term the ways in which differing conceptions of the voice and its powers are linked historically to different conceptions of the body's form, measure, and susceptibility, along with its dynamic articulations with its physical and social environments. In the idea of vocalic space, the voice may be grasped as the mediation between the phenomenological body and its social and cultural contexts. Vocalic space signifies the ways in which the voice is held both to operate in, and itself to articulate, different conceptions of space, as well as to enact the different relations between the body, community, time, and divinity. What space means, in short, is very largely a function of the perceived powers of the body to occupy and extend itself through its environment. The meaning of human space is changed drastically when it becomes possible to inhabit and command with one's voice an auditory range far larger than that prescribed the limits of the naturally audible. In our era, the conqueror is always also a 'loud-speaker': as the old joke has it, Stalin is just Genghis Khan with a telephone—or, in the expressive German word, a 'Fernsprecher'.

In ancient and medieval conceptions of the body's relationship to its physical and spiritual environment, for instance, individual bodies are seen as much more radically open to processes, influences, and agencies coming from the outside than they are in the modern world. Although a contemporary conception of disease as microbiological invasion was lacking, the body was conceived, not so much as an object, or the home and expression of a personality, as a dynamism. Conceived in this way, the human body was seen as vulnerable to invasion by other forces and agencies. Much has been made of the opening of the body, via the arts of dissection and anatomical display, to the penetrating light of scientific and medical understanding from the seventeenth century onwards. This genealogy, which emphasizes the objectification of the body achieved in new scientific conceptions, may seem to suggest that prior to the abstract opening of the body to the light of reason, it was experienced as unviolated and obscure interiority. In fact, this sense of the division between the lit and visible world of the body-brought-to-knowledge and the obscure and formless privacy of the body, the division between the body in knowledge and the body in experience, may itself be seen as the production of a scientific sensibility. In the pre-scientific conception of the body of the late classical and medieval periods, the body is seen as both open to and in complex interchange with manifold external influences, agencies, and energies, natural, divine, and demonic.

One might call such a conception of the body's relationship to its various environments a conception of 'implicated space'. In such a conception, the insides and the outsides of things are not so powerfully distinguished as they are in later conceptions; insides and outsides change places, and produce each other reciprocally. We will see in later chapters how speech, and especially inspired, ecstatic, or possessed speech, belongs to such an economy of the body at such periods.

This idea of the implicated space of the human body gives way steadily after the medieval period, and with increased rapidity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to a sense of *explicated space*, which places the body as an object in a coherent and fixed field. This move from implicated to explicated space forms part of a broader move from an auditory to a visual conception of the self and the body, and from what I will be calling a demonological to a dramaturgical conception of the sourceless voice. Later chapters of this book aim to show that modern acoustic technologies, which allow the transmission, reception, and multiplication of voices at a distance, produce new configurations of the imaginary space of the body and the socio-cultural spaces of its utterance. Once again, the body is not located so much as distributed in space.

Seeing Voices

The shifting conditions of vocalic space are illustrated with particular clarity and intensity in the curious, ancient, and long-lived practice of making voices

appear to issue from elsewhere than their source: the practice of ventriloquism. We are going to see that ventriloquism has an active and a passive form, depending upon whether it is thought of as the power to speak through others or as the experience of being spoken through by others. The history of ventriloquism reveals the complex alternations between these two contrasting possibilities. Making sense of this history entails making sense of the power of unlocated or mobile voices, along with the history of attempts to account for such voices, by providing them with names and points of origin.

The topic of ventriloquism belongs now to the history of magic and illusion, along with phenomena like thought-reading, divination, juggling, conjuring, and the practice of illusory magic of all kinds. It is in this sense that the subject has attracted the attention before me of antiquarians and historians of magic, superstition, and popular entertainment. However, the question of ventriloquism has attracted different kinds of attention and migrated between different areas of cultural jurisdiction at different times: theological, magical, medical, scientific, literary-critical, ethical. At one moment, it is the job of the theologian or religious philosopher to account for ventriloquism; at another, it is the job of the pathologist or the physicist, the psychoanalyst or psychologist; at another, the job of the sound-technician. The history of the history of ventriloquism is in fact an interesting inner compartment of the book that follows.

The more I have investigated the phenomena and practices of ventriloquism at different points in Europe and America over the last two millennia, the more it has appeared to me that this rather abstruse and specialized practice provided different cultures with a way both of enacting and of reflecting upon the powers and meanings of the voice as such. The aperture cut out by the history of ventriloquism thereby helps to define and disclose a cultural field which might have been too large and diffuse to be approached head-on. We have already begun to see how intimately related to the disposition of actual and imaginary spaces the voice must always be. The phenomenon of ventriloquism also offers a way to understand aspects of the cultural sensorium, or the different historical explication and experience of the senses. The ventriloquial voice asks in particular to be understood in terms of the relations between vision and hearing, relations which it itself helps to disclose.

Ventriloquism is usually thought of as a phenomenon of sound, as the power of creating specifically aural or vocal illusions. For centuries, commentators attempted to make sense of the phenomenon in terms of the mechanics of voice production—themselves very approximately understood until the late eighteenth century—and the physics of sound which began to be developed during the nineteenth century. It was long believed that ventriloquists were able to produce sound in a special manner, through some special organ, or the physical redistribution of existing vocal organs. The fascination and the menace of ventriloquism

derived from a belief that it represented the power of sound to countermand the evidence of sight. When we hear a voice from nowhere—from thin air, as we say—or from some improbable location (the belly of a prophet, the depths of the earth) we hear something which our eyes assure us is not possible. The belief that ventriloquism is primarily a matter of the voice and ear, acting, or being acted upon autonomously, and evading the customary government of the eye, is remarkably persistent. The understanding of ventriloquism will necessitate an investigation of the relations of priority between the different senses, and especially the senses of sound and sight. In so far as the eye may be associated with the government of space (the ordering of objects in space, and the governing effect of spatiality itself), the disturbing effect of ventriloquism may derive from its transcendence or disruption of seen space. This is not a transcendence of space itself, although it may appear as such. Both eye and ear operate in, and require space; but the synesthetic relations of eye and ear are asymmetric, in that the eye and the ear have different kinds or qualities of space. The space of hearing is not ungoverned in comparison with the space of the eye; but it is differently governed.

What are the characteristics of sound and hearing, and the forms of spatial experience they allow or require? Historians of the passage from orality to literacy have suggested that the most important difference between a culture based upon sound and one based upon sight lies in the relation of language to temporality. For literate or, so to speak, 'sighted' cultures, words are thought of as forms of record, signs capable of capturing bits of the world and of experience, and holding them in place. In aural-oral cultures, words are events; in visual-literate cultures, they are mnemonic objects. This suggests a distinction, which in some historians of orality can take a very idealizing form, between the participative relationship between humans and between humans and their non-human environments characteristic of oral cultures, and the dominative and non-reciprocal relations between the human and the non-human worlds characteristic of visual-literate cultures.⁸ Don Ihde suggests that the value of sound, and of an intensified awareness of it, is to restore us to a sense of being in the middle of the world, an intuition confirmed by Walter Ong, who suggests that '[s]ound situates man in the middle of actuality and in simultaneity, whereas vision situates man in front of things and in sequentiality'.⁹ The 'acoustic space' in which the oral-aural individual finds himself, Ong continues, is 'a vast interior in the center of which the listener finds himself together with his interlocutors' (*PW* 164).

⁸ An uncompromising argument regarding the dominative nature of vision is provided by David Michael Levin in *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 51–166.

⁹ Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Religious and Cultural History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 128. References hereafter abbreviated to *PW*.

The frontality of vision in human beings co-operates first with the fact that our ears are not well adapted to responding to the direction of sound, and secondly with the fact that vision requires a distance between the viewer and what is viewed, as opposed to the contiguity or mingling of substances characteristic of the other senses. These factors reinforce that sense of cleavage between the observer and the observed that is sometimes said to be characteristic of the age of the world-picture. As it seems to me, however, this cleavage need not guarantee and does not in all circumstances ensure the relations of domination for which the eye has sometimes been held responsible.¹⁰

Perhaps the tendency for visual and written representations of the world to become the means of domination over it derives not so much from the distance between the eye and its objects as from the capacity of the eye to suspend or withdraw itself. Being able to turn itself off—to blink—is what gives vision much of its active power, to dispose, discriminate, and revise. It makes vision an exercise performed on the world, as opposed to the bearing in of the world upon us that seems to take place in hearing. This aspect of sight encourages us to conceive of it according to a cinematic model (and may even have encouraged the development of cinematic technology itself) as a series of flash-photographs, or ‘takes’ upon the world, which are then animated or given movement through an act of synthesis. This in its turn encourages us to think of vision as intentional and purposive. We never merely see the world: we look at it, picking out particular objects for our attention, focusing on one object in preference to another, segmenting the totality of the visual field into figure and ground, foreground and background. The same is true of hearing, of course. Indeed, in so far as the sound of the world impinges continuously and variously upon us, it may be even more necessary for us to be able to filter and form that world by our acts of auditory attention and inattention than it is in the case of sight.

And yet there are important differences between the sense of the world that results from visual as opposed to auditory attention—always supposing, of course, that it were possible for these forms of attention to exist in pure forms. The effect and the enabling condition of this capacity to fragment and distinguish is the sense of a stable and continuous world-for-sight. Seeing tends inevitably towards looking, and looking towards picturing. The world as apprehended by vision seems to stand still to be looked at; and through being looked at, it gains the property of persistence.

It seems largely otherwise with hearing. We cannot shut off hearing as we can seeing. We cannot, Don Ihde has said, ‘listen away’ as we can ‘look away’;

¹⁰ The most compendious account of 20th-cent. suspicions and condemnations of the powers of the eye is to be found in Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993).

we have no earlids and, even if we did, they could not function as eyelids do, because of the diffuse nature of sound, which radiates and permeates, rather than travelling in straight lines. Writing that, I am suddenly reminded of the landlady of the amateur cellist Mr Morfin in Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, whose deafness offers only partial protection from his unmelodious bowing, which she apprehends as 'a sensation of something rumbling in her bones'.¹¹ There is no escape from sound, which reaches us from everywhere and works upon us without pause. Even in the conditions of radical sensory deprivation, the sounds of the body, creaking of the joints, cracking of the teeth, bumping of the pumped blood, persist and insist.

What is continuously and immediately present in a world of pure sound is the repeated experience of passage and impermanence. Where the voluntary and discontinuous nature of seeing as looking procures the sense of a continuous 'world-for-the-seeing', which can be relied on to hold its form even when it is not being looked at, the involuntary and continuous nature of hearing exposes us to a world of sound the primary characteristic of which is its impermanence. The world of sight appears to be *there*; pressing on us without remission, the world of sound is only ever there at the moment of our hearing it. The world of pure hearing would therefore be, so to speak, *unremittingly intermittent*. Sounds build and fade, break in and break off, blend and attenuate, in a pure plurality without background. Of course we filter and select the sounds we hear, just as we filter and select the objects that we see. In giving sounds a structure, we attempt to fix and spatialize, perhaps by borrowing the visual power to segment and synthesize, what is in its nature transient. We attempt to create as a picture what does not dispose itself as such. In its 'native habitat', Walter Ong suggests, 'the word is something that happens, an event in a world of sound' (*PW* 22). To be reliant upon sound rather than sight is to be exposed to the sense of 'something going on, something active, a kind of evanescent effluvium which exists only as long as something or someone is actually producing it' (*PW* 41–2). Such a reliance upon sound, as John Hull discovered during the process of losing his sight, and as he records in his remarkable memoir of that process, can involve an exposure to time which renders one passive:

When you are blind, a hand suddenly grabs you. A voice suddenly addresses you. There is no anticipation or preparation. There is no hiding round the corner. There is no lying low. I *am* grasped. I *am* greeted. I am passive in the presence of that which accosts me . . . For the blind person, people are in motion, they are temporal, they come and they go. They come out of nothing, they disappear.¹²

¹¹ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Peter Fairclough (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 912.

¹² John M. Hull, *Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness* (London: Arrow Books, 1991), 71–2. References hereafter abbreviated to *TR*.

The power of capturing, retaining, and therefore reordering the world which is associated with sight, and with a view of the world formed around its domination, is expressed in the creation of a sense of manipulable, permanent, homogeneous space. It requires and allows the sense of clear and coherent distinctions between the inside and the outside of the body, and the relative disposition of different bodies in space. A world apprehended primarily through hearing, or in which hearing predominates, is much more dynamic, intermittent, complex, and indeterminate. Where the eye works in governed and explicated space, the ear imparts implicated space.

When the reliance upon hearing is unusually intensified, as in John Hull's case, the switch from a sense of governed to a sense of produced space can be extremely disorientating. The loss of his sight meant that Hull began to lose the sense of his own body, as the vehicle or location of his consciousness. His description of this experience seems to suggest that the very division between consciousness and the world, and thus of individuality itself, is dependent upon the sense of sight. In blindness,

one can't glance down and see the reassuring continuity of one's own consciousness in the outlines of one's own body, moving a distant foot which, so to speak, waves back, saying, 'Yes, I hear you. I am here'. There is no extension of awareness into space. So I am nothing but a pure consciousness, and if so, I could be anywhere. I am becoming ubiquitous; it no longer matters where I am. I am dissolving. I am no longer concentrated in a particular location, which would be symbolized by the integrity of the body. (TR 48)

The blind person, or the person relying on hearing alone, is *permeated*. The blind person lives in his body rather than in the world: but it is a particular kind of body, a body given compelling but impermanent shape and volume by the experience of sound, which establishes strange continuities between the inside and the outside. Hull records his delight at the sound of a heavy rain shower, which relieves him for a moment from the effort of memory and projection required to hold a visual image of the world in place. But the rain also provides an image of the new dependence of his consciousness on what is received, unpredictably, from outside. His development of a new sense of his bodily form may mark a partial re-experiencing, from the point of view of the governed and explicated spaces of sight-orientated modern self-consciousness, of the produced and implicated space of an earlier disposition of the body in the world:

I am aware of my body just as I am aware of the rain. My body is similarly made up of many patterns, many different regularities and irregularities, extended in space from down there to up here . . . Instead of having an image of my body, as being in what we call the 'human form', I apprehend it now as these arrangements of sensitivities, a conscious space comparable to the patterns of falling rain. The patterns of water envelop me

in myriads of spots of awareness, and my own body is presented to me in the same way. There is a central area, of which I am barely conscious, and which seems to come and go. At the extremities, sensations fade into unconsciousness. My body and the rain intermingle, and become one audio-tactile, three-dimensional universe, within which and throughout the whole of which lies my awareness. (TR 100)

John Hull's experience of the intensification of hearing through the withdrawal of sight is interestingly matched by the experience of Suzi Maine who, as a result of a cochlear implant, began to hear again after thirty years of deafness following meningitis: 'I feel like a resonating crystal . . .', she wrote in her diary a few days after the insertion of the implant. 'The vibrations are so heightened I can hear every bump in the road as I drive along. It's almost as if my whole body is in contact with the surface and is ringing.'¹³

In such a condition, the mobility, transitiveness, and intermittence of the voice predominate over its powers to suggest a particular source or originating presence: 'Other people's voices come from nowhere', remarks Hull, and then wonders: 'Does my own voice also come from nowhere?' (TR 42). Many of the values of sound and the voice can only be disclosed when the experience of the ear is unnaturally or unexpectedly emphasized, or when the dominion of the eye is suspended or disrupted. The meanings attaching to the unaccommodated or unlocatable voices in various kinds of ventriloquism seem to produce just such a suspension. For the history of the senses is a history, not just of the increasingly complex exchanges between and co-ordinations of the different senses, but of attempts at what may be called *autonomization*, the abstraction, idealization, and reification of particular kinds of sensory experience and the modes of their apprehension at the expense of others. 'I am all eye', John Keats once wrote. Ventriloquism and its equivalents will provide some of the most striking evidence of the condition and consequences of being 'all ears'. It is in relation to the produced space of hearing that the peculiar doctrine of the autonomous power of the ventriloquial voice evolved and survived until the nineteenth century.

The truth about ventriloquism appears, or has appeared from the late nineteenth century onwards, to be both more mundane and more psychologically complex. For the success of ventriloquial illusions depends, not upon the isolation and intensification of the sense of hearing, but rather upon its deficit. Far from depending upon the separation of eye and ear, ventriloquism enforces their close co-operation. Rick Altman has argued that sound in film is subsidiary to image; a 'pure' or unattributed sound is always marked by doubt and mystery until it can be tracked to and synchronized with its source. Thus, Altman can declare that 'fundamental to the cinema experience is a process—which we might call the sound hermeneutic—whereby the sound asks *where?* and the image

¹³ 'I Can Hardly Believe My Ears', *Guardian* (20 Dec. 1997), 'The Week', p. 2.

responds *here!*¹⁴ Christian Metz has pointed similarly to a fundamental asymmetry between sound and vision. Sound, and especially the sound of the human voice, is experienced as enigmatic or anxiously incomplete until its source can be identified, which is usually to say, visualized; visual objects, by contrast, do not appear to us to need complementing or completing.¹⁵ We ask of a sound ‘What was that?’, meaning ‘Who was that?’, or ‘Where did that come from?’, but feel no corresponding impulse to ask of an image ‘What sound does this make?’ Thus, in cinema, we appear to need the specific verification of seeing a speaking mouth at the very moment of its utterance in order to manage the magic or scandal of an unattributed voice; the confirming obverse of this being the uneasiness induced in us by inexpert dubbing, or the faulty synchronization of image and sound, which release voices from the tenure of the lips that have let them through, an uneasiness which is effectively evoked in the odd title of Antonin Artaud’s 1933 essay, ‘Les souffrances de “dubbing”’.¹⁶

More recently, the composer and theorist of film sound Michel Chion has identified a specific form of maladjustment of sound and vision in cinema which also characterizes many forms of ventriloquism. Chion defines what he calls a cinematic *acousmètre* as an acoustic agency whose position with respect to the screen is undecidable, in that it is present and audible and effective within the visible scene, but is *not seen to speak*. The *acousmètre* is thus to be distinguished on the one hand from the ‘natural’ (though in fact synthesized) voice which is simultaneously seen and heard, and on the other from what he calls the *acousmatique* voice, which is heard but does not emanate from the action on the screen (for example, the voice-over, or narrating voice). The voice of the *acousmètre* can emanate from a character hidden from view in the scene (Polonius behind the arras), or from a non-human mechanism, like a robot or a tape-recorder; the classic example, however, is the figure of the Invisible Man in James Whale’s film of 1933.¹⁷ The *acousmètre* exists between sound and vision, and is to be identified with neither, but rather with a complex and fascinating process of transfer and interchange between them, in which we begin to see their sound and hear their physical shape, location, and movement. The passage of hearing and vision into one another induced by the insufficiency of stimulus induces the compensatory involvement of other senses too, as we begin to supply by imaginary tactile means, for example, the absent volume of the audible-invisible man. The later forms of ventriloquial performance with which we have become familiar since the mid-nineteenth century, in which it is imperative that we know the actual

¹⁴ Rick Altman, ‘Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism’, *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 74.

¹⁵ Christian Metz, ‘Aural Objects’, tr. Georgia Gurrieri, *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 25–6.

¹⁶ Antonin Artaud, ‘Les Souffrances de “dubbing”’, *Œuvres complètes*, iii (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 108–11.

¹⁷ Michel Chion, *L’Audio-vision* (Paris: Nathan, 1990), 107–17.

source of the illusion to be the visible ventriloquist, even as we are forbidden sight of the voice, are phenomena of the *acousmètre*.

The ambivalent, mysterious, and interrogative nature of the unlocated sound or voice may be a result of the fact that human beings do not hear at all well. Though we are reasonably sensitive to the quality of sounds, we are not good, in comparison to other species, at relating sound-stimulus to position and distance. Where human hearing can give warning of dangers, often in advance of the eye, the eye is usually needed to confirm or disconfirm the danger. So perhaps the reason that sight has priority over hearing for human beings is simply that it needs to. From the beginning, then, hearing is a diffusely kinetic sense, producing states of arousal, attentiveness, or questioning anxiety, while seeing is an interpretative sense; where the ear stirs, the eye stills. Writing about the experience of recovering her hearing, Suzi Maine recorded her exhaustion at what she calls the 'brutal intrusion' of the sound. 'The noise was almost unbearable . . . the sounds are shocking, like a cattle prod constantly nudging your head.'¹⁸

Cinema has provided the strongest and most irrefutable evidence of the dependence of what you hear upon what you see, both in ventriloquism and in communicative technology. It appears that the experience of pure hearing is not one that may be sustained for long. The deficit of the ear is almost always made good by the contributions of the eye. However, there are two different means by which this seems to be achieved. First of all, the eye can supplement the ear, in the process of aural asking and visual answering identified by Rick Altman. But it is also possible for the ear to borrow and internalize some of the substantiating powers of the eye, and to mould from them a kind of sonorous depth, a space sustained by and enacted through the experience of sound and hearing alone. Under these circumstances, sound is not integrated into the domain of vision, but offers to create an alternative domain of its own, in the production of a sense of sonorous space, a sense of volume, depth, and shape seemingly formed by and from sound itself. The power of this dream of a purely vocal-auditory world derives precisely from the sense of ontological deficit that is always a feature of sound and hearing: a sense that to hear, or to be exposed to sound is to be deprived of the means of identification and differentiation. Pure hearing is identified with passivity, threat, and voluptuous excess. The fantasy of a world of autonomous sound, in which hearing is not subdued by but itself subsumes the positioning, identifying functions of sight, has been a feature of Romantic aesthetics, modernist and avant-garde experimentation, and contemporary technological ambition.

The Romantic dream of sonorous autonomization recurs strangely in the conspicuous success in the twentieth century of radio ventriloquists like Edgar

¹⁸ 'I Can Hardly Believe My Ears', 2.

Bergen and Peter Brought. Such an idea seems absurd in the light of the knowledge of how important visual cues are to the ventriloquial illusion. Ventriloquism of this kind, and perhaps ventriloquism in general, testifies to a remarkably persistent desire to believe in the autonomy of the voice, in the power of the voice detached not only from its source, but also from its subordination to sight. The radio ventriloquist does what radio itself does; conjuring with sound a visible scenario in which we can consent to be duped by the ventriloquial illusion. Just as ventriloquism depends upon the insufficiency of sound and the adjustment of sound by sight, so a ventriloquial structure is at work in the larger adjustments of sound, sight, and the other senses. To understand the operations of ventriloquism, in the larger sense of the separation of voices (and sounds) from their source, and the compensatory ascription of source to those sounds, is to go a long way towards understanding the construction and transformation of what may be called the cultural sensorium, or the system of relations, interimplications, and exchanges between the senses.

We must speak of the construction and transformation of the sensorium because the relations between the arousing ear and the interpreting eye are a cultural achievement, rather than a biological given. Thus, there seems reason to suspect that our contemporary tendency to associate hearing with feeling—intense but indeterminate—and seeing with knowing—precise but abstract—is itself the result in part of the well-documented shift from a society based on the spoken, and therefore heard word, to one based on the written word. It seems plausible that, in a society without written records, or one which is organized around the rhetorical and performative arts of speech rather than of writing, the ear may have been a much more discriminating organ than it is now, and hearing capable of performing to some degree many of the functions which now gather around the eye. If there is some limited truth in the view that an oral culture is in some respects more immediate, dynamic, emotive, and exteriorized than a written culture, it is likely, too, that in such cultures the functions of analysis, introspection, and memory which have accrued to the eye must have been enacted in larger measure through the sense of hearing. Walter Ong, for example, has shown how in oral cultures the flow of speech tends to be organized in quasi-spatial ways, which anticipate the storing and ordering effects of writing: speech will fall into regularly recurring patterns, or will be attracted to shared and recognizable utterances which become known as *topoi*, literally the ‘places’ of speech (*PW* 79–87). To understand the cultural meanings of ventriloquism will mean making sense of these changing cultural relations between sound and sight, voice and text. It may be suggested that the differentiation of the sense of the individual body, and the sense of clear body boundaries, will depend, first of all, upon the refinement of the powers of vision, which begins to happen very quickly after the first few weeks of life and, secondly, upon the subordination of

the other sources of sensory stimulation to the powers of sight, and in particular its powers of discrimination. In a culture in which the oral and the aural have been more generally subjected to the ordering powers of the eye, this process is presumably likely to occur earlier and more systematically than in a culture in which orality is more dominant.

The result of this co-operation of the biological with the cultural relations between the senses is the simultaneous demotion and exaggeration of the powers associated with sound and with hearing. Sound, especially sourceless, autonomous, or excessive sound will be experienced both as a lack and an excess; both as a mystery to be explained, and an intensity to be contained. Above all, sound, and as the body's means of producing itself as sound, the voice, will be associated with the dream and the exercise of power.

Power, Rapture, and the Sacred

It is in the nature of the voice to be transitive, both in the literal sense that it is always in transit from me to the one who hears it, and in the more strictly linguistic sense that it has an object or target. For the one constituted as such an object or target, the voice is the undeniable evidence of will or intention. This is as true of inner or unarticulated voices as it is of the more ordinary kind. The voices heard by mystics and schizophrenics, as well as many non-psychotic people, are so tenacious and unignorable because the voice insists that it has come from somewhere else, from some other person or agency than the hearer. It is extremely hard to persuade the victims of auditory hallucinations of this kind that what they are hearing is not real, which is to say, that it does not have its source somewhere in the real world rather than in mere electro-cortical agitation. Because a voice is an event in time, something that happens to us, even happens on us, in a way that an object presented for sight is not, the experience of hearing something with one's own ears is much more importunate and encroaching than seeing it with one's own eyes. A little earlier, I made the point that the human sense of sight is far more developed than the human sense of hearing, which, compared with that of other species, is limited and untrustworthy. And yet it is precisely because of this that we seem to have become much more able to mistrust our eyes than our ears. Thus, if a god or a tyrant wants to ensure unquestioning obedience, he had better make sure that he never discloses himself to the sight of his people, but manifests himself and his commands through the ear. Do we not call such a person a *dictator*? *Ex auditu fides*, as St Paul puts it in Romans 10: 17—from hearing comes belief. The very word 'obedience' derives from the Latin *audire*.

The experience of a voice without an obvious origin, whether in divine annunciation, oracular utterance, the voices of those seemingly possessed by

spirits, or the many forms of auditory hallucination experienced by the psychotic and the ecstatic, is an experience of the overload of sound. In such an experience, there will usually be a communicated meaning of considerable import, such as a warning, exhortation, or instruction. It seems impossible for such unlocated or sourceless voices not to be experienced as a subjection to overmastering power. Why should this be so?

In a culture of writing, in which words come to take on the quality of objects, voices will tend increasingly to be modelled upon and to be assimilated to the condition of written words, which is to say as seemingly manipulable forms and quasi-spatial objects. The ephemerality and uncontrollability of oral language, deriving largely from the fact that it comes and goes so unpredictably in time, means that it is more apt than writing to suggest a world of powers and powerful presences. The long association between the dissociated or ventriloquially dissimulated voice and the exercise of various kinds of divination, in particular in the traditions attaching to the oracle at Delphi, seems to testify to this close link between the autonomized voice and the control and signification of time. John Hull, who was able to interpret his blindness as a return to the oral and sonorous dimensions of religious experience, suggests that there is therefore a fundamental difference between a divine principle that yields itself up to sight and one that does not. Sound is more readily associated with the transcendent, because sound 'suggests that over which we have no power' (*TR* 126). He goes on to suggest that this is why religions often speak of the invisibility of the divine principle, but hardly ever of his/her inaudibility: 'When we say that the divine being is invisible, we mean that we do not have power over it. To say that the divine was inaudible, however, would be to claim that it had no power over us' (*TR* 127).

A voice without an origin, which is usually to say, a voice immune to the powers of the eye and the categorial cognitive functions associated with it, will emphasize the power of voice as utterance and effect over against its associations with presence and intention. At the same time, voice cannot not be thought of in relation to the idea of presence, since, as Walter Ong suggests, 'manifestation of personal presence is not something added to voice. Voice is not *peopled* with presences. It itself is the manifestation of presence' (*PW* 168). On this view, it cannot be quite accurate to speak of a voice deprived of all aspects of presence. In so far as a sound is recognized as a voice, rather than as a sound, it is assumed to be coming from a person or conscious agency. Aristotle distinguishes the idea of the voice from sound in general in just these terms in his discussion of sound of his *De Anima*, 2. 8. The difference between sound and voice, he writes, is a difference between unsouled and ensouled entities: 'Voice is a kind of sound characteristic of what has soul in it; nothing that is without soul utters voice.' Aristotle's definition allows for animate beings in general to be possessed of voice, and not just those possessed of human consciousness. The distinction between

voice and sound in fact cuts across the distinction between the ensouled and the unsouled: 'Not every sound made by an animal is voice (even with the tongue we may merely make a sound which is not voice, or without the tongue as in coughing); what produces the impact must have soul in it and must be accompanied by an act of imagination, for voice is a sound with a meaning' (*De Anima*, 2. 8). Not everything in the voice, it appears, has soul; but everything that impacts upon us as voice, or raises the possibility of voice, also raises the possibility of soul.¹⁹

The power of a voice without a visible source is the power of a less-than-presence which is also a more-than-presence. The voice that is heard in the thunder, the eruption, or the whirlwind, is a kind of compromise formation. In that it is ascribed to a god, or simply to God, the voice transcends human powers of understanding and control; but the very fact that it is so ascribed also makes it possible to begin exercising control, in the very considerable form of conferring a name. To hear the thunder as a voice is to experience awe and terror; but to hear the voice in the thunder is also to have begun to limit the powers of that voice.

Given the sensory organization of newly born infants, it seems more than likely that the experience of exposure to excessive sound, consequent on the remission of the powers of the eye, will recall and reactivate early intense experiences of helplessness and subjection. In the late 1930s, Otto Isakower suggested, in a somewhat overliteral, but nevertheless suggestive argument, that there may be a determinate link between the development of hearing and the development of the sense of power and authority in the human psyche: 'Just as the nucleus of the ego is the body-ego, so the human auditory sphere, as modified in the direction of a capacity for language, is to be regarded as the nucleus of the super-ego.'²⁰ A patient suffering from auditory hallucinations may appear to be reduced to a state of terrifying passivity, but such hallucinations are in fact themselves a kind of defence, for 'hallucinatory voices serve the purpose, among other things, of warning the sick person of the danger of being overpowered by the id'.²¹ Isakower focuses on the common sensation of the flaring up of voice just as we are on the point of falling asleep: "before the "censor", whom we know so well, withdraws, he seizes the opportunity of making his voice heard once more very forcibly'.²²

The idea of the association of sound and power receives support from other sources. Julian Jaynes emphasizes the fact that '[s]ound is the least controllable

¹⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima Books II and III*, tr. D. W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 32, 33.

²⁰ Otto Isakower, 'On the Exceptional Position of the Auditory Sphere', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 20 (1939), 345–6.

²¹ *Ibid.* 346. ²² *Ibid.* 348.

of the sense modalities' and evokes the helplessness of the condition of what he calls 'bicameral man', or man at a stage of evolution before the integration of consciousness, when he might not recognize the voices heard in his head as emanating from his own brain:

there is no person there, no point of space from which the voice emanates, a voice that you cannot back off from, as close to you as everything you call you, when its presence eludes all boundaries, when no escape is possible—flee and it flees with you—a voice unhindered by walls or distances, undiminished by muffling one's ears, nor drowned out with anything, not even one's own screaming—how helpless the hearer!²³

Walter Ong surmises that sound is opposed to sight in the fact that it 'signals the present use of power, since sound must be in active production in order to exist at all' (*PW* 112). Of course the signs of movement or power can also be perceived by the eye. But the eye can also perceive the absence of movement, which the ear cannot, since anything heard by the ear must by definition be in movement. Stillness is something you can see, but not something you can hear, not even in silence, since absolute silence is in fact the suspension of hearing altogether.

This seems to explain why, in an auditory culture, in which words may still be apprehended primarily as sounds, words seem to have a magical power (our word 'enchantment' derives from the word for magical chanting or incantation). But if sound suggests the idea of the exercise of power, this may be because it more fundamentally involves the subjection to it. The reason for this, suggests Ong, is the simultaneity and complexity of sound-experience:

One of the special terrors of those addicted chiefly to auditory syntheses is due to the disparity between this world of sound and that of sight: hearing makes me intimately aware of a great many goings-on which it lets me know are simultaneous but which I cannot possibly view simultaneously and thus I have difficulty dissecting or analyzing, and consequently of managing. Auditory syntheses overwhelm me with phenomena beyond all control. (*PW* 129–30)

However, excessive sound is associated, not only with unpleasant or terrifying subjection, but also with experiences of intense rapture. The evocation of states of religious rapture is accomplished through sound in many religions, from the cacophonous frenzies of Dionysus, through to the joyous noisiness of Hindu rituals. To this we must add the means employed to bring about conditions of trance, in shamanism, voodoo, and secular practices of dance. The powers of the unlocated voice are often intimately involved with such rituals.

One way of explaining the co-operation of rapture and fear in such experiences is of course to point to the close association between ecstasy and the

²³ Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 97, 98.

surrender of control. However, the loss of control is usually itself accomplished or accompanied by various ways of framing or limiting that loss. The loss of control involved in religious ecstasy is almost always limited in time and place, and almost always brought about through highly specific procedures.

The differential relations of power between the senses, and the differential role of the senses in the effecting of power, have an individual or psychic historicity as well as a cultural history. For the foetus and the infant, it now appears, the sense of hearing is far more developed and dominating than the sense of sight. As early as six weeks after conception, the foetus responds markedly to the stimulation of sound, and for most of its intra-uterine life, will continue as it were to be bathed, soothed—and also occasionally agitated—by sound. One of the reasons that sound is so important to the foetus and, we may assume, for the newly born infant, in whom the powers of sight are as yet extremely poorly developed, is that it is far from fully discriminated from the other senses, and most particularly the sense of touch. This seems to have the effect both of making the neonate intensely vulnerable to sound, which may be experienced as an painful threat or invasion, and of identifying sound closely with the shaping and integrating functions of touch, in the form of pressure and palpation, as these are experienced on the baby's skin. It is in the work of the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu that this relationship between the experience of sound and that of touch has been most developed.

Anzieu's work is a development of a throwaway remark in Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (1923) that 'the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body'.²⁴ Central to Anzieu's work is a conception of what he has called the 'skin-ego', by which he means 'a mental image of which the Ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body'.²⁵ Anzieu suggests that chief among a number of imaginary containing volumes parallel to the skin-ego is the infant's sense of a 'sonorous envelope', in the bath of sounds, especially those of the mother's voice, that surround the young child, soothing, supporting, and stabilizing it. This imaginary envelope is the auditory equivalent of Lacan's mirror-stage, in that it gives the child a unity from the outside; it can be seen, therefore, as a 'sound-mirror or . . . audio-phonetic skin'.²⁶ Without the

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Pelican Freud Library, 11; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 364 n. 2. This footnote first appeared in the English tr. of this text of 1927 by Joan Rivière, though its authorial status is not clear; it does not appear in the German edns. of the work.

²⁵ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, tr. Chris Turner (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 158.

satisfactory experience of this sonorous envelope, the child may fail to develop a coherent sense of self; there will be rents or flaws in the ego, leaving it vulnerable to inward collapse in depression, or invasion from outside, leading to the formation of an overprotective artificial skin in certain forms of autism.

Anzieu's analysis has been carried forward recently by Edith Lecourt, who makes more explicit the implication of Anzieu's work that the sonorous binding which a 'good-enough' experience of parental sound provides is in fact a protection against the otherwise diffusive and disintegrating conditions of sound itself. These conditions Lecourt defines as the absence of boundaries in space—'sound reaches us from everywhere, it surrounds us, goes through us'—and in time—'there is no respite for sonorous perception, which is active day and night and only stops with death or total deafness'—as well as its disturbing lack of concreteness—'sound can never be grasped; only its sonorous source can be identified'. All of these qualities are summed up, says Lecourt, in sound's quality of '*omnipresent simultaneity*'.²⁷

Anzieu's and Lecourt's conception of the sonorous envelope builds on the insights of some earlier psychoanalysts. In a paper of 1958 entitled 'Early Auditory Experiences, Beating Fantasies, and Primal Scene', William Niederland narrated the case histories of patients who derived erotic satisfaction from being subjected to physical and sexual abuse accompanied by violent vocal assault. Niederland suggests that the patients must be understood as attempting to introject and control frightening and traumatic experiences of sound, the 'early fear of bodily extinction by intense, ego-overwhelming auditory sensations', or the threat of impending 'auditory extinction' which Niederland believes may in fact be a feature of all infantile experience.²⁸ One of Niederland's patients was a homosexual man, who was driven to seek masochistic sexual experiences specifically at times when 'the noises of the city—experienced as crude and intensely felt primitive sounds—assail him and threaten to overwhelm his ego'. In doing so, Niederland suggests, 'he "*structures the situation*," that is, he transforms the threatening unorganized noise into organized meaningful sounds emitted at his own behest'.²⁹

This contrast between threatening and ego-assailing noise, and the organization of that noise into sound perhaps also explains some of the pleasure of music. The pleasure of musical experience is the pleasure of the surrender of the visual individual to a structured community of sensation. Didier Anzieu's conception of the 'sonorous envelope' may help us to understand this process. What Anzieu

²⁷ Edith Lecourt, 'The Musical Envelope', in Didier Anzieu (ed.), *Psychic Envelopes*, tr. Daphne Briggs (London: Karnac Books, 1990), 211.

²⁸ William G. Niederland, 'Early Auditory Experiences, Beating Fantasies, and Primal Scene', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 13 (1958), 474.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 475.

describes as the ‘bath of sounds’ which surrounds the baby, especially the caressing tones of its mother, acts in co-operation with actual postures and shaping caresses both to support and determine the baby’s sense of its own physical existence. Anzieu’s notion of the sonorous envelope has been criticized for seeming to turn the experience of the mother’s voice into an idealized, oceanic plenum. But it is important to understand what Anzieu is saying in the context of his work upon the necessary formation of protective or filtering skins or imaginary membranes of various kinds. The bath of sounds into which the child sinks, and which, we may suggest, is recalled in later experiences in which individual identity is immersed in sound, is also a defining, limiting, shaping function. In the sonorous envelope, the child is protected against the disintegrating effects of sound (which Freud had suggested constituted a particular threat to the emerging ego) by a structure that is itself made up of sound. In so far as it confers shape, dimension, and pattern, the sonorous envelope is sound that is half-way to being recruited by the eye, or has anticipated its functions. The power of music may derive from this balancing of form with intensity, in which the perceived regularities of rhythm, tone, melody, and harmony have the effect of articulating (breaking up and co-ordinating) and thus spatializing what would otherwise be an undifferentiated torrent of noise. Music, and musicalized noise, is sound that holds us (arrests us, supports us) in the shapeliness that we have ourselves afforded it, in the patterning response of our musical attention. Music is sound which appears to have become autonomous, achieving a solidity and form separate from its occasion or medium.

The Greatest Power of Emanation

Where Didier Anzieu has stressed the largely passive or reactive experience of sound, Guy Rosolato has focused on the active production of sound as voice. Rosolato suggests that the infant may experience in the exercise of its voice a sense of sonorous omnipotence, the power to exercise its will through sound which perhaps corresponds to what Freud called the stage of magical thinking, or ‘omnipotence of thoughts’. The voice, writes Rosolato, ‘is the body’s greatest power of emanation’.³⁰ Initially, the cry produces a generalized vitalization of the world, in which mass becomes movement, and inertness is subject to excitation:

The infant takes its measure very early on, like the irradiation of its still largely immobile bodily mass into a much larger space, covering an area which shows itself extending in all directions and overlapping the obstacles to sight. Right from the beginning, the cry is the manifestation of the *excitation* of living matter in pain or pleasure, at once autonomous and reacting to stimulation—an excitation which is life itself. (p. 76)

³⁰ Guy Rosolato, ‘La Voix: Entre corps et langage’, *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 38 (1974), 76 (my tr.). References hereafter in the text.

This apprehension of a generalized vitalization through the voice gives way to the willed control over vocal sounds. As the fantasy develops of sonorous omnipotence, another aspect of the voice develops. As well as being the power of emanation, the voice comes to be experienced as something produced. The infant's first cries vitalized and animated the world, surging out of inert objecthood and resisting the relapse into it. The more conscious exercise of control over the voice, and therefore over the world through the voice, begins to form, out of the generalized power of emanation, vocal precipitates, or emissions, 'which are *separated off from the body*, which come from a subterranean work of fabrication, a metabolism, and which, once given out, become objects distinct from the body, and without its qualities of sensitivity, of reaction and excitation, and take on a value which interests the desire of the Other' (p. 78).

At this point in its development, the infant's capacity to produce or project power may exceed its capacity to receive or acknowledge that power as its own. The voices of appeal, threat, or raging demand that the child produces give a sense of sadistic mastery, which both produces an object of its own, and makes the world temporarily an object. The rage of the infant and the toddler will often manifest itself in a desire to put its will into sound, to force sound into a permanent form; as though the amplitude of a cry would imprint it more firmly and permanently on the world, and give it the quality of manipulability that the child finds lacking. The pleasure in the objectification of sound is perhaps the origin of the sense of sound sculpted into form, by patterning, repetition, and synchronic overlay, which provides the pleasure in music. Like the infant's cry, the singing voice manipulates itself into an object. However, once the voice has been separated from the child, it may also be experienced as what Kleinian analysis calls a 'part-object'. A 'part-object' is a part of the body which provokes love or desire (typically, the breast, penis, or faeces) and therefore becomes split off from the body. For Klein, this separation of the part-object comes about as a result also of ambivalent feelings towards the object, which get affectively polarized; thus the breast which is withdrawn or fails to satisfy also takes on a 'bad' or persecutory form.³¹

The baby is hungry and cries; hunger for young humans is inseparable from crying. No hunger for humans without crying. The cry is the response to the hunger and the means employed to defeat it. The cry is the form of the baby's sonorous omnipotence. The voice is the means—the sole means—that the baby has to escape from so much suffering, and reach and fetch to it the comfort and sustenance (breast, bottle, company) that it needs. Nicolas Abraham and Maria

³¹ Melanie Klein, 'Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant', in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963* (London: Vintage, 1997), 61–93, esp. pp. 61–71.

Torok have emphasized this close relationship between need, language, and power in the newborn infant, observing that language first arises in the painfully empty mouth. 'The emptiness is first experienced in the forms of cries and sobs, delayed fullness, then as calling, ways of requesting presence, as language.' The executive power of this calling creates a transition 'from a mouth filled with the breast to a mouth filled with words', and then a powerful association between them.³² The voice is the auditory apparition of the breast, the sound that swells to fill the void opened by the breast's absence. It seems to me that Abraham and Torok do not have good reason to assume that what arises in the empty mouth to substitute for the breast is already 'language'; I would prefer to call it 'voice', meaning by this a raw, quasi-bodily matter from which language will be made. Human beings, I am surmising, can never afterwards give up the belief in the power of the voice to command and countermand space, and to ease suffering.

But the voice is also the voice *of* the infant's suffering and need. When the cry does not bring instant relief, it becomes itself the symbol of unsatisfied desire, even the agency of the frustration of this desire. It is almost as if there arose a 'bad voice', in parallel to Klein's 'bad breast'. But the crying voice is not the breast and cannot provide what the breast can provide. Instead of filling the baby up, it empties it, adding to the need for food an unpleasant and frightening constriction of breath. For the baby, for whom, we may surmise, negation is as difficult to encompass as for the dreamer, the voice is not something other than the breast, which cannot satisfy precisely because it is other than the breast, but is the breast gone bad, the breast that refuses to feed, the breast that screams instead of yielding pleasure. If the cry is the form of the infantile hallucination of the breast, it is a disappointment. The child attempts to feed itself with its voice, but its voice simply crams starvation back down its throat.

Just as the bad breast is the negative version of the good breast, which is both the hypostasis of the bad qualities of the breast, and the anxious image of the angry breast's retaliation for the infant's imaginary assaults on it, so the bad voice is both the expression of the infant's rage and the embodiment of the retaliatory rage that the infant fears from the bad breast as a result of the infant's own destructive anger. This is why the bad voice is always directing its angry energies against itself in crying or screaming. The angry voice destroys itself, because it is itself the ugly proof of the hostility that threatens to spoil the transcendent beauty of the good voice. There is no frightening voice—no roar, or scream, or ugly or demanding voice of any kind—that we do not recognize as this bad voice, the voice of rage, and of frustration. This is to say that there is no

³² Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, 'Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation', in *The Shell and the Kernel*, tr. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 127.

bad voice—including the ugly and alien voice that we hear in our own voice when it is played back to us—which is not partly our own.

The good voice, on the other hand, is the voice of pleasure and beneficence. When the child is fed, its cry is stifled and then stilled. As the infant feeds, it takes in something good and precious to itself from outside. But as it feeds, it hears the voice of the one who feeds it. If it takes into itself in a psychological sense the breast that provides the milk which it takes in biologically—Klein's introjection of the good breast—then it also takes in the voice which accompanies the milk which feeds it. Like the introjected image of the 'good breast', of which, perhaps it is itself the most important and influential form, the good voice becomes an important repository of life and hope and reassurance. The voice is the most important factor in the formation of Didier Anzieu's 'sonorous envelope'.³³ This voice holds, secures, encloses, and supports. But it comes from outside. The bad voice is the infant's own voice which has been violently estranged from it. The good voice comes initially from the outside, being the voice of another or of many others which the infant hears: but it too can be introjected.

Gradually, the child learns to introject, not just the voice of the 'mother', but also its own voice. But the pleasure it takes in its own voice (do we not regularly hear and speak of people who are 'in love with the sound of their own voice') indicates that something of the value and ideal form of the mother's voice may have been requisitioned for the purposes of the *propria persona*. The child gradually comes to recognize its own voice as the good voice. Thus the bad voice is the voice of the self become other: the good voice is the voice of the other become self. Idealized voices of all kinds derive their power, prestige, and capacity to give pleasure from this willingness to hear other voices as one's own.

The exercise of power through the voice and over the voice thus results in the production of vocal objects. But such an object can also suggest a voice which is an active and autonomous presence in the world, and can exercise power on its own account. For the young child, who both relies upon its voice and is so vulnerable to the threat of auditory assault and extinction, a gap may open up between the voice that is spoken and the voice which is heard. The voice, as pure, lyric, unselfconscious I-hood spilling or erupting into the world, suddenly becomes part of that world and recoils upon its originator. Under these conditions, the child may be left depleted and itself vulnerable to the vocal assaults it launches on the world. The exercise of the voice then threatens to make the child part of the objectified world that the exercise of the voice itself creates.

At the same time, the idea of a vocal object, of the voice not as an event but as a thing, also suggests the possibility that it may be manipulated or controlled. It is for this reason that D.W. Winnicott includes the beginnings of control in the

³³ Anzieu, *Skin Ego*, 157–73.

baby's voice, in its 'mouthing, accompanied by sounds of "mum-mum", babbling, anal noises, the first musical notes and so on', along with the incorporation of objects such as blankets, bundles of wool, or cuddly toys, in the category of what he calls 'transitional phenomena'. These exist between the conditions of 'me' and 'not-me' and assist the passage from oral self-stimulation to a more mature relationship with objects.³⁴ The importance of the voice in this process of objectifying seems to derive from the overwhelmingly oral character of the relationship to the mother or source of nutrition via the breast or bottle; for Freud, too, the earliest distinctions between pleasurable feelings that are held to belong to me, and those which are rejected as not-me, are formed in oral terms.³⁵ We might suggest that the fantasy of sonorous autonomization often involves the mapping of the functions of oral discrimination, swallowing and vomiting, and their equivalents, ingestion and excretion, on to the functions of speaking and hearing. It is not by chance that we speak of calming music as 'sweet', and of unpleasant sound as a 'cacophony'. We will see later how regularly oracular or prophetic speech is associated with the profanity of excremental matter. Sufferers from Tourette's syndrome, who sometimes experience the compulsion to utter violent obscenities, may also be enacting a powerful equivalence between a loss of control and ownership over their speech and the congelation of that speech into a malign objecthood. It is from these early experiences of extreme ambivalence perhaps that the power of the fantasy of sonorous autonomization derives.

It may be for this reason that the dissociated voice is always closer to the condition of a cry than of an articulate utterance. A cry is not pure sound, but rather pure utterance, which is to say, the force of speech without, or in excess of, its recognizable and regularizing forms. A cry always seems in excess of the one from whom it issues, and in excess of the semantic content which it may have. In the cry, something else speaks apart from the person. In the cry, and its associated forms, we hear, not so much the voice of the feelings, or even of the body, as in certain accounts of hysterical speech, but rather the uttering of utterance itself. The uttering of utterance strikes us as transcendent or frightening largely through its distinction both from subjective origin—it is no longer in the control of the one who emits the utterance—and objective condition—it is more than a mere object. It is an intentionality without subjective intention.

The cry—whether of anger, fear or pain—is the purest form of the compact between the voice and power. The twentieth century was dominated by the mediated or technologically magnified cry, the microphone, megaphone and

³⁴ D. W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' (1951), in *Collected Papers: Through Pediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958), 232.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Negation', tr. Joan Rivière, *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, tr. James Strachey *et al.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 439.

loudspeaker allowing the generalization of the aggressive-sadistic use of voice. Amplified voices, like the natural amplification effected by the cry itself, cancel or close up space. Indeed, amplified voices disclose the particular form of the assault upon space constituted by the infant's cry. For when we shout, we tear. We tear apart distance; we disallow distance to the object of our anger, or of our ecstasy. When I shout, I am all voice, you are all voice, the space between us is nothing but a delirium tremens of voice. In shouting, we fall upon our own voices, attempting to claw them apart. At such times, the voice is a malign object, a hot, ulcerous excrescence upon the self, that I must at all costs put from me. Why must I put my voice from me, when my voice is the claim and enactment of my power? Because the voice is the means of articulation. The voice is the agent of the articulated body, for it traverses and connects the different parts of me, lungs, trachea, larynx, palate, tongue, lips. It both distinguishes and connects ingestion and utterance. It moves from me to you, and from me to myself, in moving from the mouth to the ear. The shout or the scream obviates all these distinctions; it opens the throat and voids sound, as the stomach, contracting, voids its poisons and surfeits. The cry makes me blind, swallowing up the world of visible distances and distinctions. The crying voice tries to get rid of this burden of voice, that, in extending myself into the world, can only ever hold me at a distance from myself, hold me apart from the world.

For the infant, space, the gap between itself and its satiety, is a wound. The infant does not want interiority, the comfort and safety of the womb. It wants to have done with space, wants to be again where there are no distances or dimensions, no inside or outside. It tries to shape intervals of spacelessness within space. It withdraws into interiority in sleep. Waking, it cries; it demands. Its cries are an attempt to diminish and abolish the space that yawns about it and within it. Shouting is the reassertion of the blind imperative demand of the infant, and of the infant's archaic space, in all its intense intermittence.

But in this, as in all other things, the infant must learn to compromise. Its voice teaches it that its cries go from it, out into the world. Amplification, like the baby's cry, always turns into a matter of reach, and therefore of limit; its transcendence of natural limits always discloses further limits. The abolition of space attempted by a cry always reasserts space. So, if space cannot be consumed in the conflagration of the voice, then it had better be commanded. I began this chapter with the simple statement that voice goes out, and returns to me, changed and yet the same. It allows me to connect here and there, and then, now and then. Voice allows space to be measured and substantiated. From being the antagonist or devourer of space, the voice begins to be its accomplice. Arising in, it begins to give rise to space. What the scream tears apart, it also holds together. The scream is the guarantee that, after the world has been atomized, it will reassemble and re-resemble itself.

The ecstasy or arson of vocalic space constituted by the cry is made good not only by this kind of imaginary architecture, but also by a defensive territorialization, which reserves to certain parts of the body (typically the mouth, the tongue, the breast, and the head) the power and responsibility of articulate utterance, and expels to other parts of the body other, more unruly, and spontaneous kinds of utterance. The history of understandings of ventriloquism, with their attempts to distinguish between oral and abdominal speech, belongs to the larger history of attempts to fix the power of the cry, to organize its trajectory and force in vocalic space, the coherent field of relations between the inner and the outer, between bodies and their environments.

There are other ways in which the power of the cry may be ordered. Earlier in this chapter, I spent some time discussing the ways in which the voice confers shape upon the body, and is thereby involved in the process whereby the body itself accomplishes, or shapes its world. But how does this conception of the voice's function relate to Rosolato's conception of the voice as part-object? How can the voice be both a bodily process and the precipitate of that process? Both immanent in the body's workings and a bodily production or residue? I think the answer lies in a conception which I have not seen described fully anywhere in psychoanalytic or phenomenological writing, but which is powerfully implied and attested to throughout the history of ventriloquism: the conception of what might be called the *vocalic body*.

The Vocalic Body

The principle of the vocalic body is simple. Voices are produced by bodies: but can also themselves produce bodies. The vocalic body is the idea—which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine, or hallucination—of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice. The history of ventriloquism is to be understood partly in terms of the repertoire of imagings or incarnations it provides for these autonomous voice-bodies. It shows us clearly that human beings in many different cultural settings find the experience of a sourceless sound uncomfortable, and the experience of a sourceless voice intolerable. The 'sound hermeneutic' identified by Rick Altman determines that a disembodied voice must be habited in a plausible body. It may then appear that the voice is subordinate to the body, when in fact the opposite is experientially the case; it is the voice which seems to colour and model its container. When animated by the ventriloquist's voice, the dummy, like the cartoon character given voice, appears to have a much wider range of gestures, facial expressions, and tonalities than it does when it is silent. The same is true of any object given a voice; the doll, the glove puppet, the sock draped over

the hand, change from being immobile and inert objects to animated speaking bodies. Our assumption that the object is speaking allows its voice to assume that body, in the theatrical or even theological sense, as an actor assumes a role, or as the divinity assumes incarnate form; not just to enter and suffuse it, but to produce it. In bald actuality, it is we who assign voices to objects; phenomenologically, the fact that an unassigned voice must always imply a body means that it will always partly supply it as well.

In fact, so strong is the embodying power of the voice, that this process occurs not only in the case of voices that seem separated from their obvious or natural sources, but also in voices, or patterned vocal inflections, or postures, that have a clearly identifiable source, but seem in various ways excessive to that source. This voice then conjures for itself a different kind of body; an imaginary body which may contradict, compete with, replace, or even reshape the actual, visible body of the speaker.

What kind of thing is a vocalic body? What sorts of vocalic bodies are there? Such bodies are not fixed and finite, nor are they summarizable in the form of a typology, precisely because we are always able to imagine and enact new forms of voice-body. The leading characteristic of the voice-body is to be a body-in-invention, an impossible, imaginary body in the course of being found and formed. But it is possible to isolate some of the contours, functions, and postures by means of which vocalic bodies come into being. What characterizes a vocalic body is not merely the range of actions which a particular voice-function enjoins on the body of the one producing the voice, but also the characteristic ways in which the voice seems to precipitate itself as an object, upon which it can then itself give the illusion of acting.

We have already met in Didier Anzieu's conception of the sonorous envelope a powerfully defined account of one kind of vocalic body. This body is formed on the model of a container. It surrounds and supports; it confers physical definition. It may or may not be the case that this construction derives, as Anzieu at certain points seems to claim, from a specific experience of the maternal voice, powerfully associated as it is for the infant with the sensations of being encircled and carried. More important, however, is the post-infantile association of the sonorous envelope with collective experiences of voice, with the knitting together of voices in singing, cheering, conversation, and music. Edith Lecourt identifies the experience of the sonorous envelope, not with the mother, but rather with 'the musical quality of the harmony of the group and, in the first case, of the family group, around the baby, for the baby who gives and takes his note amidst a sharing of sounds (noises, musics, words), vibrations and silences: a fusional experience of omnipotence'.³⁶ The sonorous envelope is the first shape that the

³⁶ Lecourt, 'Musical Envelope', 213.

voice secretes, and draws its power from the primary indistinction of auditory and tactile sensations in the baby. In a sense, it is not so much a particular kind of embodied vocal shape, as the general possibility or guarantee that sound can confer and take up shape itself.

In my discussion of the cry, I have also suggested another form of the vocalic body. In the exercise of vocal hostility—rage, aggression, condemnation, and so on—the action of the voice upon itself is clearly visible and audible. In these modes, the voice seems to demonstrate its power to inflict harm by attacking itself, taking itself as an object or substance which may be subjected to injuring or exterminating assault. It may enact the envelopment or strangulation of its object; or it may scatter or pulverize its own forms and tonalities. The voice of rage must do this, because it is aimed at transcending its own condition, forming itself as a kind of projectile, a piercing, invading weapon, in order to penetrate, disintegrate, and abandon itself. The dimension of elevation is extremely important in anger and vocal assault: we raise our voice; we shout others down. But the angry voice may also be a bringing up and out of what comes from below, or deep within. The characteristic chest voice of anger, attesting, perhaps to an imaginary ‘maleness’, mimes the existence of a huge, boiling, bottomless reservoir of feeling, which comes both from within and, as it were, below the self, so that it is both contained by, and itself provides a kind of support for the self, and for the voice that may otherwise flame through all supports and restraints, shrivelling shape, space, and distance.

The voice of rage therefore presents itself as the antagonist of the sonorous envelope, the denial of the bodying and embodied nature of sound. And yet such a voice is also capable of bracing or armouring itself by its very tonalities; the angry or demanding voice at once destroys and defends itself—in fact, defends itself against itself. Think of the rant of the demagogue, as the type of warlike political persuasiveness: the voice cracks with the effort to surpass its own condition, to become an action, achieving a kind of immediate effectivity in the world. Hitler’s voice rages at itself, suffocates itself, attacks its own form; yet it also reins and retains the rage it unleashes. Timbre and voice quality are bound in by the percussion and ‘attack’ of the voice itself. In all of this, we have, to be sure, the gesture and enactment on the body of a certain affective disposition. But the power of the spectacle depends upon something more. It depends upon the production of another, imaginary body, the vocalic body of raging itself. Raging is more than something done to or written over a particular body; it is the desire for and hallucinated accomplishment of a new kind of body, a fiercer, hotter, more dissociated, but also more living, urgent, and vital kind of body.

In all instancings and picturings of the vocalic body, the voice secretes a fantasy of a body in its relations to itself, in what it does to the fabric of the very sound it produces. The voice makes itself solid by its self-relation. The most

intense and intimate kinds of self-relation result in the voice of seduction. Such a voice seduces by conjuring *itself* up as a precious and fascinating object, or texture, or sensation. This voice is onanistic; it must attend to itself with care, touching itself tenderly and exquisitely at every point. The seductive capacities of voice have been highlighted by technologies of amplification, from the telephone to the microphone. It is said that the crooning style of twentieth-century popular song was discovered by singers and sound engineers in the early days of sound recording when it was realized that microphones could not cope with the extreme dynamic ranges possessed by singers used to commanding the large space of the concert hall. The crooning voice is seductive because it appears to be at our ear, standing forward and apart from the orchestral background with which it is nevertheless integrated. The crooning voice is full of what Roland Barthes has called the 'grain' of the voice, its individuating accidents of intonation and timbre. The microphone makes audible and expressive a whole range of organic vocal sounds which are edited out in ordinary listening; the liquidity of the saliva, the hissings and tiny shudders of the breath, the clicking of the tongue and teeth, and popping of the lips. Such a voice promises the odours, textures, and warmth of another body. These sounds are not merely the signs or reminders of bodies in close proximity to our own; they appear to enact the voice's power to exude other sensory forms. Most of all, perhaps, the imaginary closeness of such voices suggests to us that they could be our own; they are the magical antidote to the grotesque and insufficient effigies of our voice returned to us by the tape-recorder. These voices—Frank Sinatra, or Billie Holiday, or Tori Amos—are loved because they are recognized. They sing to us because they seem to be singing to themselves, and thus can be mistaken for the ineffably beautiful song of our own voice. The intensity of self-relation in such a voice is sealed by the use of reverberation which became common in recording in the years following the war. Reverberation attempts to supply to the voice itself something of the solidity and dimension given to a natural voice by the reverberations of its environment. The echoing voice is not a voice in space, it is a voice of space. This voice continuously touches, comes back to itself, marking out a volume in space in the interval between emission and return.

The power of the voice derives from its capacity to charge, to vivify, to relay, and amplify energy. Precisely because of this, the voice can also become deathly; in its decayed or deathly condition, the voice precipitates a peculiarly emaciated kind of body. We might call this an excremental voice; a voice that is pure discharge, a giving out of mere dead matter, toneless, vacant, absent, sepulchral, inhuman. It seems to demonstrate that it has no connection with the world, or with the one who originates it; it is heterogeneous matter. As opposed to the seductive voice or voice of rage, the excremental voice must aim to have no relation to itself, must aim not to touch itself at any point. It is thus the opposite of

the seductive voice. It wants to come apart, not only from its speaker, but from itself. But, as we know, excrement is highly prized; it can be a kind of sacred substance, precisely because it is profane. The very horror which propels the excremental from us creates a bond with it. The disarticulated voice of fatigue or despair finds a kind of consolation in its bleak song of dissociation.

There is also a sublimated form of the vocalic body. Michel Poizat has shown how, in post-Romantic conceptions of song and vocal music, the force of the cry has become embodied in the voice of the soprano, whose soaring, inhuman power becomes both the expression of boundless longing and itself the object of fetishized desire. In the song of the soprano, voice goes beyond utterance into pure uttering; it expresses the passage of the human into the inhuman.³⁷ If this voice is objectified, this is according to the strange psychoanalytic logic of the fetish, in which a part of the body is violently, obsessively reduced to an object, precisely in order to make up for the fact that it is a dissimulation of or substitute for what is really wanted. The transcendent voice becomes the object of desire precisely through becoming inviolable. Felicia Miller Frank has suggested that the voice is associated with Edmund Burke's aesthetics of the sublime because it is uncapturable in representation; paradoxically, the transcendent, angelic female voice becomes the very objectification of this refusal to be encompassed in objecthood.³⁸

It is for this reason, as Frank has so effectively shown, that the transcendent voice, which 'occupies the space of inhuman otherness opened by the aesthetic of the sublime' (p. 195) also becomes associated with the less-than-human in another sense, with the condition of objectification supplied by mechanical means. But any account of the fortunes of the fantasy of sonorous autonomization, of the voice given the powers and properties of a separated object or agency, must take account of the remarkable actualization of this fantasy in the development of technologies which allow the electronic modification, enhancement, storage, and administration of the voice. The twentieth century was the first in which it had been possible to make actual the ideal of the voice of power, the utterance separated from its occasion of enunciation. In one sense, this actualization of a fantasy has reduced it. The autonomous voice, whether it is the voice of a God, or a spirit, or the more abstract trope of the voice of the spirit, or of nature, derives its power from its ambivalence, from the fact that the voice separated from its source is an object of perception which has gathered to itself the powers of a subject. When it becomes possible to record and replay actual voices at will, the sense of the voice as itself constituting an agentless agency is

³⁷ Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry*, tr. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

³⁸ Felicia Miller Frank, *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice, and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 186–7.

reduced. From being a source of powerfully mingled pleasure and menace, the technologically autonomized voice becomes a source simply of repeatable pleasure, or of the pleasure of repeatability itself. Once you have the opportunity for playback, the voice from out of the burning bush loses most of its sense of awful portent; it is reduced, perhaps, to the ludicrous, scratchy chuffing of the gramophone hidden in the undergrowth in the village pageant described in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*.

And yet the apparent reduction and demystification of the autonomized voice effected by vocal and acoustic technologies also brings about a revival of ancient and long-lived fantasies of the powers of the autonomous, dissociated, or quasi-objectified voice. This means that there is a much closer relationship between pre- and post-technological experiences of the dissociated voice than may at first appear. The technologies of the voice are actualizations of fantasies and desires concerning the voice which predate the actual technologies. At the same time, the technologies which appear to familiarize the dissociated voice also revive some of the powers of the uncanny and the excessive with which the dissociated voice had long been associated. Vocal and acoustic technology must therefore be understood partly as a process, not of Weberian disenchantment of the world, but of re-enchantment.³⁹

Although there are ambivalent feelings attached to these imagings of the vocalized body, it may be that the very desire to embody the voice to which they testify also witnesses to a certain primary investment of libido or love in the voice, deriving originally perhaps from the intense bond of love relating one to one's own voice. The vocalic body will always derive much of its energy from the idealization of the voice, even if that idealization is repudiated. We can find evidence of this relationship between the idealization of the voice and the forms of its bodily imaging and enactment in the practices and writings of voice therapists. Voice therapy ascribes to the voice not only the power to express and enact pathological states, but also the power of healing or relieving these states. Olivea Dewhurst-Maddock, for example, represents the voice as an ideal mediator between person, body, and world: 'Your voice reflects your whole health—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. The hallmarks of a healthy voice are versatility, sensitivity, warmth, and purity of tone: clear, bright, and open, with

³⁹ I offer one example of this from my own experience of childrearing. Much of this book has been written in the early mornings to the accompaniment of the cries, gurgles, and babble of my youngest son, whose room is equipped, like that of many young children, with an intercom alarm. Joe's early-developed capacity to summon his mother and me to his presence though the power of his voice has been considerably enhanced by this technology. It is tempting to feel that the meanings and powers of the voice for this particular young child have been affected by his growing awareness of the powers of the little plastic box in his room to enhance the already magically extensive powers of his voice.

no hint of forcing or straining. Above all, the healthy voice possesses vitality—the abundance of vital energy that can triumph over hardship, disappointment, and pain.⁴⁰

This particular version of the healing voice struggles against the inhibiting effects of what the author calls ‘armouring’, ‘areas of self-imposed rigidity and tension [which] . . . symbolise your reluctance either to express or receive’.⁴¹ The controlling metaphor here is familiar from Freudian accounts of hysteria; what cannot be spoken is acted out by the silent speech of the symptoms displayed on the body. Where Freudian analysis suggests that this bodily speech can be reclaimed by language, routed back through the speaking mouth (whether of the analysand or analyst), voice therapy suggests the possibility of a magical bodily speech which can occur everywhere in the body. Therapy is therefore a matter not of translating the body back into voice, but rather of giving voice to the body. This is Olivea Dewhurst-Maddock’s account of the process of vocal ‘de-armouring’:

Begin by vocalizing in your daily life while you walk, bend, stretch, and turn. Hum quietly, sing a favourite ditty, or simply mouth tuneful ‘de-de-das’. Importantly, note how your voice responds when a certain part of your body is involved in the motions. For example, does it tend to become quieter, or more faltering when you bring into action your neck muscles, or perhaps your hips? This can help you locate areas of ‘armouring’—parts of your body that seem to be stiff, tense, and tough, covered with ‘armour’. Such armour is often the residue of painful (usually forgotten) experiences, frozen into muscular resistance. Try to give voice to these frozen feelings, in order to dissolve them and free yourself.⁴²

The voice is at once immaterial—it is energy and not substance—and full of the sense of the body’s presence (its warmth, elasticity, and sensitivity). It is the ideal body, or the body idealized. Such therapeutic imaging, which has clear affinities with ways of imagining the relations between body, voice, and world characteristic of some ancient and Oriental philosophies, as well as Romantic aesthetics, seems to involve, alongside its warnings against blockage, freezing, or paralysis, a fear of articulation and separation themselves, a fear of anything that might countermand that imaginary power of emanation ascribed, according to Rosolato, in fantasy to the voice. In other words, the healing voice may be seen as a benign form of the demand of the cry that I described above, the demand for the suspension or dissolution of all distinctions. Rosolato’s suggestion that the voice can become a part-object, with the very characteristics of deadness and resistance that are here ascribed to the devocalized or silenced parts of the body,

⁴⁰ Olivea Dewhurst-Maddock, *The Book of Sound Therapy: Heal Yourself with Music and Voice* (London: Gain Books, 1993), 102.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 73–4.

⁴² *Ibid.* 47.

implies that the drama of the voice enacted through Dewhurst-Maddock's version of voice therapy may be less benign than at first appears.

The accounts of voice offered so far have considered it not so much as the communication or expression of ideas, feelings, and meanings as of pure vocalization. It is true that the kinds of questions posed by the ventriloquial voice involve a kind of play or movement between the ideas of the quasi-utterance and the actualized, locatable, and interpretable utterance, or between sound and voice. Early accounts of the ventriloquial voice focus much more closely upon its specific tones and timbres than on what is being said. Furthermore, the drawing of ventriloquy into colloquy, in other words, into structures of elaborate exchange between the ventriloquist and ventriloquized interlocutor, ventriloquism in which the utterance is taken seriously as utterance, occurs only gradually. In the early appearances of ventriloquism, in which the voice that speaks is assumed to emanate from a deity or spirit, its utterances were much more likely to be one-way commands or admonitions than invitations to the come and go of dialogue. Under these conditions, the quality of the voice as pure sound rather than as meaning or intention will be highlighted. The question of who is speaking will under these circumstances tend to be answered in non-personal terms.

As such, the ventriloquial voice functions as a mediator between the human world (characterized by voice, or sound as the expression of animated life) and the inhuman. In earlier periods—up to the eighteenth century—the ventriloquial voice was often referred to a supernatural or superhuman realm, accounted for as the voice of God, or of demons or angels. Even here, the dialectical relations of sound and sight have a part to play. The move from a Judaic God who issues his commands through sound, voice, and annunciation, and does not yield himself up to be seen, to a Hellenized New Testament God who is characterized by radiance, illumination, and enlightenment, is a move from an inhuman to a humanized conception of deity.

During the long, though irregular dwindling of the authority of the supernatural after the eighteenth century, supernatural explanations of ventriloquial voices dawdle alongside more secularized or scientific explanations. But now, these voices are ascribed not so much to the transcendent realm of gods and supernatural beings, as to the realm of matter itself—which is other-than-human and less-than-human at once. Matter which has thus been given a voice—the radio, or the telephone, for instance—still retains a tincture of the old supernatural explanations, and indeed begins to bring about a kind of re-enchantment of the world. In technological modernity, the dead and dumb world of matter begins to speak, though now not as the voice of nature or the breath of God, but on its own.

In between the solidification of these two functions—ventriloquism as superhuman utterance from the late classical period to the end of the eighteenth

century, and ventriloquism as sub- or inhuman utterance characteristic of the period since the end of the nineteenth century—was the brief period of ventriloquism's appearance as the manipulation of human voices, as a dramaturgy. It is in this period that the questions *what?* and *where?* asked of the unlocated voice mutate into the question *who?* Ventriloquism becomes an affair of dramatization and colloquy, and a medium for exploring the relations between selves and their voices.

I have tried in this opening chapter to open up some possibilities of discussing the history of the voice according to three different, but overlapping frames: in terms of the location of the self and the body in imaginary space; in terms of the co-operations and conflicts of the different senses; and in terms of the apprehension and embodiment of different forms and conceptions of power. In each case, the voice is a means both of integration and of disturbance. The voice positions me in space, and establishes the space of social relations; but the voice also by its nature makes the positioning of the self less than wholly certain. Similarly, the voice itself is ambivalently positioned between hearing and sight; the voice that is securely ascribed to its source knits together hearing and seeing, enabling their co-operation to be verified; but the capacity of the voice to put its source in question also keeps apart the different orders of seeing and hearing. Finally, the origin of the voice in the magical exercise of power establishes the need for it to be integrated within the spatial and sensory fields even as it possesses the power to reopen and reintegrate those fields.

In all three areas, the legitimate and familiar exercise of the voice is accompanied by the doubts and delights of the ventriloquial voice, of the voice speaking from some other place, reorganizing the economy of the senses, and embodying illegitimate forms of power. What follows is not a history of the voice as such; but if such a thing were to be undertaken, it would have to be in terms of the struggle between the legitimate voice and the different forms of spacing, sensing, and forcing embodied in the ventriloquial voice. Correspondingly, a history of the particular kind of spatial-sensory exception represented by the fantasy of the ventriloquial voice may be an unexpected prerequisite for any future history of the voice.