on voice in poetry
the work of animation

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On Voice in Poetry

The Work of Animation

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# Contents

*Acknowledgements*  
viii

**Introduction**  
Voice in Poetry: Opening up a Concept  
1 A Natural Scale  
2 Vibration and Difference  
3 Turnings of the Breath  
4 ‘The Multitudinous Tongue’  
5 Getting the Measure of Voice

**Notes**  
163

**Bibliography**  
190

**Author Index**  
199
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What do we mean by ‘voice’ in poetry? Given the sheer diversity, and ambivalence, of poems’ understandings, deployments, explorations of voice, their strategies of voicing, as well as the roles played by voice as trope, as prosodic resource, as ideology, so categorical a question could easily seem self-defeating. Phrasing the question thus, moreover, takes its ‘we’ to be unproblematic, not to mention assuming some stable entity called ‘poetry’ – and all this simply in order to raise the question of ‘voice’. But then again, asking about voice might, for this very reason, bring this ‘we’ into focus, might offer up a conception of ‘poetry’ that can comprehend practices as various as those of Paul Celan, Henri Chopin, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Lisa Robertson, William Shakespeare; and, reciprocally, opening ourselves to the kinds of thinking these poems render possible, and indeed exact of us, might provide a starting point from which to reflect on the category of voice itself.

First and foremost, this book will be made up of mutually intersecting attempts to reflect on this category, and to open up the concept of ‘voice’ for poetics. That there should be ‘voice’ in poetry seems intuitive enough: poems’ soundworlds are constructed out of voice as material or medium; poems display, or stage, or generate, a ‘speaking voice’, or speaking voices, and these effects are registered as we readers, silently or aloud, are invited to ‘voice’ a poem. But in these instances, is ‘voice’ really being treated as one single concept, as opposed to, say, a cluster of different conceptual valences centred on one word? Talk of ‘opening up a concept’ risks taking for granted that voice does furnish a ‘univocal’ concept in the first place. And if
we see this indeterminacy as central to what voice is, or at least to how voice works, then it is far from clear as to whether such indeterminacy reflects voice itself, or simply our attempts to grasp it. An initial aim for this book had been to provide a definition of ‘voice’ which would resolve such indeterminacies; however, it became evident that no such definition was likely to be forthcoming, and that in any case such a definition was, if not impossible, then at best undesirable. Instead, the account of voice in poetry I will sketch proceeds by inhabiting these indeterminacies: placing, as it were, the different valences of voice, the different figures through which we grasp voice, into polylogue. To open up the concept of voice is to attend to these valences and figures in order ultimately to trace the matrix of their interaction.

But there might even be reasons to doubt this intuitive belief that there is ‘voice’ in poetry at all. The most recent edition of the *Princeton Encyclopædia of Poetry and Poetics* – which, given its institutional hegemony, must count for something like the current received wisdom on the matter – starts its entry on ‘voice’ by saying: ‘To define voice in written poetry immediately poses a problem, for there is no literal voice in the poem: voice is an oral metaphor employed in the description and analysis of the written word.’ This reflects a critical moment little credulous where such naïve appeals to intuition are concerned, one which has taken to heart the critiques directed by post-structuralism and historicism, as by avant-garde poetics, at a term laden with a politically suspect essentialism (one which silences ‘other voices’, so the trope goes). Voice is either ‘metaphysical’ or it is ‘ideological’; mobilised in tandem, these two critiques form an intellectual pincer movement little can resist.

In this respect, it is fascinating to compare this entry to the one of over twenty years earlier, which starts: ‘To stress voice in discussions of poetry may be simply a reminder of the large extent to which poetry depends on sound. The qualities of vocal sounds enter directly into the aesthetic experience of performance, of poetry readings, but no less do those sounds resonate in the “inner ear” of a fully attentive silent reading.’ Poetics as a ‘discipline’ has, it would seem, graduated from voice as ‘speechsound’ to voice as ‘metaphor’. But by the same token, ‘voice’ was not considered worthy of an entry in either the 1965 or the 1974 editions of the *Princeton Encyclopædia*; it is only after the critique of ‘metaphysical’ and ‘ideological’ voice,
only after voice as a category becomes questionable, that the term is recognised explicitly by poetics as a question. Which is not to say we know how to pose it: in a way, the current book is nothing more than an attempt at phrasing this question.

My suggestion in the pages that follow will be that speechsound and metaphor are but two figures for voice. By this I do not mean that voice is ‘figurative’; rather, this is figure-as-configuration: the ways in which voice becomes thinkable in a singular manner. In this, I will distinguish between figuring as and figuring through. Voice is figured as speechsound, as persona, as subjectivity, but also, making greater use of a metaphorical/metonymic palette, as an authentic self, or as an individual or collective identity (hence phrases such as ‘to find one’s voice’). But it is also figured through the prosodic and rhetorical repertoires available to poetry: ‘figures of sound’ such as alliteration and assonance; figures of speech such as interjection, prosopopoeia, apostrophe; more indeterminate figural uses of sound, as in glossolalia, paronomasia, onomatopoeia. Such figuring-through can also extend to the energies and syncopations generated by metre and other prosodic patterns, to the construction of deictic utterance – the rhetorical and the prosodic deployments of voice, I will argue, can never be grasped in isolation from one another. In this respect, the aim is not one of establishing a ‘correct’ model of voice, of uncovering ‘voice itself’ as though magically out of a hat, but of inhabiting the fissures opened up by these conflicting configurations. But nevertheless, by inhabiting these fissures as they are registered in particular poems, one might listen out for the broader mechanisms of figuration at work: the shapes and dynamics of voice’s self-configuration.

With this in mind, let us return to that claim that ‘there is no literal voice in the [written] poem’, with its corollary that voice is an ‘oral metaphor’. This raises a curious question: is there a ‘literal voice’ in an oral poem? For it is far from clear what a ‘literal’ voice would be. It is true that the rhapsode is present at the moment of performance, and that the rhapsode’s voice is an acoustic phenomenon, but this leaves unexplained the relationship between the rhapsode’s voice and the voice of the poem. The matrix of prosodic patterning, of employments of deixis and apostrophe, of ventriloquisms of different persona within the epic narrative (oral poems being predominantly epic), the poem’s conversation with an ongoing tradition – all
this is itself hardly ‘univocal’; none of these, I take it, belong to the rhapsode’s ‘voice’. Even when most literally ‘there’, inhering in the individual throat that recites or declaims, voice is more than just ‘a voice’. Difficulties multiply. For we could also pose the opposite question: to call voice a ‘metaphor’ suggests that it is a metaphor of something, but of what? It is one thing to say that the term ‘voice’ inevitably involves us in a metaphorical (or, more accurately, I suspect, *metonymic*) register. It is quite another to reduce ‘voice’ to a single metaphor. To speak of metaphorical substitution, no less than does the claim that there is no ‘literal’ voice in poetry, takes for granted that there is something, at least, that voice ‘literally’ is.

The longer I have spent contending with the question ‘what is voice?’, the more acute my awareness that I do not know what voice is – but also, the more I feel that this is due to a fundamental incompatibility between the diverse phenomena we understand as ‘voice’ and any ‘what is?’-style questioning. When we speak of ‘voice’ we are always figuring voice in one way or another – as speechsound, as voiceprint, style, authenticity, persona, possession, orality. But at the same time, it is easy enough to say that voice is ‘not’ any one of these instances – that it is, on the one hand, both ‘intimate’ and yet ‘a stranger to language itself’; that it is ‘something other than phonation’ on the other. Voice, as it were, gives itself by way of such figures, but is identical to none of them, is encompassed wholly by none of them. It is not just speech that voice ‘overflows’, but its own figural determinations; it is ‘other’ not only to phonation but to each instance where we speak of ‘voice’. But to grasp voice as overflow, as otherness, would be to employ one more – *figure*.

It is striking how the various polemics directed at voice have prioritised certain figures over others. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins argue that the enduring obscurity of the nineteenth-century Poetess to literary history reflects the fact ‘that she is not the content of her own generic representation: not a speaker, not an “I,” not a consciousness, not a subjectivity, not a voice, not a persona, not a self’. Here, voice takes on a metonymic register where it signifies wholeness, coherence: voice as *univocal*. But insofar as such univocality binds the other terms, ‘voice’ becomes the determinant trope in this broader schema. A similar figural association pervades Languages poetry’s critique of voice. In Bob Perelman’s dismantling of William Stafford’s ‘Traveling Through the Dark’, ‘a “voice” poem’ in which
‘William Stafford has “found his voice”, ‘voice’ also stands in for a canonical model of authorship for which ‘the I is in a privileged position, unaffected by the words.’ Voice imposes, Charles Bernstein tells us, ‘some autobiographical gestalt’ on the poem at hand. Fast forward a generation and we learn that Conceptual Writing too ‘may differ from its others insofar as it does not create a single voice or thematic constant from its constituent bits.’

This critique of the univocity of voice, or at least the univocity of ‘poetic’ voice, also extends to poems’ deployments of speech-sound. In the background to more recent polemics one hears the persistent after-echo of Mikhail Bakhtin’s dismissal of (lyric) poetry on account of its ‘monologism’, in opposition to the ‘dialogical’ or ‘polyphonic’ novels of Rabelais, Dostoevsky (and, curiously, Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*). Poetry’s monologism does not just reflect the dominance of a single speaker (the much-maligned ‘lyric “I”’), but also, so Bakhtin argues, a poem’s rhythmic organisation, which ‘destroys in embryo those social worlds of speech and of persons that are potentially embedded in the word: in any case, rhythm puts definite limits on them, does not let them unfold or materialize.’ Here too, that same metonymic relation of voice and authorship is operative: rhythm becomes the vehicle for imposing a single ‘style’, and thereby assuring the presence of the poet within the poem; but more than that, rhythm becomes a sign of this authorial presence. We find something similar in Paul de Man’s claim that ‘[t]he principle of intelligibility, in lyric poetry, depends on the phenomenalisation of the poetic voice.’

More vociferously sounding in the background, however, is Jacques Derrida’s critique of ‘phonocentrism’, according to which voice is the privileged ‘philosopheme’ of Western metaphysics. And yet Derrida himself had occasion to complain that ‘some rather hurried people have thought that I’m not interested in the voice, but only writing. This is obviously untrue’. Given his earliest Anglophone reception, and indeed translations, it is hardly surprising that people, hurried or otherwise, would have made this error. David Allison’s 1973 rendering of *La voix et le phénomène* as *Speech and Phenomena* is egregious enough; yet the equivalence of *voix* and *parole* in English translations was more widespread. The term ‘phonocentrism’ was employed only sparingly by Derrida, and to designate a particular understanding of voice: namely, the elision of voice and speech into
On Voice in Poetry

an utterance in which is rendered audible ‘the signifier animated by my breath and by the intention of signification’.

The transient acoustic presence of a vocal utterance gives on to the ‘metaphysical’ construct of ‘constant presence’. But this means that the excess of voice over its narrow determination as logos is, in fact, crucial to Derrida’s thought; through such excess we see the signifier continually upset this reduction to the breath that animates it – indeed, open up different movements, animacies, within language itself. And so the fear of committing the cardinal sin of ‘phonocentrism’ has led, in Anglophone literary studies at least, to a prohibition on the term ‘voice’ for wellnigh four decades, and with it, the impoverishment of our thought.

That such diverse critics and poets should share the same overall interpretation of voice also points to the peculiarly historical nature of voice as a concept, or conceptual formation. This entails in turn that, in posing the question of voice, one be acutely aware of one’s own historical situatedness. At its simplest, this is to recognise that our voices are shaped by their cultural and technological mediations, from the politics of accent to the development of voice prostheses in the last century and a half. Poetic explorations and deployments of voice both reflect such mediations and, as cultural artefacts themselves, contribute to them. And ‘voice’ is historical in another sense. We have already noted the difficulties of determining the relation between voice as word and voice as concept (or conceptual formation). But if, as Peter de Bolla puts it, ‘[t]he relations between words and concepts are multiform, or at least susceptible of calibration’, then our exploration of the word ‘voice’ will change the object of its enquiry. To ask what voice is, is to envisage what voice might be. De Bolla concludes that ‘a concept may be present at a particular time even though no word for that concept existed’ (ibid). But it also means that by probing our word usage we might open up different conceptual linkages, formations, conjunctions – in de Bolla’s phrase, ‘modalities of intellecction’ (p. 29). If my study initially presents itself as descriptive (what do we mean by ‘voice’?), it is ineluctably bound up in a normative register (what should we mean by ‘voice’?) which itself gives on to the speculative: what does voice mean? In this last sentence, voice has become the subject, not object. This requires that the mode of attentiveness the study exacts shift accordingly.
De Bolla’s observations preface a work of intellectual history; my own focus, by contrast, is future-oriented, whether discussing John Donne and William Shakespeare, or Sean Bonney and Lyn Hejinian. So, when I suggest that we understand voice not as metaphorical or figurative, but as figural, this has a more avowedly speculative dimension. It is to suggest that voice becomes thinkable only by being figured, more also, more radically, that voice gives itself to thought only through the modalities of its self-configuration. But such thinking ‘speculates’ in another sense. The term ‘figure’ might, to some, connote the visualisation of voice; it is precisely such an association that my own usage, organised around ‘configuration’, aims to interrupt. Voice demands of us an auditory thinking; and such thinking is, as Walter Ong and Adriana Cavarero have noted in very different contexts, alien to a current episteme which, in Cavarero’s phrase, is ‘videocentric’. In addition to this, ‘voice’ demands that we attend to higher level prosodic contours, rather than units, segments, syllables, and so forth. Yet the fact that our term for such contours, ‘suprasegmentals’, names its phenomenon in terms of what they are not, i.e., segments, suggests that our episteme is no better equipped for thinking non-unitary phenomena than it is non-visual phenomena. It is a commonplace in works on prosody and intonation to lament this condition; no new vocabulary has been forthcoming. It is beyond the scope of this book (or capabilities of its writer) to offer up any kind of vocabulary that would rectify this state of affairs. A practice of listening, rather. To facilitate such listening, the writing necessarily straddles the approaches of philosophical poetics and criticism: ‘voice’ as a category worked through by poetics will facilitate our listening to individual poems, but it is only as individual poems demand specific listenings, and voicings, that poetics can start to attend to voice in the first place.

§

This leads me to the philosophical concerns at the heart of this book. In one sense, the following is no more than an attempt to get some purchase on the question: why do sounds have meaning at all? This is compounded by a residual sense of dissatisfaction with our propensity to account for this phenomenon by dividing our experiential totality up into sense-data on the one hand, and mental content on the other, so as to examine the two independently and then put
them back together. Not only because such a procedure seems to avoid the very facticity of sonorous meaning, but also because the fact that sounds did mean at all subsequently turns into an insuperable enigma, eliciting the response: yes, but WHY? In Being and Time Martin Heidegger observes: ‘What we “first” hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle. We hear a column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling. It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to “hear” a “pure noise”.’24 His contention is not that these sounds are ‘immediately’ there, but that they only ever resound into a ‘hermeneutic’ context which determines the modalities of their sounding. But if this is already the case for woodpeckers, crackling fires, and so forth, then it is complicated further when we are listening to language – and yet further when listening to voices, given that certain aspects of vocal meaning at least are not straightforwardly linguistic. ‘When we are explicitly hearing the discourse of another, we proximally understand what is said’, says Heidegger, but immediately specifies: ‘not what is expressed in the utterance’, nor ‘a multiplicity of tone-data’ (ibid.). The writing contorts back on itself as though to show the sheer alienness of such anti-dualistic questioning.

But what if we direct Heidegger’s intuitions towards poetics? As a student of prosody, I am surely not alone in my frustration at our lack of a vocabulary for discussing metre, rhythm, etc., that does not treat the sounds of language in isolation to meaning – at which point we are left with the difficulty of explaining why this sonorous patterning actually matters. Hence the appeals to under-scoring/-mining meaning (an epigram from Pope comes to mind), self-reflexive comments on a tradition, and so forth. Voice, however, is never not both sound and sense; in the voicing of poetry its rhetorical and prosodic deployments are inextricable. As such, the category of voice might offer a means of interrupting this long-ingrained habit of thought, and perhaps escaping the reduction of poetics to a hermeneutics of speechsound. But this introduces yet one further complicating factor: namely, that poems indisputably do abstract away from their vocal materials in order to create pattern, both at the level of lexical and tonic stress (e.g. metre) and at the level of the syllable or phoneme (e.g. alliteration, assonance). Might such processes of abstraction, even if not endowed with particular meanings, permit a
reflection on how voices mean more broadly? Otherwise expressed: might poetry's very scission of vocal sound and meaning allow us to grasp differently this phenomenal whole?

These – admittedly vast – practical questions for a jobbing literary critic cannot, however, divert one entirely from the 'ontological' dimension to Heidegger's own reflection, which is concerned with how entities give themselves to experience – and nor from its philosophical afterlife. Heidegger's claim is that voice should be grasped in terms of a hermeneutic-phenomenal whole that we experience before any 'present-at-hand' determination of objects, and this implies a more foundational anteriority to the sound-sense dualism. We hear reverberations of this insight in Paul Zumthor's claim that 'phone does not in any immediate way belong to sense, it prepares the space into which sense can speak'; we also hear them in the claim of one of the interlocutors of Nancy's dialogue 'Vox Clamans in Deserto', that voice 'frays the path to naming'; and when Michel de Certeau says, of the infant's initiation into language: 'it is the voice that opens (and circumscribes) a sphere of communication preparatory to the spoken word.'

This line of thinking is given perhaps fullest articulation by Adriana Cavarero and Bruce R. Smith: 'The voice is sound, not speech. But speech constitutes its essential destination', Cavarero argues; but notes that this should not mean that voice's sonority simply effaces itself in the process of meaning-transmission: 'Rather than a mere leftover, however, what is really at stake is an originary excess' (p. 13). Or, as one of the provocative and far-reaching 'Propositions concerning O' that Smith enumerates has it: 'O measures space. O calibrates time. O circumscribes the horizon of sound'. Indeed, the origin Smith proposes is in many ways even more extensive: O (as apostrophe, as interjection, as opening of the mouth) precedes not just language, but sound itself. Cavarero aims to trouble 'the philosophical affinity for an abstract and bodiless universality, and for the domain of a word that does not come out of any throat of flesh' (p. 8). And yet, preferring sound to sense, she risks replaying the very dualism she would reject, and overlooking the enigma that voice is phonetic as well as physical. Smith would place 'O' before and beyond any such dualism, opening up the very horizon within which sound and meaning might give themselves to experience, as unity or as dualism.
It is at this juncture that many of these philosophers appeal to poetry as an exemplary form of voice as it ‘overflows speech.’ Says Cavarero: ‘There is a realm of speech in which the sovereignty of language yields to that of the voice. I am talking, of course, about poetry’ (p. 10). And Nancy: ‘poetry... speaks with that speech that is not executed by any language and from which, by contrast, voice issues and a language is born.’ Yet is this not to do violence to the diverse technical manipulations of a vocal-verbal material whose *techne* would comprise variously metre, rhyme, typography, the tabular page, performance, and acoustic technologies? We have already seen that prosodic figure does make use of patterned speechsound abstracted away from the voice as totality; but we can also point to something like the reverse: that in poetry, voice is never not verbal – that interjection, apostrophe, onomatopoeia, glossolalia, figure the breakdown of verbal language only within a broader linguistic context, as rhetorical strategies through which language stages the excesses it cannot grasp. One gets the sense at such moments that ‘poetry’ is being invoked as philosophy’s ‘other’, rather than grasped on its own terms. But such valorisation does poetry a disservice, both as it makes claims that no poem can possibly live up to, and as it disregards the singular exploration of medium that is the very life of the poem.

This coincides with another potential pitfall. If voice exceeds its determinations as *logos*, there is the temptation to grasp that voice quite simply as this excess. Alice Lagaay, drawing together many of Lacan’s brief discussions of voice, concludes that his ‘notion of voice is the empty placeholder that represents the limit of that which is thinkable or expressible in discourse’. Similarly, Michel de Certeau sees voice, through glossolalia, to flee ‘the law of linguistic and semantic order’ in search of ‘autonomous spaces’ – at which point the metaphysics of language becomes at the same time a politics.

But in such cases, it is not clear that voice names anything other than our own aporia. ‘Excess’ would transpire to be just one more way of figuring voice, but the figural logic in operation is left unquestioned.

My reticence concerning this line of questioning is also articulated in Steven Connor’s *Beyond Words*. What Lacan, Certeau and others testify to is voice as an ‘otherness’, but as ‘an intact otherness, an otherness with a profile, point and a purpose’. As such, they belong to a tradition which includes Antonin Artaud, Diamanda Galás, Trevor Wishart, Luciano Berio, Pauline Oliveros. But, Connor
continues: ‘Alongside the tradition of the horrifyingly, heroically failed or maimed voice, there is another tradition, which embraces the voice’s condition of what Michel Serres calls a “mixed body”’ (p. 30). I too am interested in voice’s mixity, although taking this term somewhat differently. Poetry, I will argue, takes voice not just as its material support, but as a medium. Voice is not simply ‘other’ to logos, or to the body of the person whose vocal utterance it is; voice is continually other to itself.

To which I would add a further concern: the treatment of poetry as privileged site of the ‘sovereignty of the voice’, it strikes me, sits uneasily with the focus on glossolalia and interjection found throughout philosophical writing on voice. For poetry’s vocality is not simply prosodic but, if I may co-opt a term from communications theory, chronemic, concerned with what I will call in the following the animation of language. At the prosodic level this means attending to higher-order contours, phrasings, cadences, as well as those individual sonorous units – the word, the syllable, the phoneme. ‘Paralanguage’, this is often called: and yet the term itself is no less problematic than ‘suprasegmental’ – if anything, more so, as it effectively places intonation, stress, tempo, pitch, alongside para language, as though language could ever exist without intonation, stress, tempo, pitch. As Connor puts it, ‘there is no language without the putting of language into play and at stake’. The choice of the term reveals a latent metaphysics: meaning as the correspondence of sign and referent, or signified and signifier (depending on one’s preferred vocabulary), but also: meaning as ideal, mental content.

Through its resistance to this mode of thinking, voice shows up a blindspot in contemporary philosophy of language. As Fernando Poyatos has noted, ‘The problem with paralanguage is that it does not always offer a “unit” analogous to the phoneme, susceptible of being built up into larger structures.’ Similarly, Anthony Fox argues that ‘the bottom-up approach [of establishing intonation contours out of phonemic units] fails to accommodate satisfactorily the features of higher-level units’ – although he immediately expresses scepticism about the opposite procedure. But more than this, to focus on ‘chronemics’, that is, the temporal movedness of voice broadly conceived, would be, as Émile Benveniste points out, to attend not to language as lexico-syntactic system, but to discourse: ‘Phonemes, morphemes, and words (lexemes) can be counted; there is a finite
number of them. Not so with sentences/phrases \(\text{[phrases]}\). Phonemes, morphemes, and words (lexemes) have a distribution at their respective levels and a use at higher levels. Sentences have neither distribution nor use.\(^{39}\) Benveniste’s focus on the sentence would return the meaningful context of language to intersubjective communication; however, I am not convinced that the animation of language can be understood simply from out of the animation of our self-expression. We also need to attend to prosodic and figural movements, but beyond those, to the dynamics through which that very linguistic intelligibility is constructed.

And this brings me to that other element of my subtitle: ‘the work of animation’. Thus far I mentioned the animation, as it were, of language itself: those movements into sounding which are at the same time movements into intelligibility. Alongside this is poetry’s segmentation of speechsound, what Yuri Tynianov once called ‘the dynamic grouping of vocal material.’\(^{40}\) Yet this animation does not only treat ‘voice’ as an object in poems, a material made use of by poems; its dynamics resides in the space between poem and any singular, provisional voicing of the poem. To this end I would (another throwback to the book’s earlier aspirations at disambiguating a concept) propose that we distinguish between (a) difference voices (personae or pre-personae, because disembodied or not yet determined as speaker), (b) different vocal lines (polyphony, syncopation, counterpoint, indeterminacy of phrasal ending), (c) different vocal attitudes (registers, address, epideictic versus deictic, embodied versus disembodied, moments of excess of phone over logos, when the sheer extravagance of sound becomes opaque to speech or semantics), and finally (d) different voicings (demanded of a reader, or of performance more generally). It is this last to which I will return again and again: voice as generated by text rather than transcribed into text, poem as transaction rather than object. We need to think anew the temporality of voice; the following pages will tentatively sketch at ways such a rethinking might take place. These are the stakes of its own ‘work of animation’.

The book has five chapters. In the first, I look at the roles played by glossolalia, interjection, but particularly onomatopoeia in philosophical and poetic attempts to grasp in voice something like an origin of language, be it through speculative histories, or accounts of the infant’s initiation into language; in each case, we find that
to reflect on language's origin necessarily entails reflecting on what language *is*: tacitly or otherwise, it involves sketching an ontology of voice, asking how voice might open up the space for linguistic meaning as such. This question is then pursued in the second chapter, which probes Derrida's characterisation of voice as 'differential vibration', in terms of a bodily articulation of language. ‘Articulation’ is, on this model, both jointure and differentiation, as in the articulation of limbs (or, for that matter, lorries); at issue is not only how language is articulated through its body, nor how a body is articulated through language, but the articulation of the body-language nexus itself. Here, moreover, we come to reframe the question of *presence* not as a voice that is actually ‘there’, but rather as the animation through which such a ‘there’ comes to constitute itself. This provides the impetus for the third chapter, which concerns in particular the rhythmic dynamics of those supposedly ‘rhetorical’ figures, interjection, apostrophe, deixis. Such figures are often employed so as to bring into presence the entity named, but in so doing they proffer themselves as surrogate presences. More than this, however, we find such presence articulates itself through the poem's addresses to its readers. The vocal presence of such poems is radically *plural*: not as the poem's voice but rather the voicings it releases. This points towards a thinking of voice as the site for a collective subjectivity, and chapter four notes the political dimension to this collective condition – the basis not only for individual articulation, but for a revalued linguistic sensorium. Finally, I will turn to the question of ‘measure’: both how poems ‘measure’ voice through their prosodic deployment of a vocal-verbal medium, but also how we can, through this exploration of voice, come to measure ourselves.

One final note, on ‘method’ – but also, inevitably, on ‘metaphysics’. The reflections that follow could be described as ‘quasi-transcendental’: that is to say, they see each factual instance of voice, be it an individual voice sounding out of lungs, glottis, larynx, mouth, and tongue, be it a specific figuring of voice in a specific poem, as always bound up in the transcendentality of ‘voice’ as such; but by the same token ‘voice as such’ cannot ever free itself of the factual particularity of its singular instance. This strikes me as the only means of grasping voice given its constitutive excess: the fact that voice is always more-than-voice, always bound up in a logic of figuration, always marked by its mediality by which it ceases to be merely voice.
It also means that the readings of individual poems that make up a large proportion of this book cannot stand as ‘exempla’ for a general theory, but provisional means of pursuing a train of thought. They are not so much exemplary as proleptic, pointing towards and facilitating a future thinking. And this also means that the chapters are necessarily essayistic. True to the original meaning of essai, they try out their ideas, test them out, make a virtue of its open-endedness. The essay is the genre best suited to a speculative poetics, and it is a speculative poetics that in the following pages I will attempt to sketch.
1
A Natural Scale

*Teevo cheevo cheevio chee*
O where, what can that be?

With this call and response starts Gerard Manley Hopkins’s unfinished ‘The Woodlark’.¹ In light of his youthful diary entry ‘I think the onomatopoeic theory [of the origin of language] has not had a fair chance’,² in light also of his abiding concern with grasping the immanence of God within nature, and in light of the singular phonic experimentation of his œuvre, it might come as a surprise to learn that this is one of the very few occasions in which Hopkins employed onomatopoeia; particularly so given that the lines evince such uncertainty regarding the commensurability of human to animal voice. The two voices rhyme, but any harmony this rhyme might signify is troubled by the dissonance of their respective rhythms: the bird’s chirruping takes four trochees, whereas the listener’s response is not only unmetrical, but its accenting of ‘that’ leaves the word ‘be’ unstressed, so that the ensuing falling cadence clashes with the rising inflection of the onomatopoeia of the opening line. Harmony between man and nature is both gestured towards, and seemingly closed off.

Latent in Hopkins’s couplet is an insight underpinning so much theory of onomatopoeia: that the imitation of the animal voice (and for the purposes of this chapter I’ll be focusing on the onomatopoeia of voices, rather than of other sounds) within human speech posits resemblance between voices only by admitting a fundamental difference in kind. Such imitation, so the argument goes, is also a form
of transcription: the animal voice is transposed into phoneme, that is, its vocality is assimilated into a contrastive system of phonic signs. Such an understanding of onomatopoeia underpins philosophies as varied as those of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Giorgio Agamben (Herder’s pre-dates, and indeed anticipates, the model of the ‘phoneme’). Both posit the origin of languages in voice, but in neither case does this indicate a desire for an originary unity; rather, voice becomes the site for this origin only because voice has already left pure sound behind, indeed, has become not simply phonetic but phonemic. Although voice is portrayed as the vehicle through which resemblance becomes signification, it becomes clear retrospectively that the structure of signification itself (either as cognitive faculty or as system of differences) had, in advance, provided the basis for our ability to discern and produce resemblances.

Herder offers a speculative history of the development of language out of imitations of natural sounds; yet the ‘origin’ of human language is ultimately to be found not in this history but in our human capacity for imitation – the mediating faculty Herder calls Besonnenheit. Those sounds which communicate sensation through interjection (cries, groans, exclamations, etc.) Herder terms the ‘language of sensation’, but this is qualitatively different to our imitation of external noises; it is this latter which permits the establishment of conventional signs. When the sheep bleats, it gives unthinking voice to instinct; when we humans, by contrast, take this bleating as a sign for the sheep’s presence, and subsequently reproduce it to signal its presence (or else make present the idea of it in its absence), we recognise it not simply with our ears but with our souls: ‘The soul has recognized it in a human way, for it recognizes and names it distinctly, that is, with a characteristic mark’ (p. 88, my emphasis). For Agamben it is as system of differences rather than as cognitive structure that language separates human from animal voice. In the phoneme – ‘the negative and purely differential entities that, according to modern linguistics have no signification and, at the same time, make signification possible’ – the ‘animal’ voice becomes phone engrammatos, ‘signifying sound’; this, moreover, entails that sound can signify only on condition of the death of the animal voice. As Reuven Tsur has had occasion to observe of the bird whose song might seem most easy for a human voice to imitate: a cuckoo ‘emits neither the speech sound [k] nor [u]; it uses no speech sounds at all.
But a poet (any poet) in human language is constrained by the phoneme system of his language; he can translate the cuckoo’s song only to those speech sounds’. Such ‘translation’, on Agamben’s terms, is ‘death’.

Yet Agamben’s ultimate concern, like Herder’s, is with origin not as historical source but as ontological foundation. For what the translation of onomatopoeia shows us is a condition that Agamben considers latent in every vocal utterance. All language is marked by a no-longer/not-yet structure whereby it has ceased to be pure animal voice but has not yet become the pure *gramma* of the written word. This provides the temporal frame within which language can ‘take place’; such taking place, lies in that disjunction ‘between the removal of voice and the event of meaning’. Yet he goes further: this ‘taking place’ ‘is the other Voice whose ontological dimension [...] constitutes the originary articulation [...] of human language.’ ‘Articulation’ here is both jointure and separation: language ‘says itself’ not by making itself the content of its utterance, but by setting in motion that opening movement which permits its own saying. If ‘Voice’ lies anterior to language, it is because it ‘articulates’ language.

Cipher of voice, onomatopoeia devocalises; such is the paradox that animates it. And, as Agamben’s account shows, its teleology of devocalisation pervades not only speculative histories but also (equally speculative) ontologies of language. Nor is it restricted to those theories which situate language’s origins of language in onomatopoeia. ‘L’Abbé Condillac and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, searching for language’s (pre-) historical origin, find an unexpected afterecho in the theories of infantile language development offered by Guy Rosolato, and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok; all suggest that the original impulse for language arises out of interjection, inchoate and immediate cries of need or passion which eventually metamorphose into language as a system of signs. Language, it seems, requires both voice, and the devocalisation of this voice. In the following I would like to trouble this process of devocalisation.

Crucial in onomatopoeia is how vocal sound is given over to imitation – in this, it sets up a distinction between imitating sound and the original: for Herder this is mediating consciousness capable of imitation, for Agamben the differential structure of the phoneme. But in each case, we find a shift from resemblance to conventional signification. This is certainly what Hopkins’s ‘The Woodlark’ traces – as
becomes clear in a later passage, when the lark’s song, transcribed onomatopoeically, gives way to a monologue rendered verbally:

And the córn is córded and shóuldérs its shéaf,
The ear in milk, lush the sash,
And crúsh-sílk póppies aflásh,
The blóod-gúsh bláde-gásh
Fláme-rásh rúdréd
Búd shéllíng or bróad-shéd
Tátter-tángled and díngle-a-dánglèd
Dándy-húng dáinty héd

(p. 132)

Here we encounter a transformation in the poem’s soundworld, most strikingly in the use of two of Hopkins’s most characteristic prosodic gestures: the coincidence of alliteration with stresses symmetrically within the line (corn/corded, shoulders/sheaf; blood-gush/blade-gash; Bud shell/broad-shed; Tatter-tangle/dingle-a-dangled; dandy-hung/dainty head), and the condensed ‘sprung’ accenting, piling clusters of monosyllabic stresses one upon the other (most strikingly in the eight consecutive stressed syllables: ‘blóod-gúsh bláde-gásh / Fláme-rásh rúdréd / Búd shéll[ ]’). This sounds remarkably unlike the onomatopoeia of the opening: when the lark’s voice becomes ‘speech’, it makes a series of different demands on our own voicing. Anthropomorphism, like other forms of tropic equivalence, necessarily admits the difference it seeks to broach; here this difference is registered in the poem’s prosodics as well as its rhetorics. Here we might in fact see Hopkins’s poem to be responding to its ‘acousmatic’ predicament: ‘where, what?’ asks the woodlark’s listener, and the poem continually tries to fill in a body through verbal sound where the bird’s own body remains hidden. In its transformed soundworld, the poem pushes the latent differential structure of onomatopoeia to its conclusion: namely, that imitation is ultimately based not on resemblance, but on a figural and metonymic, rather than metaphorical, association which takes as its starting point the arbitrary relation between the sound that imitates and the sound imitated. But, by the same token, the poem is now more than imitation: it becomes the exploration of Hopkins’s prosodic and gestural repertoire, a testing of vocal range.
When Hopkins tests the vocal range of sprung rhythm and alliterative patterning, he introduces sonorous correspondences between speech sound and birdsong which cannot simply be grasped as imitation; nor do they remain at the level of the phoneme as a discrete unit. Hopkins’s alliterations attain their force through their syntactic-prosodic accumulation; similarly, if the accents punctuate any forwards movement, such punctuating nevertheless depends on this movement (for instance, the triple rhythms of the opening line of this excerpt). The individual figure of sound arises from out of a broader rhythmic continuum; it serves to ‘dynamise’ the vocal material, as Yuri Tynianov puts it, but only as it works with, and against, the dynamism of the material. Tynianov observes that, in verse, segmentation functions as dynamisation. Building on Tynianov’s insight, let us dwell on the relation between the segments of syllable and lexical stress and the ‘suprasegmental’ contours of prosody as a whole. The term indicates metaphysics passing itself off as ‘methodology’: starting with individual segments and building them up into intonation contours, phonological phrases, and other prosodic phenomena which reside above (‘supra’) the segments themselves. Yet the dynamism of Hopkins’s poem suggests the inverse – that what is ‘above’ the segment does not supervene but rather creates an anterior phonic context of movedness, which renders these segments discernable as such. This is perhaps the moment at which Hopkins’s poem must outstrip its onomatopoeic opening. In part, this is as the poem’s sonic exploration veers away from resemblance; but it also signals a shift away from onomatopoeic sound as unit, searching out correspondences between phoneme and the auditory unit germane to be rendered as phoneme. Hopkins has, of course, not disposed of phonemic patterning; yet he is working on a very different temporal plane.

In this respect it finds a striking counterpart in another fragmentary address to a bird, from around the same period – this time to a cuckoo:

Repeat that, repeat
Cuckoo, bird, and open ear wells, heart-springs, delightfully sweet,
With a ballad, with a ballad, a rebound
Off trundled timber and scoops of the hillside ground, hollow hollow hollow ground:
The whole landscape flushes on a sudden at a sound
We saw with Hopkins’s use of onomatopoeia that the introduction of the bird’s voice into the poem’s soundworld served not simply to harmonise bird and human voice but to insist on their disjunction, and here too it is an absent nature that is addressed, so to be endowed with some kind of presence: address thus gives way to incantation. Indeed, the poem describes a double movement. On the one hand, it focalises away from the opening address into an evocation of the poet’s experience of the birdsong, which finally becomes the experience of the ‘whole landscape’, as it ‘flushes, on a sudden, at a sound’; on the other, it responds to the bird’s acousmatics by internalising the birdsong into its soundworld, not as onomatopoeia precisely (though words like ‘rebound’, ‘trundled’, ‘hollow’, ‘flushes’, ‘sudden’, seem to attain a phonic, almost iconic, efficacy), but through vectors of syntactic and rhythmic intensity, as if thereby to engender the very responsiveness of nature that the address had sought out. The former movement shifts from the bodily exuberance of a ‘pure’ voice (here figured by the cuckoo’s spontaneous song) to referential description; the latter would retain this exuberance as language’s very ability to call upon nature to show itself, or at least to recreate the cuckoo’s song from out of its continuing absence.

But not simply ‘recreate’. Compensating for the fact that the cuckoo does not ‘repeat’ its song, the poem turns inwards to produce its own ‘song’, a song which, as we saw with the tour de force accented passage from ‘The Woodlark’, diverges from the bird’s own call to explore the poem’s own vocal-verbal medium. What is at issue is not simply re-animating the cuckoo, but rather what I am terming poetry’s ‘work of animation’. This can take the form of an individual figure of sound, such as the four-syllable clusters ‘with a ballad’ and ‘at a sudden’, which (or so I shall argue in the final chapter) cumulatively provide a ‘measure’ for the poem, not simply motivic structure but rather nodes of prosodic energy brought into a dialectic of constraint and release; it might also take the form of the grammatical indeterminacy of ‘open ear wells’, where ‘wells’, suspended between noun and verb, complicates the kind of metaphoricity being put to work. At issue is the entire chronemic mechanics of reading. This subsequently shifts the relation between the poems and the nonhuman world they address, and their attempts to gauge this relation. On one level, the poems internalise these sounds of nature into their explorations of voice – voice becomes the means
of grasping the ‘natural’ substrate to human speech. But by the same token, the vocality of nature comes to figure nature itself – and reciprocally, birdsong becomes a means of figuring voice: as excess to speech, but also, variously, as phonemic density, as rhythmic motility.

Hopkins’s poems, taken together, constitute an exploration of the ‘natural scale of the human voice’. The phrase is Herder’s. Striking in Herder’s Abhandlung is how the distinction between animal interjection and human imitation, between immediate cry and signifying sound, is figured through musical tropes. Of the language of sensation he says:

Even the finest instrument strings of animal feeling (I have to use this metaphor because I know no better for the mechanism of feeling bodies)—even these strings, whose sound and straining does not come from volition and slow deliberation at all, indeed whose nature all of investigating reason has not been able to bring to light through investigation, even these are directed in their whole play, even without the consciousness of foreign sympathy, at an expression to other creatures. The struck string performs its natural duty: it sounds!, it calls to a similarly feeling Echo—even when none is there, even when it does not hope or expect to be answered by one.

(pp. 65–66)

And of those aspects of human language which aspire to evoke this musicality, by contrast – song, poetry, oratory, or gesture:

Condillac, Rousseau, and others were half on the right track here in that they derive the meter and song of the oldest languages from the cry of sensation—and without doubt sensation did indeed enliven the first sounds and elevate them. But since from the mere sounds of sensation human language could never have arisen, though this song certainly was such a language, something more is still needed in order to produce this song—and that was precisely the naming of each creature in accordance with its own language. So there sang and resounded the whole of nature as an example, and the human being’s song was a concerto of all these voices, to the extent that his understanding needed them,
his sensation grasped them, his organs were able to express them. Song was born, but neither a nightingale’s song nor Leibniz’s musical language nor a mere animals’ cry of sensation: an expression of the language of all creatures within the natural scale of the human voice!

(p. 104)

Animal voice is characterised by timbre and resonance, but also with a nod to the relatively recent coinage of the term ‘vocal cords’, by Antoine Ferrein in 1741, which modelled the vocal organs on stringed instruments. The human voice, however, stands outside of nature as does a concertato line from its orchestral accompaniment. Or else – and Herder’s imprecision is illuminating – ‘concerto of all these voices’ could be concerto grosso, in which case the human mediating faculty means that the human voice is plural when other animals’ are not: indeed, only the human voice can discern the consonance between these natural voices. The wavering between these two conventions of concerto is not unlike Hopkins’s own poems, where the relation between poet and woodlark/cuckoo is thematised both as a relation between human speaking voice and the voice address, and as a series of relations at work within a particular voice, drawing into polyphony vocal lines, vocal attitudes, of competing voicings.

But in this we might overlook the most fascinating of Herder’s musical metaphors – one which might at first hardly strike one as metaphor at all. And yet, in ‘the natural scale of the human voice’ [der natürlichen Tonleiter der menschlichen Stimme] one hears an echo of the principles of diatonic harmony, outlined by Jean-Philippe Rameau earlier in the century, for which the intervals of melody can only be understood within the context of the consonances established by the overtone series. This hint is reinforced by the German word Stimme – voice, but from the same root, stimmen, that provides ‘harmony’. To say this scale is ‘natural’ is both to make a claim about human ‘nature’, so that instead of the voice having a ‘natural source’ in quasi-animal cries, it is imbued with the ‘nature’ of man’s cognitive faculties, and to invoke the natural-scientific underpinnings for diatonic harmony itself: that harmonic consonances, and by extension the possibilities of art and artifice, find their source in nature, as the mathematical proportion.
In what follows, I wish to work between these three of Herder’s metaphors – the vibrations of string; the concerto in which human voice is either distinct from nature’s voices, or made of the same stuff, but given prominence to display its virtuosity; and the ‘scale’ peculiar to this voice. But, taking advantage of a polysemy not in Herder’s German, to speak of a ‘natural scale’ will prompt us to think of a different meaning of ‘scale’, namely, the dimensions peculiar to human experience. Hopkins’s fragments reflect on their own vocal-verbal medium as a means of trying to grasp that which necessarily outstrips voice – namely, the immanence of God. In the final chapter we will work further the possible homology between the ‘measures’ established within poems by prosodic patterning, motivic structure, and so forth, and poems’ attempts to ‘measure’ the human; for now let us remain with the various attempts to find an origin for language in voice.

§

‘Already as an animal, the human being has language’ (p. 65) – has there ever been a more misleading opening to a treatise? For, we have seen, Herder’s central argument will be that the human being is not an animal, that the ‘language of sensation’, as he calls this animal language – the exteriorisation of powerful feeling, as both physical response to stimulus and social, communicative need – is fundamentally distinct from human language as a system of conventional, referential signs. And yet, this distinction cannot be as clear-cut as he would wish: there is the case of ‘original languages’ – which, if his account of human language is to be believed, and despite their name, are no closer to language’s ‘origin’ – but also, curiously, ‘the hero Philoctetes’: ‘A suffering animal, as much as the hero Philoctetes, when overcome with pain, will whine!, will groan!, even if it were abandoned, on a desolate island, without the sight, the trace, or the hope of a helpful fellow creature’ (p. 65). The likeness of Philoctetes’ cries to those of an animal signifies difference between the two (only distinct entities can resemble one another); yet it also implies that in his cries the languages of sensation and of Besonnenheit coincide, or at the very least that the two cannot easily be told apart.

Philoctetes is a figure of abiding fascination for Herder, and in his Philoktet, a ‘Scenen mit Gesang’ composed in c. 1774, around two years after the publication of the Abhandlung, he tasks himself with
evoking these groans within not just verbal language, but also the specific prosodic and rhetorical repertoire his play deploys. We will turn to Philoktet below; for now let us remain with the Abhandlung itself. Herder’s central aim in the early stages of this work is to counter the account of language put forward by Condillac, and more or less corroborated by Rousseau,\(^\text{18}\) that language initially arose from interjections, designed to communicate needs (for Condillac) or passions (for Rousseau) to others, interjections which were subsequently formalised into a lexico-syntactic system. Herder’s central argument against this teleology is that it imagines ‘human reason […] as a new, quite separate force added into the soul which became the property of the human being in preference to all animals’ (p. 83). He counters: ‘If a human being was ever able to perform a single act in which he thought entirely like an animal, then he is also through and through no longer a human being, no longer capable of any human act at all. If he was without reason for a single moment, then I cannot see how he could ever in his life think with reason, without his whole soul, the whole economy of his nature, being changed’ (pp. 83–84, translation modified).\(^\text{19}\) Herder thus reframes the question, and the kind of origin at issue: not ‘how did humans come to have language?’, but ‘how do humans come to be human?’

If others found it unintelligible how a human soul was able to invent language, then it is unintelligible to me how a human soul was able to be what it is without precisely thereby, already even in the absence of a mouth and society, inevitably inventing language for itself.

(p. 90)

Herder’s reproach of his two eminent French precursors is that ‘the former [Condillac] made animals into human beings, and the latter [Rousseau] made human beings into animals’ (p. 77). In part this stems from the particular inflection of Herder’s argument, which leaves speculative history behind to sketch a metaphysics of human nature, and in particular this faculty for Besonnenheit: both a ‘sensing’ and a ‘taking-awareness’, anterior to a purely disembodied reason, but also suggesting that no bodily experience is sensory. Like Kant, who at that time was absorbed in what would become the First Critique, Herder’s interest is less in the empirical movement from
one stage of linguistic development to another than in the conditions for the possibility of such a movement. There cannot simply be some qualitative leap from dumb cry to signifying sound: it is the ‘inevitable’ possession of the faculty for language which can first set underway the history he will outline, from imitation to signification via the ‘characteristic mark’.

As it happens, Herder’s dismissal of Condillac and Rousseau misses Rousseau’s own insistence, in the Essay on the Origin of Languages, that the ‘cry of nature’ arises from ‘passions’ rather than ‘primary needs’, and as such was bound up in the ‘moral nature’ that distinguishes man among the animals: another argument based on as-it-were *a priori* faculties. Need alone, he argues, would have led humans to avoid each other, to feed themselves rather than commune with others; the first communicative cries must therefore have been caused by ‘moral needs, passions… Neither hunger nor thirst, but love, hate, pity, anger, wrested their first voices’.20 Perhaps this means that for Rousseau as well, human nature predates and renders inevitable mankind’s acquisition of language. This is certainly one way of reading his ambivalent remark, from the Discourse on Inequality, that ‘speech seems to have been highly necessary in order to establish the use of speech’.21 What characterises mankind on Rousseau’s account, however, is its moral nature, not its capacity for imitation, and this leads to a very different account of the devocalisation of speech. Yet insofar as the shift towards reference entails a shift away from communication’s moral vocation, the specific carving up of the linguistic sensorium he charts in his speculative, even mythic history, presents itself as a contingent historical process rather than a fact of language – or, for that matter, of the psyche. His speculation on origins, easily dismissed as an ‘ideological’ search for a chimerical prior unity, is salutary in its refusal to conflate contingency and necessity (what some would consider the determinant feature of ‘ideology’). The linguistic sensorium, Rousseau effectively tells us, has been otherwise at different points in history, and there is no reason why it will not be so again.

As we have seen, each account of how language is acquired end up narrating the operative conceptions of exactly what is being acquired. In this, we find a kind of retroactive projection of our assumptions about language onto origins which are not simply historical/developmental but metaphysical. Agamben’s attempt to grasp, beneath the
individual utterances of ‘voice’, an ontological-foundational ‘Voice’, has the virtue of showing precisely how difficult it is to unthink the very conceptual frameworks that voice, in its anomaly, is taken both to exceed and ultimately to precede. Above we cited Agamben’s model of ‘Voice’ as the ‘taking place of language’. He continues this passage: ‘inasmuch as this Voice [...] enjoys the status of a no-longer ([animal] voice) and of a not-yet (signified), it necessarily constitutes a negative dimension’.22 ‘Negative’, this ‘Voice’ is also soundless: ‘Voice cannot be spoken by the discourse of which it shows the originary taking place’ (p. 84), rather it is through its ‘marvellous muteness’ that Voice ‘shows its inaccessible place’ (p. 92).

But this insistence on muteness and inaccessibility, its ‘negative ontological foundation’, is somewhat troubling. For what voice is inaccessible to, is the dichotomy of animal voice and signifying gramma. It seems strange that Agamben should not wonder whether the reason that ‘Voice’ escapes the animal-phone/signifying-gramma dichotomy is not that it exists as its negative foundation, but rather that the dichotomy is in fact insufficient to grasp ‘Voice’ itself (or ‘voice’, for that matter). The attempt to thematise voice in terms of negativity and aporia might simply signal the refusal to jettison the opposition of sound and sense at any cost – might well indicate that, despite its apparent lack of explanatory power, Agamben takes the opposition to be insuperable. As he puts it in his final remarks: ‘Inasmuch as the Voice is, however, that which always already divides every experience of language and structures the original difference between showing and telling, being and entity, world and thing, then to grasp the Voice can only signify to think beyond these oppositions, that is, to think the Absolute’ (p. 92). The task of thinking ‘beyond these oppositions’ is one he puts off for later. Far easier to posit Voice’s ontological foundation from out of these oppositions, to fall back on an originary negativity that absolves us of the very thinking its negation demands.

Rousseau’s attempt to identify something like an ‘absolute’, thus shows itself less as the ‘ideological’ search for lost unity than as a means of questioning the historicity of the conceptual framework we too easily take to be inevitable. Sketching out this quasi-mythic transition from cry into speech, he notes two effects: an initially melodic voice is abstracted into a purely referential system of lexical-syntactic signs, and at the same time its melody is abstracted away
into music, which finally results in the ascendancy of instrumental over vocal music, and harmony over melody and rhythm. This is the context for Rousseau’s polemics against Rameau, and at the same time the philosophical stakes around Herder’s own deployment of the theory of diatonic harmony (whether intended as a dig at Rousseau, or simply indicative of his own conception of musical meaning). As noted, Herder will not have read Rousseau’s *Essai*, which is where we find his most concerted defence of melody against harmony, and link between the prosody of a language and its music (more so even than in the polemical *Lettre sur la musique française*, 1752–53). In the *Essai* Rousseau argues that music and language find common source in the cry of nature: the first languages served to communicate rather than refer; they communicated through inflection, pitch, melody. As language becomes more ‘articulate’, so it becomes more monotonous, more dependent on syntax: ‘it becomes more precise and less passionate; it substitutes ideas for feelings, it no longer speaks to the heart, but to reason’ (p. 296). On Rousseau’s prompt, we might ask: what of those prosodic articulations and configurations that have become language’s own unthought?

It is fascinating how psychoanalytic accounts of the infant’s initiation into language, such as those found in Abraham and Torok, Julia Kristeva, Rosolato, and more recently Steven Connor, absorb these eighteenth century debates about origins. Indeed, they even replay the mythic or fictive register, not of ‘origin’ as such, but rather of infancy. In calling these ‘fictions’, my point is not to claim that they are empirically ‘not true’, but rather that they offer a means to sketch out the kind of language that the infant will acquire, and to narrate how that acquisition takes place. Thinking cannot do without such myth; but the ways in which these myths are constructed tell us a great deal about the assumptions subtending such thinking.

Like Condillac, they see the first cries to constitute an attempt to sate these basic needs, yet the first entry into vocal – if not yet verbal – communication leads not only to socialisation but to our spatial orientation within the world more generally. The mouth becomes the point of contact between the infant and the world: as we will see in greater detail in the next chapter, the interior lining of pharynx, glottis, lungs, diaphragm, gives on to interiority as such, and in the same gesture sets up the relations between self and other, self and world, that language will serve to gauge and to broach. Thus Rosolato
posits the infant’s initiation into language in the ‘introjection of the “nutritive” voice, in the aura of the breast as primary object [objet initial],’ something developed by Abraham and Torok when they suggest that ‘the transition from a mouth filled with the breast to a mouth filled with words occurs by virtue of the intervening experiences of the empty mouth’. We find a similar logic to Hopkins’ addresses to birds: the attempt to create a specular, but also physical, presence when faced with absence. When the cry arises from the lack of the mother’s breast, the sheer physicality of voice in mouth fills up the absence of sustenance. Yet this is not simply about responding to, or filling or supplementing, an immediate lack; rather, it becomes an initiation into space more broadly. Says Connor: the infant’s ‘cries are an attempt to diminish and abolish the space that dawns about it and within it’. Similarly, Michel de Certeau suggests that ‘for the infant, it is the voice that opens (and circumscribes) a sphere of communication preparatory to the spoken word… a space of enunciation’. Such space is physical as well as conceptual, for the encounter between self and other(s) that characterises linguistic relation requires that we orient ourselves before, and in terms of, these others.

Here we start to broach the question of language’s unthought. For – are these cries language? In Connor’s view, there is no good reason to assume, as Abraham and Torok do, ‘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.’ If so, however, then it is worth noting that this voice is not simply latent ‘matter’, but also medium – that is, bound up in forms of relation at once referential (to hunger) and communicative. One might choose to read these not as empirically falsifiable descriptions of language acquisition but as ‘fictions’ of infancy, in which case they recall William Blake’s chimney sweeper, sold by his father ‘while yet my tongue / Could scarcely cry “weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”’ In Blake’s poem “weep” both prefigures the call ‘sweep’ that will be his fate, and stands in verbally for the non-verbal weeping of the motherless, abandoned child; similarly, ‘tongue’ figures both sound production and articulate speech. Voice even here exceeds its physical outpouring, is never simply ‘pre-linguistic’, complicating the transition from voice to speech by reminding us of their entanglement. Either way, they
serve to narrate, by charting the ways in which we are first initiated into language, our understanding of what language itself is. In this respect they function proleptically – the imagined origin becomes a means of asking what voice in fact is, what makes voice language. Voice is only more-than-language by being already bound up in the structures of language itself; but this also implies that language is always more-than-language, that voice is always more-than-voice.

But if they focus on the interjection of hunger, these accounts nevertheless seem to make a qualitative distinction between these vocal sounds and the following stage in language development: the infant's attempt to imitate verbal sounds around them through 'babble'. If the initial cries belonged to a 'voice of sensation', then now we see a relation to voice grounded on imitation, establishing the infant's emergent mediating consciousness. But if the sole purpose of babble is imitation, why do deaf children babble? David Appelbaum takes this fact to place babble on the side of voice, not speech, a form of vocal auto-affection, not verbal imitation. The mouth is not just the place where we register our encounter with lack; it provides the means for our spatial orientation with regard to both the world and ourselves. In this respect babble would constitute in its own way a testing of vocal range, of measuring the boundaries at which point our bodies cease to be ours – and inversely, the boundaries and ecstases by which our bodies first do become 'ours'. So when Herder posits language's origin in imitation, and Abraham and Torok, Condillac, Rosolato and Rousseau ascribe it back to inter-/intro-jection, Certeau takes the vocal-physical auto-affection of babble as the basis for a theory of language arising out of glossolalia, which 'combines something prelinguistic, related to a silent origin or to the “attack” of the spoken word, and something postlinguistic, made from the excesses, the overflows, and the wastes of language.'

Certeau's phrase 'postlinguistic' makes one wonder what residual vocality survives the purported 'devocalisation' through which voice becomes language. These psychologistic accounts see voice as at once functional and extravagant: arising in an orifice designed for nutrition, not communication, the initial tendency is to make communication serve the needs of nutrition. This means that, when voices start doing more than merely communicate, they become doubly, and inconveniently, extravagant. This would explain why Kristeva will approach voice through the psychic economy of
repression: ‘language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother.’ In this respect, the very categories of ‘prelinguistic’ and ‘postlinguistic’ attain a regulatory, as much as epistemological, function.

Which returns us to Herder’s own difficulties with the ‘prelinguistic’ voice of sensation. As noted, he claims both (a) that the voice of sensation is more prevalent in ‘original languages’ and (b) that the voice of sensation has nothing to do with language’s actual origin. More troubling for him still is the question of voices of those somewhat primitive uses of language still authorised (or at least tolerated) in enlightened societies, in which the voice of sensation and the language of Besonnenheit find themselves in uneasy cohabitation of the same speechsounds. Says Herder: even there where ‘reason often puts an end to the role of feeling and the artificial language of society to that of natural sounds... the loftiest thunders of oratory, the mightiest strikes of poetry, and the magical moments of accompanying gesture still often come close to this language of nature, through imitation’.

Through imitation: just as the adoption of animal cries into human sounds is the basis for the institution of verbal signs, so oratory, poetry, gesture, imitate human cries of sensation. They reintroduce into human language the vocal repertoire through which we (humans) express feeling, but in so doing show one further use of the faculty of Besonnenheit, which is itself, as we have seen, an imitative faculty. Poets serve a regulatory purpose: they may seem to blur the distinction between languages, between human and animal, but in fact, through their own mimetics, they reinforce it. Not for the first, or last, time in the history of western philosophy, poetry is deployed as the means of explaining away a problem, at once exotic and aberrant and itself safely inexplicable.

But for this very reason it becomes a site of rare illumination. For what is loaded onto ‘poetry’ as philosophy’s expedient ‘other’ is the recalcitrant kernel of its unthought. In order to sustain the strict separation between human and animal, between speech and cry, Herder needs now to account for the varied ways in which vocal inflexion seems meaningful without having any determinate lexical content, inflexions by which verbal speech does more (and less) than simply serve ‘reason’. Might ‘poetry’ and ‘oratory’ (in, it must
be said, one of the more oratorical passages of the *Abhandlung*) fill in this gap left by the rigidities of the philosophical system? Here it is interesting to compare Herder’s account of imitation to Kristeva’s account of poetic language’s *mimesis*, again conceived as a way in which the prelinguistic (the ‘semiotic’ in Kristeva’s vocabulary) enters into the ‘symbolic order’ of ‘thetic’ (i.e. referential) language. This is a *mimesis* not restricted to imitation: instead of reproducing signifieds, poetic language reproduces ‘*signifiers* – vocal, gestural, verbal’, such that ‘the reenacting of the signifying path taken from the symbolic unfolds the symbolic itself and… opens it up to the motility where all meaning is erased.’ For Kristeva too, this pre-language is grasped both *synchronously* as the semiotic, and *diachronically* through the infant acquisition of language: the ‘heterogeneousness’ that characterises poetic language can be ‘detected genetically in the first echolalas of infants as rhythms and intonations anterior to the first phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences.’ It functions precisely by interrupting the thetic-symbolic process of devocalisation: ‘the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the world is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed, instinctual, maternal element’ (p. 136). This is art not as philosophy’s regulatory ‘other’, but as its potentially revolutionary ‘other’, not covering up the unthought but opening fissures through which the unthought is brought into the realm of thinking.

Or we can see the role played by poetry in Agamben’s attempt to posit ‘Voice’ as ‘place’ for the ‘taking place’ of language. Agamben is rare among philosophers in grounding his reflections so concretely in poetry’s medium-specificity, rather than invoking some model of poetry as philosophy’s ‘other’. Through their continual suspension of the sound-sense opposition, he argues, poems render audible not *phone* but rather the suspension itself, what he had called language’s ‘taking place’ between *phone* and *gramma*: not ‘voice’ but ‘Voice’. But by the same token, this happens through its deployment of its vocal-verbal medium: not ‘Voice’ but ‘voice’. ‘Poetry contains in fact, contains an element that always already warns whoever listens or repeats a poem that the event of language at stake has already existed and will return an infinite number of times. This element […] is the metrical-musical element.’ But this too-easy collapsing of metre and music should give us pause; what about those contours which
make up poetry’s ‘phrasing’ but are not ‘metrical’ per se? To understand metre as ‘a place of memory and repetition’ (p. 78) is to cast it solely as patterns of, and linkages between, discrete phonemic units; the temporality of poetry is thus reduced to the interaction of such units. This bias underwrites those other figures of voice Agamben addresses: phoneme, onomatopoeia and, to a lesser degree, glossolalia. It is hardly surprising that for such a conceptual scheme the movedness of ‘Voice’ should become an enigma that can be understood only as aporia.

It is here that we can see the force of Kristeva’s provocative suggestion that infantile echolalia and instinctual drive contain ‘rhythms and intonation anterior to phonemes’, and Rousseau’s that language has, over time, deafened itself to pitch, melody, rhythm. Later in that same essay Kristeva will appeal to ‘the fragmentation of syntax by rhythm’ (p. 142); the irruption of ‘semiotic’ into ‘symbolic’ now coincides with the surfacing of non-segmental contours which refuse to be assimilated into a logic of the segment. A similar worry, in fact, is discernible when Herder suggests that the voice of sensation is required in order to ‘enliven’ [beleben] language: ‘In all original languages remains of these natural sounds still resound – to be sure, they are not the main threads of human language. They are not the actual roots, but the juices which enliven the roots of language’ (p. 68). ‘In the pace, in the rhythm, of their poems and of other ancient people’s songs resounds the sound which still enlivens the dances of war and religion, the songs of mourning and happiness, of all savages’ (p. 69). And, as we saw: poetry is ‘enlivened by the interjection of human sensation’ (p. 103). Life, it appears, comes to language from the outside – and, moreover, does so as pace, as rhythm, as ‘juice’ rather than ‘root’ or ‘thread’: each time grasped in terms of movement as much as of ‘life’ itself.

But this is not only a question of linguistic phrasing: Rousseau will suggest that linguistic theory’s unthought is music theory’s unthought also. For Rousseau’s history tells of a double devocalisation. ‘Cadences and sounds arise along with syllables: passion made all the vocal organs speak, and adorns the voice with all its brilliance; thus verses, song, and speech, have a common origin’ (p. 318). As language becomes monotone, music shifts away from vocal lines towards instrumental music, away from effects of timbre, rhythm, melody, towards a system of harmony which ‘separates song from
speech so much that these two languages combat one another, contradict one another, and cannot be united in a pathetic subject without being absurd’ (p. 323). It is precisely the impossibility of this union that gives such unnerving charge to the masterpieces of twentieth century Sprechgesang, from Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* to Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza III*.

Rousseau’s argument is twofold. Firstly, to grasp harmony solely as physical vibration divests music of the moral power it attains when arising out of the voice of nature; it splits the vibrations of sound-waves from the vibrating impulse to speak, an impulse which will inflect the contours of speech by fluctuations and intensities of pitch and rhythm. If the movement from cry of nature into language is one of passion into reason, it is also one which separates language from its prosody, leaving as its by-product a music that cannot speak and is divorced from the passions out of which it arose. And this leads to a second point: to ground melody in harmony means overlooking those elements – timbre, inflection, and rhythm – that do not fit within this system and yet are intrinsic to any melodic line. It is, in both cases, to take music out of time.

Rousseau’s commitment to voice at this juncture makes full use of its conceptual indeterminacy: as cipher of subjective expression, as semantically charged utterance (semantic if not in this instance referential), as individual melodic line. Such indeterminacy, where voice is constituted by the entanglements of register, of metaphorical and literal, and so forth, becomes crucial to his attempt to reimagine a sensorium of language irreducible to the opposition of (arbitrary) sound and (referential) sense. Here Rousseau shifts from his speculative-mythic history to anticipate Agamben’s wistful invocation of ‘the absolute’: voice lies ‘before’ the dualism of sound and sense not only in so far as we experience voice as whole before we divide it up into semantic content and sound data, but also as this wholeness subsequently remains unthinkable to a metaphysics that has never cast off its own binarism.

If the fate of linguistic meaning is bound up with the fate of music, this entails a revaluation of the semantic valence of prosody: not just metre and versification, but intonation, inflection, cadence, pitch, quantity, verbal gesture, and the textural palette central to the pragmatics of every spoken interaction, what Ann Wennerstrom has termed ‘the music of everyday speech’. Indeed, Wennerstrom
offers her own potted speculative history in explaining the discursive significance of prosody: 'The prosodic features of the cries of our prelinguistic ancestors may have become grammaticalized over the millennia into specific prosodic systems of modern languages. For example, the association between high pitch and increased volume and salient, new information, found in the intonation patterns of many languages, may stem from prelinguistic responses to what is worthy of attention in the environment' (pp. 7–8). On this account, linguistic sound is suprasegmental before it is divided up into segments. Following Rousseau’s analogy, if the theory of diatonic harmony disregards rhythm, then it is subsuming the temporally dynamic aspects of a melodic line under the progression of static chords; if a theory of language stays at the level of segment, and posits the non-linguistic, be it pre- or post-linguistic, in glossolalia, onomatopoeia, or interjection, then it too remains confronted by static units from which it must then build up a temporal whole as the context of meaning. The challenge is to expand our palette of verbal sound, and insodoing start to attend to the vocal-verbal movement that characterises language’s ‘natural scale’.

§

Could the following poem, ‘Le Rossignol’ [The Nightingale], by the mysterious sixteenth century French poet Durand de la Malle and chronicled by Henri Chopin in Poésie Sonore Internationale, be said to employ the human voice’s ‘natural scale’?

Tinu, tinu, tinu, tiao
Sprotin squita
Querrec pi pia
tio, tio, tio, tix
Quito, quito, quito, quooo
zi, zi, zi, zi, zi, zi
Quarrec tin zquia pi pi qui

This seems an exercise in pure onomatopoeia, or so Chopin characterises it. A deployment of ‘the purely sonorous syllable’, it remains imitative merely, and not transformative (p. 55). And yet, the syllable already transforms the birdsong into something else – a phoneme, as Agamben would have it. Note, for instance, the poem’s dependence
on conventions of punctuation (are the commas grammatical or rhythmical?) and phonology specific to a particular language (the French ‘qui’, pronounced /ki:/; the French guttural ‘r’; the accenting at the end of words rather than the beginning). This implies not only that the harmony between human and animal voices is at the same time a dissonance, but also that, far from being ‘a foreign body that remains external to normal representational speech’, onomatopoeia is at once outside and inside – and is always both more, and less, than onomatopoeia. Nikolai Trubetzkoy suggests that onomatopoeia function this way because ‘they are not conventional but natural’; yet we have already seen onomatopoeia to function metonymically as much as through resemblance. Moreover, the very notion of the ‘natural’ is complicated whenever the voice is concerned. As ‘natural’ sounds are played on a ‘natural’ scale, ‘Le Rossignol’ too becomes a testing of the vocal range, a precursor not to Chopin himself perhaps, but certainly to Bob Cobbing’s ABC in Sound.

Or what of this celebrated outburst?

\begin{verbatim}
o reche modo
to edire
di zi
tau dari
do padera coco\end{verbatim}

Artaud’s glossolalia might do away with onomatopoeic imitation, yet it hardly becomes for all that the ‘pure’ cry of sensation: it not only constitutes voice but in the same gesture figures it, notably through the apostrophic ‘o’ which signals its mock-prayer, and reminds us that glossolalia has long been part of the language of incantation, but more recently part of the attempt by futurism and dada to return language to this vocal attitude: be it Khlebnikov’s zaum (‘beyondsense’), which resembles the language ‘used in charms and incantations, where it dominates and displaces the language of sense, and [thereby]... has a special power over human consciousness’, or Hugo Ball’s sound poems, ‘rows of vowels’ that he would ‘chant’ ‘in the manner of liturgical plain song’.

Ball’s stated aim was to ‘relinquish[] – lock, stock, and barrel – the language which journalism has polluted and made impossible. You
withdraw into the inmost alchemy of the word’. But surely this is contradictory. Such is Steve McCaffery’s conclusion: ‘To say the least, these desires are paradoxical: a quest through a “poetry without words” in order to obtain the word’s innermost alchemy’.49 This, however, is to overlook Ball’s allusion to Rimbaud’s phrase _L’alchimie du Verbe_, from _Une Saison en enfer_. Ball traverses a distinction latent in the German word _das Wort_ and which French makes between _la parole_ or _le mot_ and _le Verbe_ – a distinction not unlike Agamben’s opposition between individual voice and ontological Voice, and which finds its theological precursor in John 1.1: _In the beginning was the Word_. That Ball should have found inspiration in ‘liturgy’ is in this respect quite unsurprising. The alchemy may cease to be ‘verbal’ and still, on this distinction, remain ‘Word’. As Ball shifts registers, from referential word to meaning-giving Word, his interest is not to do away with language, nor to return it to its vocal ‘origin’, but rather transform the parameters of what language can be. It is precisely this aim which underpins Henri Chopin two generations later: ‘we left behind the word that says [le verbe disant] in order to welcome the word that acts [le verbe actif].’50 Hence this exploration of sound, supposedly the ‘exteriority’ of language, becomes a means of reaching inwards. And hence also the competing conceptions of ‘word’ which galvanise his thinking. This might also serve to explain why both Khlebnikov and Artaud twinned their glossolalic incantations with etymological speculation: vocal anteriority becomes philological anteriority.51 Thus Khlebnikov tells us that _zen_ means both ‘earth’ and ‘eye’, which means there must be ‘some third entity’ which originally unites the two. ‘A mirrored device’, Khlebnikov speculates (p. 377). But when Artaud, in a parody of his philosopher contemporaries, co-opts Greek etymologies, it is less as a search for origins to language than as a radical bastardisation of words where roots provide the basis for new portmanteaux, as evinced perhaps most famously in his conjunction of poetry and blood in the ‘poematic’, a coinage bringing together the ‘poetic’ and _ema_ (Greek for ‘blood’, thus situating poetry’s life and death in the body), but also hinting at a poetic _matos_, a principle of movement in excess of the voice and speech that articulates it.52 Voice becomes not an anteriority to be rediscovered, but rather the generative principle for a demotic vocal-verbal poetics to come.

What both Artaud and Durand make clear is the difficulty in shifting between what scholastic thought called _vox confusa_ and _vox articulata_.53
The possibility of onomatopoeia shows that voices which are ‘inarticulate’ can nevertheless be given verbal – and indeed semantic – form; but in this case, how can we be sure that they are inarticulate after all? It was to clarify this problem that the early mediaeval theorists of music and language Donatus and Priscian introduced the distinction between *vox articulata* (voices which arise out of understanding) and *vox litterata* (voices which, although not necessarily containing meaning, can be transcribed into writing). Whilst animal cries constitute *vox confusa*, some voices (of frogs and bats) are both confused and unwritable whereas others (of nightingales, cuckoos) are confused but writeable nonetheless. This applies to musical voice no less than to ‘linguistic’ voice. Is birdsong, for instance, music? For St Augustine, and the theorists of music that followed him, the answer is ‘no’. In his *De musica* (387–89 CE), Augustine argues that *musica* must arise out of the rational faculties of man if it is to be distinguished from mere sound (even organised sound). The instrumentalist who cannot explain the principles of the music s/he plays is no closer to being a true musician than the bird that sings its profuse strains of unpremeditated art. If the singer is not conscious of the principles of music-making, it is not true song; birds are in this regard no more conscious than automata – and indeed, their singing is often figured as a form of automatism. But the human *musicus* [musician] who imitates birdsong through the cognitive activity of imitation and transcription into determinate pitch, interval, rhythm, *does* create *musica*. As Elizabeth Eva Leach summarises, ‘the mark of the *musicus* is to understand music’s natural rationality by means of “artificial” human reason’. Drawing out the musical logic latent in the sounds of nature becomes a sign of the musician’s skill, just as for Rameau centuries later the dexterous mastery of the principles of harmony will show an understanding of mathematical ratio, as well as a facility for resolving cadences.

This leaves unsolved, however, exactly how we are to distinguish between *vox litterata* and *vox articulata* – aside from the fact, as Agamben has remarked, that in the latter we know what it means. But does this not ultimately say more about the limits of our own knowledge than about writable animal voices? And moreover, for the very act of transcription to take place, for noise to be rendered as ‘phoneme’, requires that the sounds be meaningful, or at least capable of being endowed with meaning. When Agamben observes that
the inarticulate writable voice is endowed with a ‘pure intention to signify’ even if it has no determinate signification, this is not mere anthropomorphism, implicit in all onomatopoeia, but rather hints at an ‘intention’ which belongs, strictly speaking, not to human interiority at all, but to language itself. This is what is at stake when Agamben aligns the ‘pure intention to signify’ with ‘pure phonemes’.

Perhaps we might hear such an intention in irruptions of vocal excess over language, which seek to grasp the irreducibility of an individual’s exuberance into the strictures of lexis, grammar, and so forth. The ‘intention to signify’ that belongs to voice becomes a point at which vocal automatism verges on tropes of inspiration and possession, where animal voice is anthropomorphised just as it is deployed to trouble its own anthropocentrism. In this uncanny wavering between human and inhuman it bears some resemblance with the effusion of Ernest Renan, who returned to the enigma of language’s origin in the mid-nineteenth century, that ‘Le langage primitif, si nous pouvions le connaître, serait l’exubérance même’ – a linguistic primitivism which is subsequently suppressed, but which promises to be rekindled through our own verbal exuberance. When the nightingale of Giovanni Pascoli’s ‘Il fringuello cieco’ erupts out of language into joyous utterance, birdsong functions as figure not simply for vocal excess over language, but also the exuberance and automatism of such excess. A constant refrain is its entry into the birds’ chorus at the end of a stanza (‘farewell’, it sings first time round; ‘me too’ the second), each time signalling the dissolution of words into sound:

e cantava già l’usignolo:
- Addio, addio dio dio dio dio...

[...]

Poi cantava gracile e blando:
- Anch’io anch’io chio chio chio chio

In the introduction I distinguished between ‘figuring through’ and ‘figuring as’. Here we find voice figured not simply as birdsong, but as the dissolution of verbal language into phonic hedonism; this movement is figured through echo, through metrics, through paronomasia, consonance and rhyme scheme (the pun of ‘dio’ with its
rich rhyme ‘Dio’ [God], at the end of the following stanza, points out how far from casting off language Pascoli’s nightingale is, the degree to which the excess over language is being figured linguistically). But we can also discern a different autonomy at work: the repetitions of *dio dio dio dio* and *chio chio chio chio*, falling out of speech into exclamations, come to attain a motivic role within the stanzaic structure, by offering up a pattern of motifs, and implying a motivation, and agency, subtending this pattern, something which in the final chapter we will analyse in terms of ‘measure’. Even with that other nightingale – Durand de la Malle’s, whose onomatopoeia are, incidentally, remarkably similar to those in ‘Il fringuello cieco’ – we encounter a phonic patterning that both explores the contours of a human voice tasked with imitation, but subsequently exceeding an imitative framework, such as when lines 1, 3, 4 repeat and then modify a particular phonic element (e.g. *Querrec/Quarrec, tinu/tin, pi pia/pi pi*) in order to indicate a kind of compositional principle through which its various echoes come to sound themselves.

Accompanying this sheer joy in singing are myths of the nightingale (and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the cicada) dying as a result of its own song: exuberance slides into self-neglect, in each its extravagance index of automatism. Pliny told of contests between nightingales which would continue until one of the competitors perish, a tale with a fascinating afterlife. In his *Ars Poetica* Johannes Aegidius de Zamora (1240–c.1316) inserts the following sentence into his citation of Pliny: ‘The nightingale wastes little time in eating so that she can enjoy the beauty of her own song. Thus she dies sometimes from singing, and in dying sings’.62 Voice can either sing or nourish; it cannot do both. Indeed, here we might remember that for those accounts of infant language acquisition, voice, communicating hunger, was deployed to the interests of nutrition. ‘Mouth, tongue, teeth have their primitive territory in food,’ say Deleuze and Guattari. ‘In devoting themselves to the production of sounds, they deterritorialize themselves.’63 ‘Deterritorialization’ here is both extravagance and death-drive. But Pliny’s story receives a very different afterlife in Richard Crashaw’s ‘Musicks Duell’, where the contest is staged between nightingale and lute, and the nightingale, if not out-performed, is at least outlasted:

And she, although her breath’s late exercise
Had dealt too roughly with her tender throat,
Yet summons all her sweet powers for a note.
Alas, in vain! for while, sweet soul, she tries
To measure all those wild diversities
Of chatt’ring strings, by the small size of one
Poor simple voice, raised in a natural tone,
She fails; and failing, grieves; and grieving, dies;—
She dies, and leaves her life the victor’s prize,
Falling upon his lute.\(^6^4\)

In the figure of the nightingale automatism and animality converge in the song’s extravagance – indeed, Pliny is so impressed with the nightingale’s abilities that he likens it to ‘a wind organ’.\(^6^5\) However, in Crashaw’s tale the nightingale, set against the musical instrument which would eclipse birdsong, is anthropomorphised. Central to this anthropomorphism is the way the bird’s automatism and fragility provides the basis for reflecting on poetry’s own song; in its loss of agency through singing it is not so far, as we will see in later chapters, from the trope of lyric possession. This is not restricted to the anthropomorphised bird, however: Wendy Beth Hyman notes how figures of mechanical birds in particular were endowed with ‘the combined sense of something that straddles technology and divinity,’ thereby becoming a trope for poetic making itself, at once ‘authentic and personal’ and yet ‘carefully crafted and ingeniously artificed.’\(^6^6\) And yet, we are starting to see, the same could be said for the birds themselves. In this light we might turn to one further tale of the duel between a nightingale’s song and the music of human artifice: Stravinsky’s opera based on Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of the nightingale eclipsed by a mechanical bird, where one form of musical automatism comes face to face with the pinnacle of enlightenment automata, the voice-producing machine. From its earliest entry, the difference between the nightingale and the human world is figured harmonically: the fisherman’s tonal song (sung by a bass), adopting modal patterns from Russian folksong, is overtaken by virtuosic arpeggi of the nightingale (in the upper reaches of the soprano register) that draw on the octatonic scale of alternating tones and semitones. The mechanical bird, by contrast, is played by an oboe, using the far more limited pentatonic scale, so as to reaffirm its lack of expressivity: having no soul, it lacks variety (unlike Crashaw’s lute – or rather, his lutenist). More exuberant than the mundane human,
less predictable than the mechanical artifice: such is Stravinsky's tonic-chromatic message. Deleuze and Guattari have offered an account of music as the deterritorialization of ‘the refrain’, which finds its source variously in – amongst other phenomena – birdsong, which serves to establish a particular ‘territory’. Music, releasing the refrain into further ‘lines of flight’, constitutes ‘a deterritorialization of the voice, which becomes less and less tied to language’. Yet it would appear that precisely the opposite is happening here: not only insofar as the bird is finally domesticated, but in the highly determinate gestural language Stravinsky has set up through linking individual harmonic motifs to individual characters. As with Crashaw, the bird’s encounter with artifice becomes part of a wider anthropomorphism; it is as though Stravinsky’s opera allegorises the historical development in the nightingale’s symbolic valence from automaton to figure of full-throated ease.

This would certainly be corroborated by the shift in the narrative role performed by the nightingale that accompanies its shift in harmonic palette. At first, she sings either through vowels alone, or in declarative statements tells of her sheer pleasure in singing; it is only when she returns, to coax death away from the king on his deathbed (another enlivening non-human voice), that her arias attain a determinate narrative function, as though she is slowly domesticated into the world of humans. It is also at this period that she is most explicitly gendered as a ‘she’ (nightingale in Russian, solovei, taking a masculine noun), as she submits herself to the king while asking in return nothing but the knowledge that she brings him pleasure and solace. Michel Poizat has argued that the female soprano voice is often made inhuman and strangely ungendered in late romantic opera; might we then see the feminisation of the nightingale taking place within Stravinsky’s narrative as itself a response to the genre he was adopting, and contesting?

Indeed, its soprano voice sings only of pleasure, but ultimately knows pleasure through performance to another’s (auditory) gaze – the opening arias, singing of self-satisfied pleasure, are not themselves directed at the onstage audience, perhaps, but appeal nevertheless to the audience offstage, whereas the final arias are knowingly performances within the fictive world the nightingale inhabits within and performs to. Vocal hedonism is never simply auto-affective effusion: it is always performed to an audience, is always
in part a posture assumed. What kind of posture might we discern in Marina Abramovic’s famous 1975 performance work *Freeing the Voice*, in which she screams until hoarse, and finally silent? Here, the vocal excess is bound up with the question of what kind of materiality voice has. Abramovic depicts voice as function of a finite body, explored through being exhausted: the ‘freedom’ of the voice takes place as this materiality is reduced to muteness. Chris Goode gives an eloquent critique of a conception of ‘freedom’ in which the body is something to be escaped: ‘What is most disturbing was the corollary implication of the title: that the voice *within* the body (in other words not just the produced voice but also the not-yet-produced, the pre-vocal) is constrained *by* the body, by its own embodiment.’ Yet, given what we have seen of voice’s constitutive excess and medality, we might wonder if ‘voice’ is *ever* wholly ‘within the body’. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that such a literalistic conception of bodily materiality should coincide with this understanding what it means to be ‘free’.

For voice is, I will suggest throughout this book, marked by its constitutive condition of ‘between’: what Deleuze and Guattari would call ‘virtuality’ but which I will see in terms of *medium*. Of recent sound work we might think of Jaap Blonk’s *Fonetische Etuden*, which conceive of voice as instrument, in both its musical and scientific senses: the invocation of the term ‘étude’ points both to the genre of virtuoso exploration, but it is at the same time a study of the mechanics of voice production; in both cases it facilitates a testing of the vocal range. It is the between-ness characteristic of voice as material support which becomes discernable as he hones in on one phonetic cluster followed by another; its work of animation might take the notation of individual phonemes but the work itself inheres in dynamic shifts between the physical nodes of sound production, shifts which converge motivically as though the phonetic becomes physical by being so bound up in its own (con-)figuration: ‘figure’ not as image, but as provisional coherence. There is an analogy here between abstraction and figuration in plastic arts, but with a displacement as the analogy is itself displaced from one medium to the next: the voice abstracted into pattern sets off against itself figures through which voice becomes thinkable – as excess, as anteriority, as automatism, as virtuosity.

In the following chapters I will return to the privileged figures of apostrophe and interjection as sites for such a thinking through
poetry's vocal-verbal medium. And to anticipate this, let us return to Herder's depiction of Philoctetes, whose own voice, we discover in the *Abhandlung*, is overrun with the animal language of sensation. In his *Philoktet*, Herder is tasked with registering such overflow within the constraints of verse drama. *Philoktet*, as noted, intersperses scenes and song, and Philoctetes' first monologue, in which he is overcome with pain, is written to be sung. The deployment of song here shows a doubleness crucial to Herder's own reflection on voice: it serves to extract vocal sound from its context in speech, and hence highlighting cries and the moments at which language breaks down into pure vocal utterance; but it also contains, and formalises, pitch and timbre (not least by placing it within a harmonic structure: a 'natural scale'). See how Herder's Philoctetes, in spite of his agony, remains within the constraints of both metre and rhyme scheme as he voices his pain:

Leb wohl denn, liebe Höle,
    mein Aufenthalt
Seh bald nun Land und Vater
    nun bald!

Leb wohl denn, bunt Gefieder,
    und Wild und Wald!
Seh bald nun all die Meinen
    nun bald!

Hab aus nun hier geflaget,
    Ich seh, ich seh — — —
Ich Schlange, brennst gewaltsam
    Weh — Weh!—

(pp. 73–4)

The adherence to metre might remind us of Sophocles' own depiction of Philoctetes' cries, where *aa aa aa aa* (ll. 732, 739) expands into *papai*, and then is shaped to fit the iambic hexameter line: *apappai papappapappapappapai* (ll.745–46). 'Pure voice' only becomes such within the taut frame of the metrical – and, presumably, sung – verse line. But see also the role played by ellipses, marked here by em-dashes. Ellipsis arises precisely where the refrain already determines silence: the silence is thus, as it were, filled with
syntax just as syntax gestures towards an excess over the syntactic organisation of voice into language. It is into ellipsis that language breaks off. At this juncture, vocal excess is registered not sonorously, but rather as a metrical-syntactic silence. Silent, but also visual: the em-dashes are not just syntactical gestures but marks on the page: vocal sound replaced by textual ‘noise’. To register Philoctetes’ voice exacts of Herder an expansion of the linguistic sensorium in directions removed from speechsound alone – as indeed he must, if not to contravene the insights of a sensuous rationality characterised by Besonnenheit, something to which his verse perhaps remains truer than his metaphysics of language.

It is striking in this regard that the interjections of these lines are both verbal, and indeed both fall on rhyme words: seh and Weh, notably when the long ‘Weh!’ of the final line puts rhythmic pressure on its syllabic symmetry with ‘nun bald’. This intensifies in the verse dialogue with Neoptolemus which follows, and its negotiation between metre and syntax:

Ach!
Oh nichts, mein Sohn! Ich fühle Leichterung—
Ihr Götter, weh! — — Es reuet dich doch nicht?—
O Sohn, dich reuet nicht!
Ach Gott! ach Gott! ach Gott! – Es tobt
in meinen Adern! Grand, Glut, Hölle! – Sohn
dein Schwert! – Ertödte! – Schlage! – Ach!
Nimm diese Pfeile, treuer Sohn! –
Da sprühet Blut! – Ich traue dir,
o Sohn! Ich werde schlummern! – Weh!
Weh! Weh! zum Herzen! Ich, o Tod,
heilige Erde,
nimm mich auf?75

Again, Herder figures linguistic breakdown as the breakdown of syntax: be it the apostrophes and interjections of ‘Ach Gott’ and ‘o Sohn’, the ellipses, the fragments – again contained within a broadly iambic pattern. But once again, vocal excess over speech is figured less through non-verbal interjections (‘Ach’ and ‘o’ themselves re-verbalise sound within poetic convention) than through syntactic-metrical opacity. Perhaps here we can discern what Herder
had earlier called the voice’s ‘natural scale’: voice as the convergence of syntactic, verbal, and rhythmic density. It is a scale which, facilitating reflection both on man’s place in the world and on the category of the ‘natural’ itself, takes upon itself ever greater dimensions.

§

‘Weh! Weh! Weh!’ Let us turn, to finish, from Philoctetes’ extravagant, and somewhat embarrassing outbursts of pain to the no less embarrassing, if somewhat less despairing, final lines of Hopkins’s ‘The Woodlark’. I already noted the juxtaposition of two vocal responses to the lark’s song the poem evokes – its onomatopoeic opening line and the *tour de force* condensation of sprung accenting in the central monologue. In the final lines, the two apparently coalesce:

> With a sweet joy of a sweet joy,  
> Sweet, of a sweet, of a sweet joy  
> Of a sweet—a sweet—sweet—joy.

As well as ‘giving voice’ to the bird’s thoughts, these lines contain a sonic echo of ‘Teevo cheevo cheevio chee’. Onomatopoeia is internalised into speech, and in so doing speech falls into extravagant, almost monomaniacal tautology, hedonism and sonic overinvestment taking hold of reference. This is voice generated by *verbal* opacity, pushing at the limits of its syntax as much as of its metre; it may leave the unit of the word intact but in the sheer insistence of its repetitions it wrings ever more prosodic variation out of this ostentatiously restricted sonorous palette. As with Stravinsky’s nightingale, a bird performs its own joy in singing, giving verbal art the licence to take pleasure in the possibilities of the human voice: excess here is figured as plenitude, not aporia – but a plenitude arising out of the restrictions imposed upon it, as though it were that only when the materials are made finite does the sheer breadth of possibility become perceivable.

And yet, Hopkins’s poem has in its sights another source for its possibility, one which again lies in the animations of voice, which again grasps voice as anterior to the sounding which issues from diaphragm, lungs, larynx, tongue:

> when the cry within  
> Says Go on then I go on:
Till the longing is less and the good gone
But down drop, if it says Stop,
To the all-a-leaf of the tréetop.

This ‘cry within’ not only attains verbal content and becomes speech, uttering ‘Go on’, but this content is then transferred from imperative into description in ‘I go on’; in the repetition of ‘go on’ we thus discern difference in grammar, aspect, register, address, prosodics – in voicing. And, less conspicuous than earlier perhaps, but still present, is that alliterative ordering, now inhering as undersong (when/within; when/in/on/then/on/gone/down; long/less; good/gone; down/drop; says/Stop) and assonant echo-chamber (on/long/gone/drop/Stop/top), as well as nodes of prosodic density (good gone... down drop). Perhaps we can, moreover, hear this ‘cry within’ in the fisherman’s refrains from Stravinsky’s libretto, co-written with his friend, the poet Stepan Mitusov, to *The Nightingale*, and which serve as an oblique comment on the events of the opera as a whole:

He flung his net, the breath of God,
and with his nets he fished.
And with his nets he fished for the deep sea fish.
Many caught he, the breath of God.

To the heavens he took them, the breath of God,
And set the fish free in his sea.
Birds he made from all of them,
Gave them voice, did the breath of God.

Gave them voice, did the breath of God.
Their voice did charm the lords of earth.
Tears flowed from their wise old eyes.
And the tears became the stars in the sky.

Having hidden all the stars with clouds,
Death brought cold and darkness here.
Death itself, by the voice of birds
Conquer death itself did the breath of God.

The sun is risen, night is over.
The birdsong loudly fills the woods.
Listen to them: in the voice of birds
Is the very speech of the breath of God.\textsuperscript{77}

The folksy religiosity Stravinsky and Mitusov assume coincides with the modal scale of the fisherman’s song, a reminder of its knowing archaism, yet this ironic distancing should not hide the extent to which \textit{The Nightingale} continually grasps song as animation – it is, after all, only after the nightingale’s song as banished death from the king’s chamber that the song returns to tell us that ‘the \textit{voice} of birds / Is the very \textit{speech} of the breath of God’. In this context, the lines come to stand as a last word on the opera as a whole.

What these works are confronting – in Hopkins’s and Stravinsky/Mitusov’s case by invoking a divine impulse into breath and speech, in Rousseau’s, Condillac’s, Herder’s, by constructing a speculative-mythic history of origins, in Abraham/Torok’s, Connor’s, Kristeva’s and Rosolato’s by reimagining the initiation into language as a kind of primal scene – is the question of how language is first set into motion, and how this motility subsequently continues to inhere in language. But this requires that we interrupt the narrative of devocalisation with its attendant imaginaries of pre-linguistic and para-linguistic, requires that we grasp voice not as ‘origin’ but rather as matrix of the continuing vectors through which the impulse into language is continually figured, configured, transfigured. When poems work with the motility of their own vocal-verbal medium – work \textit{with}, but also work \textit{on}, work \textit{out}, work \textit{out from}, and indeed quite simply \textit{work} this medium – when they figure, channel, dynamise, and release, this condition of animacy, they offer a means for us to trace these vectors. In this, the work of animation is not restricted to the poems themselves, but becomes the work of a speculative poetics.
2

Vibration and Difference

When Gregor Samsa awakes to find himself transformed into a giant bug [einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer], his first reaction is to panic – not, however, because of his carapace, or the numerous legs protruding from his belly, but because he is late for work. He becomes shocked at his own physical state only when, calling to his sister some moments later, ‘he heard his own voice answering hers, unmistakably his own voice, it was true, but with a persistent horrible twittering squeak behind it like an undertone, which left the words in their clear shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating around them to destroy the sense, so that one could not be sure one had heard them rightly’.¹ It is ‘unmistakably his own voice’, and yet has an agency of its own, reverberations that prevent this voice from being wholly his: he at once recognises himself and recognises that he has become ‘other’ to himself.

Why should it be the voice in particular through which this uncanny self-recognition is registered? Franz Kafka is not alone in this insight – who has not felt not only embarrassment but also unease at hearing their voice on an answering machine? – but the focus on the strangely animal, uncontrollable aspect of one’s voice as it leaves the mouth and passes into the world is peculiarly his. Kafka’s writing is populated by speaking, and indeed singing, animals: Red Peter the ape; Josephine the mouse; the dog presenting his investigations and the singing dogs that so enchant him.² The excess of voice, registered here, just as it had been in the onomatopoeia of the previous chapter, as both animality and automatism, would thus threaten the longstanding association of voice with the interiority of a
‘speaking subject’. The link of voice with interiority, and indeed with one’s singular interior life, has a venerable philosophical ancestry: from Aristotle in *De anima*, for whom sound becomes voice when it is ensouled, meaning that sighs and laughter count as ‘voice’ whilst coughs and other sonorous responses to external stimuli do not,³ to the injunction to ‘find one’s voice’ and the ‘voiceprint’ that can be used for identification purposes – voice as metonym for an authentic self within.⁴ Kafka’s anthropomorphism plays continually on the inner life of its animal narrators, but ‘Die Verwandlung’ changes the focus somewhat: Gregor continues to be (or at least consider himself) human despite the fact that what he utters is, in the words of the chief clerk, ‘no human voice’ (p. 98, my emphasis).⁵

Voice, then, indicates the current state of our inner life, but more fundamentally indicates the very fact that we have an inner life. In Jacques Derrida’s phrase, hearing one’s own vocal utterance ‘seems to reduce even the internal surface of one’s own body’, and as such effects ‘the absolute reduction of space in general’.⁶ In this, voice would elide two distinct conceptions of interiority: the physical interior of voice production and reception – lungs, larynx, oral cavity, etc. – cannot easily, if at all, be disentangled from the association of voice with a self beyond or behind the physical. We find something similar when Steven Connor, concerned specifically with sound production within different parts of the mouth, argues that ‘the distinction between frontal and posterior sound values is finally a distinction between matter and immaterial, or between something and nothing’.⁷ What starts off as a physical interiority comes to exceed physical determination: its immateriality signals this reduction of space.

But we might sense also that the reverse is true: that voice, through its conjunction of sound-making and meaning-making, opens up the phenomenological space we then inhabit – that, as Jean-Luc Nancy argues, ‘the opening of the mouth’ constitutes ‘the incommensurable extension of thought’.⁸ This ‘opening’ – which, we can extrapolate, using the gerundive form of the English translation of *ouverture*, is at once noun and verb, the space between our opened lips and the act of opening – extends outwards; but at the same time, the words that issue from this mouth cannot be wholly situated in a world of *res extensa*. To compound matters, the subject, or ‘ego’, is not wholly present in the words either: in the same gesture that it
places itself into the world it also withdraws behind its words. The mouth, breathing, speaking, voicing, would thus open up the dimension it will subsequently both inhabit and exceed. Says Nancy, ‘the mouth is the opening of Ego, Ego is the opening of the mouth. What happens there, is that the there spaces itself’ [ce qui s’y passe, c’est qu’il s’y espace; alternatively: ‘it spaces’] (p. 162).

In this sense, the voice would not only elide two forms of interiority; it would elide any hard-and-fast distinction between inside and outside more generally. As Kafka’s description of Gregor hearing himself speak indicates, our voices come from elsewhere than simply ‘within’, and moreover, traversing the external world, these vocal sounds attain independence from their utterer. If voice does indicate, and even set up, our sense of interiority, it nevertheless remains strangely external to us, something we register each time we perceive our own voices: at once through the vibrations of jawbone against the ‘inner ear’, and as they return to us through soundwaves against the eardrum. It is the internal aspect which is denied to us in recordings of the voice, whence our unease at a voice is both recognisable and yet transfigured, both ours and (surely! please!) not. But it is not just recording technology: to read a poem aloud is also often intensely embarrassing (and this not restricted to Hopkins’s ‘sweet joy’); might this be because poems themselves involve external technics shaping how our voices cadence from outside us?9

In Voice and Phenomenon, Grammatology and his essay ‘Qual Quelle: Valéry’s Sources’, Derrida suggests that the motif of hearing oneself speak secures ‘metaphysical’ self-presence: vocal utterance affords a unity of internal intention and the sonorous token through which language traverses the external world.10 It is both res cogitans, the auto-affection through which we understand ourselves (s’entendre in French containing both ‘to hear’ and ‘to understand’), and res extensa; within this figure is the prospect of resolving the abyss that so troubles dualism from Descartes on. Voice quite simply contains within it the promise of uniïvocity. If for Derrida this is latent in – and foundational for – Western metaphysics, this split becomes both more urgent and more banal after the development of technologies of voice recording and transmission in the 1860s and 70s. It may well be that the cultural ubiquity of the voice prosthetic and disembodied voice (phonographs, telephones, vocoders, and more recently
the proliferation of automated voices) is what made an understanding (and ‘deconstruction’) of voice as the marker of self-presence possible in the first place. Recording, after all is transcription – and, indeed, the transcription of an absent voice: as such it answers to the Derridean repertoire of ‘trace’, ‘writing’, etc. Indeed, in Ulysses Gramophone Derrida notes the regular coincidence of motifs of interiority with telephones throughout Ulysses, but reaching its apotheosis in the ‘Aeolus’ chapter, whose ‘mental telephony... at the same time institutes, prohibits, and disrupts the so-called monologue’, be it as telephone call or as ‘the simplest vocalization, from the monosyllabic quasi-interjection of the oui, yes, ay’. To say that ‘Before the act, or the word, was the telephone’ (p. 51) is to grasp this principle of telephony as the condition for all phone.

With such prostheses, moreover, the inhuman insinuates itself into a figure which has come to serve as synecdoche for the human as such. When Henri Chopin employed microphones to pick up the vocal microparticles inaudible to the naked ear, prosthesis transforms the voice itself. As he describes it, ‘the voice truly appears around the 1950s [i.e. with magnetic tape as recording equipment, first commercially available in 1946], when it can hear itself. From then on, the tape recorder “enters the mouth” almost naturally, second guesses it, apprehends it and discovers its vocal forces.’ That it does so ‘almost naturally’, that the tape recorder is required not just for the ‘true’ appearance of voice but also for voice to ‘hear itself’, as though now in auto-affective dialogue, would bear out this logic of prosthesis. Or one might think of the ‘acousmatic’ effect of a voice coming from elsewhere than the speaking body, a classic trope of sound cinema, which so often serves to de-humanise or else to suspend categories of ‘the human’ – whether for comedic purposes, as in Singin’ in the Rain (1952), or at the dramatic climaxes of horror films like Psycho (1960) and The Exorcist (1973). That in each of these canonical cases the grafting of one voice to another mouth disrupts gender norms (Donald O’Connor singing behind the lip-synching Jean Hagen; the voice of Norma Bates – Virginia Gregg was, aptly if unfairly, uncredited for the role – in the mouth of Anthony Perkins; 12 year old Linda Blair emitting the deep growl of Mercedes McCambridge) demonstrates just how the threat of voice technology was taken towards the body-proper and the categories through which this body-proper is conceived.
Kafka is throughout his œuvre highly attentive to the unsettling power of a voice become not only disembodied, but animal and machinic, such as when K. telephones the Castle:

From the mouthpiece came a humming, the likes of which K. had never heard on the telephone before. It was as though the humming of countless childlike voices—but it wasn’t humming either, it was singing, the singing of the most distant, of the most utterly distant, voices—as though a single, high-pitched yet strong voice had emerged out of this humming in some quite impossible way and now drummed against one’s ears as if demanding to penetrate more deeply into something other than one’s wretched hearing. K. listened without telephoning, with his left arm propped on the telephone stand he listened thus.14

The telephone’s humming, like Gregor’s hissing, has an agency of its own. But Gregor’s hissing is not the only animal voice this machinic humming resembles: it also anticipates Josephine the mouse singer’s childish piping—again, modern technology figured in accordance with that well-worn trope of automatism: the animal voice. Josephine’s song, we are told, resembles any other mouse’s piping, and yet is celebrated and ritualised by all the other mice, and in The Castle also we find the auditory register of the voices both emphasised and dissolved. Note the vacillating description, working through one trope to the next, not humming but ‘singing’, not song but a ‘drum’; strangely ungraspable, its exteriority as a result that much more acute.

For young Marcel in À la recherche du temps perdu, the telephone’s exteriority to human communication discloses an absence not only spatial (between interlocutors) but ultimately temporal, and as such insuperable. At first this new invention, and its promise of abolishing separation and replacing it with a spectral, vocal presence, is endowed with supernatural force, and Proust’s description of the telephone is scored with (female) deities: the ‘Demoiselles du téléphone’ are described variously as ‘Vièrges Vigilantes’, ‘Anges gardiens’, ‘Toutes-Puissantes’, ‘Danaïdes’, ‘Furies’, ‘servantes... du Mystère’, and ‘ombrageuses prêtresses de l’Invisible’.15 This is not simply literary conceit: in 1920, four decades after patenting the phonograph, Thomas Edison suggested that his invention could
be used to speak to the dead, and claimed to be working on such a
device; and Guglielmo Marconi thought that the wireless could, in
principle, be tuned to receive voices from throughout history. And
yet, far from bringing Marcel's grandmother to presence, as hoped,
as promised, the telephone rather makes him for the first time aware
of her absence – of the fact that one day she would be forever absent
from his life. 'I had close to me nothing but that voice, phantom as
impalpable as the one which would perhaps come to me in visitation
once my grandmother was dead' (p. 849). And this to such a degree
that the next time he sees her in the flesh, she is no longer the liv-
ing presence she had been, but the 'phantom' of the telephone call
(p. 853). The spectral presence it would conjure up will from now
on infect all presence, leading to the realisation that before that fateful
telephone call 'I had only ever seen her in my soul, through the
transparency of memories piled next to each other and on top of
one another', whereas now she exists 'in a new world, the world of
Time', in which she is merely 'a ravaged old woman whom I did not
recognise' (p. 854).

The telephone, disclosing this constitutive absence in human
communication, appears to anticipate Derrida's critique of 'phono-
centrism'. But it also, as Frank O'Hara, more sanguine than Proust or
Kafka, notes, signifies for poetry a more immediate threat:

It [personism] was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones
on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone
(not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a
poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if
I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem,
and so Personism was born.

The telephone, a competing means of overcoming absence, becomes
poetry's rival. Should poems then aspire to the direct communica-
tion that the telephone permits? Or should they, rather, recognize
the constitutive absence necessary for writing as such: that it cannot
abolish absence through its address, and indeed it is in the enduring
force of this absence that the love address continues to live? A poem
like Thomas Hardy's 'The Voice', in which the address to a lost,
estranged lover and the conflation of her voice with the breeze twins
its invocation of tradition (Petrarch's Laura, l'aura, the wind) with

Vibration and Difference  53
a then-contemporary fascination with the supernatural (itself not unrelated to the experience of voice technology\textsuperscript{19}), responds to this predicament by striving to reanimate its absent addressee.\textsuperscript{20} But, of course, this depends for its central premise on her absence, so as subsequently to perform such reanimation as its lyric vocation. The opening vocative, ‘Woman much missed’, incorporates this paradox succinctly, as its directness clashes with her being ‘missed’ (and in two senses: longed for, and not obtained),\textsuperscript{21} as its soundworld becomes not only an incantation of her voice out of the breeze, but becomes through its sounding a surrogate presence.

Hardy’s poem, dwelling on, and in, its soundworld, would imply that voice in poetry functions less as the marker of self-presence than as an opening-up of presence through an encounter with absence. Not only insofar as it tries to render present its absent addressee; through its competing intonational cues, its mutually exclusive vocal attitudes and vocal lines, it demands of us plural voicings. Hardy’s poem in this sense enacts what Nancy has called \textit{le partage des voix}, translated as ‘sharing voices’ but more properly indicating a ‘distribution’ of voices in which they are both differentiated from and bound to one another: ‘the singularity of \textit{my} voice, of \textit{yours}, and of \textit{our} dialogue’.\textsuperscript{22} The attempt to open up the space for address is continually foreclosed in Hardy’s poem, but nevertheless becomes the source for its urgency; this also seeks to open up the voicings through which ‘The Voice’ shifts from the woman’s voice to the future resounding of the poem.

How do these different vocal strands cohere, and diverge? To see this I will borrow a phrase from Derrida. In a 1983 interview with Anne Berger, he offers a somewhat haughty response to those ‘rather hurried people’ who ‘have thought that I’m not interested in the voice, but only writing’. He counters: ‘This is obviously untrue. What interests me is writing in the voice, the voice as differential vibration, that is, as trace’.\textsuperscript{23} What interests \textit{me} is what we can extrapolate from the phrase ‘differential vibration’: oscillation of soundwaves, differentiating opposite ends of a frequency; vibration as affect entering a particular, differentiated form; but also the relations between self and others, self and world, word and referent, and between the linguistic terms themselves; and finally a movement (at once vibrating and differentiating) through which the parameters of presence and absence are set and re-set. Again we start to see
the constitutive *mediality* of voice, the way it both engenders, and inhabits, a ‘between’.

§

The term ‘phonocentrism’ occurs surprisingly rarely in Derrida’s œuvre: it receives but two mentions in *Grammatology*, and none in either *Voice and Phenomenon* or *Writing and Difference*, which opt for ‘phonologism’ and ‘Logo-phonocentrism’ respectively (one mention each).24 These latter terms make one wonder, moreover, if Derrida is conflating ‘phonocentrism’ and ‘logocentrism’, and the mention in *Grammatology* would bear this out. Here he speaks of ‘that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning’,25 before continuing:

We already have a foreboding that *phonocentrism* [my italics] merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as *presence*, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence (*ousia*), temporal presence as point (*stigme*) of the now or of the moment (*num*), the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth). *Logocentrism* [my italics] would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence.

(p. 12)

One might agree with Marian Hobson that the shift from ‘phonocentrism’ to ‘logocentrism’ is little more than ‘a shift of terminology’;26 nevertheless, the apparent elision of *phone* and *logos*, however heuristic it might be, should give us pause: what of those aspects of voice irreducible to speech, be it as spoken content or as speechsound? The phrase ‘differential vibration’ points to another current in Derrida’s thinking, one which not only attends to an excess of *phone* over its determination in *logos*, but also sees such excess as the basis for thinking voice’s *opening* of meaning. It is this current which the following pages seek to draw out and pursue.
This is not simply to pit ‘late’ against ‘early’ Derrida, as we can see if we turn to the texts in which the analysis of voice as vehicle for metaphysical self-presence was first systematically worked out. Voice and Phenomenon in particular, far from ignoring the bodily and sonorous aspects of ‘voice’, in fact insists upon them. One might expect Derrida to claim that voice’s sonority proves its fatal commitment to ‘presence’; instead, he thematises vocal sound in terms of the ‘exteriority of the signifier.’ The transmission of intentional meaning through speech is based on the fact that the phenomenological “body” of the signifier seems to erase itself at the very moment it is produced (p. 66); Derrida aims to grasp what is at stake in seeing this body erased, and the ways in which this body resists such erasure. At issue not a debunking of voice per se, but of ‘the traditional phonologism of metaphysics’ (p. 69) – that is, the interpretation of phone as an ideal, rather than purely bodily presence. Strikingly, although Derrida does not mention it (which may well itself be striking), this erasure is precisely what happens in the switch from phonetics to phonology, where the physical matter of sound production attains a purely contrastive value. When Derrida characterises metaphysics by its ‘phonologism’, then this would imply not only the collapse of phone into logos, but also of phonetic matter into phonemic unit. We might then follow Mladen Dolar’s provocation, that ‘the phoneme is the way in which the signifier has seized and moulded the voice’, to suggest that ‘metaphysics’ is not the ‘regime of the signified’ so much as the regime of the sign.

In both cases, the opacity of the ‘signifier’ is rendered transparent, its body dissolved into a function of ideal intuition. Cavarero complains that both Husserl and Derrida ‘devocalise logos’; yet by Derrida’s analysis Husserl has devocalised not logos but voice itself – and indeed so he must if he is to posit the phoneme as ‘the most “ideal” of signs’ (p. 66). In other words: the opacity of the spoken signifier, the refusal of the ‘body’ of this signifier to so erase itself, thus prefigures Derrida’s subsequent exposition of ‘writing’. When I hear myself speak I ‘at once perceive the sensible form of phonemes and understand my own intention of expression’ (p. 67); I am simultaneously subject and object, interior and exterior, I intuit myself both immanently (through ‘pure auto-affection’) and transcendentally (by way of the outside world, ultimately grounded by the ideal object). Res cogitans and res extensa, the ‘in itself’ and the ‘for itself’, are thus
united. Vocal utterance furnishes ‘a medium that preserves at once the presence of the object in front of the intuition and the presence to oneself, the absolute proximity of the acts to themselves’ (p. 65). On the one hand, ‘my words are “alive” because they seem not to leave me, seem not to fall outside of me, outside of my breath, into a visible distance; they do not stop belonging to me, to be at my disposal’ (p. 65); yet these words also appear, acoustically, as soundwaves in the exterior world. Voice signals not only the presence of a self, and its presence to itself, but its ‘constant presence’ within the words it speaks: the necessary congruence of speaker with speech through the sounding of the speaker’s voice, a congruence which will outlive the transient presence of this sounding.

But this is upset by the exteriority not simply of the signifier, but of vocal sound more broadly. As noted, one of the uncanny things about hearing our voices on voicemail, or on recordings, is that we hear ourselves as people hear us, and not through our ‘inner ear’: we are confronted with ourselves as exterior. One might think of the Krapp of Samuel Beckett’s Krapp’s Last Tape, who, listening to his voice speak, hears not himself but a prosthetic, both him and not-him; or of Chopin’s works Vibrespace and Le Corpsbis, which, as their names indicate (Vibratingspace and The Next-to-body), use their prosthetics of spacing to reflect on the spaces voices inhabit and open up. When Chopin incorporates pre-recorded vocal sounds into his performances, he inhabits a distance between voices that is both spatial and temporal; similarly, the tapes Krapp listens back to as he sits onstage report on listening to earlier recordings: ‘Just been listening to an old year, passages at random. I did not check in the book, but it must be at least ten or twelve years ago’. The temporal-spatial simultaneity of the performance makes evident the juxtaposition of ineradicable temporal difference. When Krapp finally starts his own recording by saying, ‘Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that’ (p. 222), this is immediately drawn into a wider conversation among the recordings themselves, as the tape recorder attains its own agency: ‘second guessing’ the mouths, as Chopin had it, but now dictating them also. The final tableau shows Krapp motionless as the tape plays on with delicious acousmatic irony: ‘Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn’t want them back. Not with the fire in
me now. No, I wouldn’t want them back’ (p. 223). The recordings, through their very spatiotemporal distancing, defeat Krapp’s attempt to extricate himself from his earlier selves.

Derrida’s insight is that, far from this experience of voice prosthesis (which is historically relatively new) being exceptional, it inheres in the metaphysical structure of a voice neither wholly inside nor outside. Whereas for Chopin and Beckett the disarticulation of a self-present subject takes place through the inscriptions of sound on magnetic tape, Derrida ascribes this to the exteriority of the signifier. When David Wills builds on Derrida’s thinking to provide a concerted reflection on prosthesis, he argues that ‘it is only through self-division, by coming apart, that the body can become language, that the word can be born’.32 Wills’s concern is with the relation between language and body, in which language is a prosthesis of the body by virtue of its referential character: if ‘language’s first reference is made to a body, a non-originary and divided body’ (p. 137), then it is only by means of this reference that the body comes to be itself. And yet, language also issues from a body; herein lies both voice’s internal split and its promise to resolve this split. When we hear ourselves speak, the world is both bypassed and traversed, but in this respect, Derrida tells us, ‘Auto-affection as the operation of the voice assumed that a pure difference came to divide self-presence’: ‘pure’ auto-affection, thus divested of its ‘purity’, renders palpable the ‘originary non-presence’ that Derrida will name the movement of différance (p. 70). The basis of subjective self-presence lies in my being at once acting subject and acted-upon object; but this requires that I am not only identical with myself, but different from myself. ‘Voice’ only assures the unity of subjective intention and objective linguistic formulation insofar as it unravels this unity. Below we shall see how uncanny, foundational voices – Socrates’s daemon, the voice of conscience of Heidegger’s Being and Time – mark the history of philosophy by virtue of their constitutive uncanniness and inassimilability into a determinate logos. Voice serves as the embodiment of a contradictory non-identical identity: it is less that voice is ‘deconstructed’ by the attentively anti-metaphysical critic than that it serves as locus for that event, or movement, that at a certain point in his career Derrida named ‘deconstruction’.

And yet, Derrida seems complicit in the very regime of the sign that would underwrite ‘phonologism’. It is not voice but the
‘phoneme’ that he will call ‘the most ideal of signs’: it is not voice but the ‘phoneme’ that ‘gives itself as the mastered ideality of the phenomenon’ (p. 67). To make this claim supposes that voice itself has in advance been mastered as phoneme. When Derrida, in the final passages of this chapter (p. 73), aligns the exteriority of the signifier with ‘metaphor’, we see that he has chosen the exteriority of sense over the exteriority of the senses. In Grammatology it becomes clear why: the phenomenon is ‘the lived reduction of the opacity of the signifier’, and non-phonemic vocal sounds (such, for instance, as the cries that Rousseau identifies at the origin of language) are themselves ‘phenomenal’. For Derrida, its reductionism lies in trying to disavow its differential structure. But in this, we find an opposing reductionism – of all phenomenal experience into ‘the signifier’ (even if signifiers which refuse to signify).

What, then, of vocal exteriorities that cannot be reduced to phonemic patterning? Derrida seems treats vocal sound in terms of an either-or: it is the ‘exteriority of signifier’, or is ascribed to phone as voice ‘in the phenomenological sense’. In each case it is understood in terms of reference—be it to an exterior referent or back to the intention animating the speaker’s utterance. But if part of the unity of ‘hearing oneself speak’ is the temporal proximity of utterance and intention, then this also entails the expulsion of rhythm, whose displacements and absences, whose irreducibility to any punctual moment, whose excess over the discontinuous unit of the sign, would resemble nexus of difference and deferral of différance. Both the phenomenological phone and the phoneme, on Derrida’s account, would grasp voice as temporally punctual. So why does he not attend to this form of linguistic temporality? Because Derrida proposes that we understand its temporalisation as ‘from the very beginning “spacing”’ (p. 73), meaning that he remains, perhaps surprisingly, within a logic of punctuality. It strikes me that Derrida’s commitment to the ‘exteriority of the signifier’ leads him to disregard at this juncture suprasegmental structures in favour of the phonemic segment. As Dolar noted, the segment is far more easily aligned with signifiers. In short, Derrida approaches the problematic of language in terms of reference; this determines the experience of linguistic time he foregrounds: the deferral and ruptures of the signifier rather than the intensities and jointures of rhythm. Let us then listen out for an alternative animation, issuing not from this
living phenomenological body, but out of the movedness of language itself: released into voice, released by voice.

For instance, the song of the cicadas in Plato’s dialogue The Phaedrus—the dialogue, according to the 1972 essay ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in which the ‘metaphysical’ prioritisation of voice is first given extensive elaboration. In his early remarks to ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, Derrida observes: ‘The incompatibility between the written and the true is clearly announced at the moment Socrates starts to recount the way in which men are carried out of themselves by pleasure, become absent from themselves, forget themselves and die in the sensuousness [la volupté] of song’.36 Self-forgetting: this is the central charge Socrates will make against writing in the Phaedrus’ final section, where he recounts the myth where Thoth, inventor of writing is reproached by Ammon-Ra for having created, in writing, a memory supplement which, instead of enhancing memory, will lead to forgetfulness. As Jed Rasula puts it: ‘vocal force and mnemonic inspiration is expended (this is Plato’s fear) in writing, but what is worse, these degrading expenditures have the capacity to proliferate on their own, sow stray seeds, and reap their own vagabond crops.’37 Song too, in other words, supplements speech, and does so—perhaps more surprisingly—as memory prosthesis, the irruption of the non-human into the body-proper for which voice has become a wellworn metonymy. But it does so not by deferring presence, but by saturating us in a non-punctual present.

Socrates warns against taking a siesta as he and Phaedrus listen to, and are lulled by, a chorus of cicadas. To sleep, he argues, would be to fall ‘under their spell’;38 to converse, by contrast, to ‘sail past them as if they were Sirens whose spell we had resisted’:

It is said that these cicadas were once men, in the days before the Muses were born. When the Muses were born and singing had been invented, the story goes that some of the men of that time were ecstatic with pleasure, and were so busy singing that they didn’t bother with food and drink, so that before they knew it they were dead. They were the origin of the race of cicadas, whom the Muses granted the gift of never needing any food once they were born; all they do is sing, from the moment of their births until their deaths, without eating or drinking. They were the origin of the race of cicadas, whom the Muses granted the gift of never needing any food once they were born; all they do is sing, from the
moment of their births until their deaths, without eating or drinking. After they die they go to the Muses and tell them which men here on earth honoured which of them (259b, c; p. 45)\(^{39}\)

Once again: a mouth unable to choose between song and sustenance. And where logos, Derrida contends, is grasped as the ‘father’ of discourse, here we find the men who sing effeminised both by the Muses who they at first excessively celebrate and, after their metamorphosis, serve, and in their voices’ now being aligned with the ‘Sirens’.

Saturated in the present, song’s transience disrupts ‘self-presence’, prefiguring the constitutive absence of writing despite its difference in focus (although we should not disregard that song engages various systems of ‘writing’: monody, tonality, etc.). Might song therefore, in spite of all, resemble the ‘differential vibration’ that Derrida would later characterise as ‘writing in the voice’, its excess of phenomenality a bearer of that ‘trace’ which, he argues in *Grammatology*, strictly speaking ‘itself does not exist’?\(^{40}\) The phrase ‘vibration différentielle pure’ comes from a parenthetical remark in *D’un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie*. This ‘apocalyptic tone’, he tells us, ‘naturally wishes to attract, to draw towards it, make us come to it, to seduce in order to bring us to it, or to the place where the first vibration of the tone unrolls itself, whether we call it subject, person, sex, desire (I am thinking rather of a pure differential vibration, unsupported, unsustainable)’.\(^{41}\) This ‘pure differential vibration’, itself without foundation, apparently anterior to determinations of subject, person, sex, desire, provides the impulse that draws us towards them, and at the same time differentiates these determinations from one another. He glosses this in the interview with Berger: ‘we are now dealing with a system of relations which vibrates or sings.’\(^{42}\)

In this it resembles the account of ‘tone’ more generally, made, again in parentheses, earlier in the *D’un ton apocalyptique*:

It crosses my mind that tonos, tone, first of all meant a stretched ligament, a string [corde], stringing together [cordage] when it is bound or woven, a cable, a strap, which is to say the privileged figure of all that is subjected to stricture. Tonion is the ligament as surgical band and bandage. The same tension traverses tonic (what by the name stricture forms both theme and instrument, the string
of *Glas*) and tonal difference, the separation, the shifts or mutation of tones (Hölderlin’s *Wechsel der Töne* which constitutes one of the most obsessive motifs of *The Post Card*). From this sense of tension, or springiness (for instance in a ballistic machine) arises the idea of tonic accent, rhythm, mode (Dorian, Phrygian, etc.). Pitch [*hauteur de ton*] is linked to tension: it is a link to the link, to the more or less strict tension of the link. One cannot define the meaning of the word *tone* simply to look at when it comes from a voice. Even less when, through a vast number of figures and tropic displacements, the tone of a discourse or piece of writing is analysed in terms of content, ways of speaking, connotation, rhetorical staging and posturing, in semantic, pragmatic, scenographic, etc., terms, that is, rarely if ever listening to the raising of the voice or the quality of timbre. I close this parenthesis.

(pp. 25–6)

Again, it is fascinating that these moments should be so stagily parenthetical, as though the parenthesis permits Derrida licence to venture such thoughts without pursuing them further. So let us pick up where Derrida left off. What coherence is there between the speculative etymology of ‘tone’ as ligament and the account of tone as a ‘pure differential vibration’ that precedes subject, person, sex, desire, etc.? We might hazard that tone is ‘differential’ not simply in that it shifts and mutates (as the tension of the string itself shifts, as its vibrations change frequency), but insofar as it is defined by its *linkage*: both jointure and differentiation. Ligature linking bone and muscle offers a reflection on the linkages of word to referent, of linguistic terms to one another, be it through syntax or through rhythm, but also the diverse rhetorics which, Derrida suggests, cohere into the ‘tone of a discourse’. Tone is *bodily-linguistic articulation*; both the body which articulates language, and which is articulated in language; but also the point at which the body-language nexus is itself articulated. 43

Derrida’s account in this sense anticipates what Steve Goodman has recently described as an ‘ontology of vibrational force’. 44 Goodman’s concern is with sound, which he casts as ‘the in-between of oscillation, the vibration of vibration, the virtuality of the tremble. Vibrations always exceed the actual entities that emit them. Vibrating entities are always entities out of phase with themselves. A vibratory nexus exceeds and precedes the distinction between subject and object, constituting a mesh of relation in which discrete
entities prehend each other’s vibrations’. If vibration is ‘virtual’, ‘out of phase’, this is because it is always more than itself, its ‘materiality’ defined by this constitutive overplus. When we shift focus from acoustic – both as physical production and as affective reception – to vocal-verbal vibration, the ‘mesh of relation’ will expand to comprehend yet further linkages and hinges, syntactic as well as sonic. The question is to work out a linkage which incorporates and body forth both movements, such that voice figures itself as site of a peculiar bodily-linguistic excess.

Here again we might be tempted to understand the opening of voice through its excess and anteriority over those linkages through which it subsequently appears: moreover, this suggests linguistic linkages irreducible to the separation of language from either ‘paralanguage’ or the ‘pre-linguistic’, something akin to what Benveniste calls *signifiance*, glossed by Barthes in ‘The Grain of the Voice’ as ‘meaning in its potential voluptuousness’. Kristeva, as well as Barthes, understands this pre-subjective, pre-referential and yet ‘semiotic’ materiality in terms of potentiality, such that the human body engenders, and generates the energies and regulation of energies that opens up the signifying space, whilst at the same time constituting the material site in which subject and language first articulate themselves: the *chora* as ‘container’, the semiotic as ‘a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process’. Yet, in so doing, both risk the very dualism they attempt to overcome, such as when Barthes situates the ‘grain’ of the voice ‘beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form’ (p. 181). However, we might follow up one further hint from Barthes’s essay which opens up a different direction for thought, when he proposes that the ‘grain’ is ‘something which is directly the cantor’s body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages, and from deep down in the Slavonic language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings’ (pp. 181–82). Not simply out of the vocal organs, but out of the language – not, moreover, out of its *sounds*, the language now treated as a totality indistinguishable from its soundworld. Moments later, he returns to this theme: ‘It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language’ (pp. 182–3).

There is an extraordinary moment in Lyn Hejinian’s 1987 *My Life*, closing the thirtieth year, where she writes: ‘The air we breathe: the
On Voice in Poetry

air we breathe ranging in size contains flakes of sound, dark, silence, and light. The transmutation of air into sound and silence, dark and light – both into voice and into metaphor – would grasp that enigma by which breath becomes more than breath, is bound into that opening movement which Barthes here calls ‘diction’, and Nancy situates in the opening of the mouth. Hejinian figures this through the momentary crystallisation of a snowflake, and in this respect finds an echo in an equally striking figure from the French poet Bernard Noël’s recent long poem, ‘Portrait d’un regard’:

nous connaissons la présence et l’absence
mais pas que notre vie est entre elles
comme un chemin de gouttes d’air

Gouttes d’air – something intangible given transitory form, neither wholly present nor absent but rather tracing the movement between. But these ‘drops of air’ allude also to the shape of our breath, to individual voiced words, articulating (again: joining, differentiating) our life between presence and absence, and indeed forming, through this voiced articulation, these two as an opposition within which we can be ‘between’. Yet Noël’s very recourse to simile at this juncture, in addition to never naming voice directly but hinting at it through a broader allusive context, complicates any notion of voice as wholly anterior to language. In the previous chapter we saw how, in the speculative histories of origin posited by Rousseau, Herder, Rosolato and others, anteriority comes to resemble yet one further figure through which to think voice. Noël’s writing grasps voice through the entanglements which make it impossible to speak of voice ‘itself’, reflecting from within these entanglements.

These entanglements are not just tropic and prosodic. In Monolingualism of the Other, Derrida reflects on the significance of his experience on the fault lines of French colonialism and decolonisation in the middle of the twentieth century, of the politics of accent, class, ethnicity and religion in Algiers and Paris, for his philosophical interest in the voice – be it the critique of phonocentrism or the sketch of a ‘pure’ differential vibration:

I was the first to be afraid of my own voice, as if it were not mine, and to contest it, even to detest it.
If I have always trembled before what I could say, it was fundamentally because of the tone, and not the substance. And what, obscurely, I seek to impart as if in spite of myself, to give or lend to others as well as to myself, to myself as well as to the other, is perhaps a tone. Everything is summoned from an intonation.

And even earlier still, in what gives its tone to the tone, a rhythm. I think that all in all, it is upon rhythm that I stake everything.

It therefore begins before beginning. That is the incalculable origin of a rhythm. Everything is at stake, but may the loser win.49

Intonation is both posited as near the ‘origin’, and bound up in its sociolinguistic and political context: intonation both lies ‘before’ these determinations, as he suggests in the interview with Berger, and is shaped by these determinations. To grasp the way voice might shape experience as such – this opening of bodily-linguistic articulation – requires taking as starting point the entanglements of voice within a singular historical conjuncture. Voice in this respect exhibits and exacts a ‘quasi-transcendental’ logic: firstly, it grounds and sets in motion the very horizon that it will subsequently inhabit; secondly, the very possibility of saying ‘voice as such’ depends upon the singular experience of voice that serves as starting point.

So what of poetry’s own treatment of the entanglements of voice and speech? In the introduction we saw Nancy suggest that voice is at once ‘intimate’ and yet ‘a stranger to language itself’, which allowed him to posit an originarity of voice by which it ‘frays the path to naming’.50 Indeed, throughout the dialogue Nancy encounters the dual difficulty of discussing voice in relation to language, of articulating (in language) its anteriority to language; in its formulations of the voice-language distinction and the unravellings of these formulations, Nancy’s dialogue folds back in on itself, searching out its own aporiai. This reaches its apotheosis in its final passages:

—Valéry said (he pulls a book from his pocket and reads aloud): ‘Language issues from voice, rather than voice from language’.
—And that is why he could say: ‘voice defines pure poetry’
—So poetry would then not speak?
—Yes, it speaks, but it speaks with that speech that is not executed by any language and from which, by contrast, voice issues and a language is born.

(p. 247)

‘A speech that is not executed in any language’: would this speech still be made up of words? We have already seen how figures such as onomatopoeia, glossolalia, interjection, themselves function within a linguistic context; yet most crucial is the fact that it is the invocation of poetry that should bring this aporia into relief, something exacerbated when Nancy’s second speaker closes off precipitately this difficulty – indeed, the first speaker will, moments later, take up the same eschatological model of voice becoming word (and indeed, Word):

51 ‘Voice is the precession of language, the very immanence of language in the wilderness where the soul is still alone’ (ibid.). Through the dialogic format, Nancy stages the evasion of this question and thereby renders it all the more glaring.

Just as poetry is never ‘pure poetry’, voice is never ‘pure voice’, also a condition of language, conditioned by language. Indeed, Nancy himself recognises this in an interview ten years after ‘Vox Clamans’, when he characterises poetry as ‘that which, in or within language, announces or keeps more than language. This is not any “superlanguage” or “overlanguage”, but the articulation that precedes language “in” itself.’

52 Again the concern is with anteriority, but now an anteriority that lies within language before language can be posited as ‘in itself’. It thus turns out that rhythm, cadence, caesura, syncopation, far from being exterior features to a lexico-syntactic system, become integral modes of language’s bodily articulation, demanding a model of ‘sense… as inflexion (as in the inflexion of a voice, or a tone, whether being raised, lowered, or sustained; and in the sense of inflexion as a backward turn instead of a straight line, a kind of folding rather than syntax, and so on)’ (ibid.). Not just signifiance in the sense from Benveniste taken up by Barthes and Kristeva: in this figure of the fold Nancy is playing on the intersection of linguistic self-referentiality with speech physiology, with its allusion to vocal ‘folds’. Nancy’s deployment of the different meanings of ‘inflexion’ will recall Derrida’s gloss of the Greek tonion, where the refusal to separate out the various modes of difference, of tension and linkage, become crucial to parsing ‘tone’ in its multidimensionality. But
it also returns us to Bernard Noël who, in ‘Portrait d’un regard’, figures words as ‘petits plis sonores’ (little sounding folds),\textsuperscript{54} language’s bodying forth converging with its referential, and self-referential, linkage.

It is not only Noël’s thematisation of voice that grasps it in terms of sonorous fold and drop of air; in its prosodics also the poem turns inwards towards its own vocal-verbal medium. In ‘petits plis sonores’ and ‘comme un chemin de gouttes d’air’, the most readily discernable figuring of voice is that of the metaphorical register of ‘path’ and ‘drops of air’; yet coeval with this is a prosodic figuring, as the line shortens syllabic length and shifts away from the duple measures preceding it. On both occasions the tropes are physical and yet intangible, denying substance just as they proffer it, and we might note something analogous in Noël’s use of the French \emph{e muet}, a recurrent feature of his versification which here adds momentary breath after ‘gouttes’, as syllables elided in everyday discourse attain aporetic weight. Or we might remember Hejinian’s own trope, with its rhythmic prolongation of the analogy made, also increasing the demands on its reader’s breath, especially when suspended over the pauses between ‘sound, dark, silence, and light’. Rhetorical figure is thus brought, even for a silent reader, to inhabit throat and lungs – it is thus that this enigmatic opening movement can surface momentarily in words. This is trope as ‘turn’, \emph{tropos}, engaging a further dimension of movedness.

Poetry \emph{does} speak, then; speaks out of this movement into speech, traces this movement but ‘inflects’ it. This model of inflexion remains in Nancy’s account only a hint, again, remains in parentheses, just as did Derrida’s sketch of a ‘differential vibration’, his parsing of \emph{tonos}; similarly, Barthes’ invocation of that ‘very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the \textit{diction} of the language’ has an almost throwaway feel to it. Yet each hint points in a similar direction. ‘Diction’ is no longer an individual’s ‘way of saying’, but the means by which the language says itself through us, in us – says itself prosodically, and, in the case of the Russian cantor, says itself as \emph{song}. Like Nancy’s inflexion and Derrida’s \emph{tonos} it forms a linkage at once bodily and referential: voice is grasped as the point of intersection of two movements into sound – from out of the vocal organs and from out of the core of the language itself. In Barthes’ distinction between the ‘diction’ of the language and the diction employed
by poets as they deploy their vocal-verbal medium, we also find an analogy between two levels of animation: of this movedness of language, and the dynamisation of verse language. The question is to trace their entanglement, how they fold back against one another, inflect one another.

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Nancy’s portrayal of voice as the ‘precession of language’ has a long philosophical history. Voice, he argues, itself ‘says nothing’, but is rather ‘a call, without articulating any language’, which directs itself towards us: ‘I would not speak if my voice, which is not me and which is not in me, even if it is absolutely mine, didn’t call on me, didn’t ask of me to speak, laugh, or cry’.55 At this juncture we hear the echo of two of the most canonical accounts of voice in the history of philosophy: Socrates’s daemon, and the ‘voice of conscience’ which in Being and Time brings Dasein face to face with the ‘nothing’ and would thus disclose our finite transcendence. Socrates, in his ‘Apology’ (or defence oration), describes his daemon as a voice that ‘whenever it speaks turns me away from something I am about to do, but never encourages me to do anything’,56 and in the Phaedrus this is precisely what happens. His daemon comes to him as a ‘sudden voice’ (242c; p. 23) after he has completed one speech about love, and he takes this voice to be telling him that he has slandered love and must therefore offer another speech to mollify the god before he and Phaedrus are punished. Dolar has noted of the daemon’s voice that it is necessarily content-less, and that ‘its allegedly infallible authority stems from beyond logos’ (p. 85). But if the daemon’s voice comes to Socrates at this particular moment, he had already felt some unease at producing his speech in competition to the rhetor Lysias on Lysias’s terms, rather than in order to establish the truth. In which case, it seems that the sounding of the daemon’s voice is conditioned in advance by its possible interpretation, and this long before it receives any specific interpretation (in this case doing justice to the god). In other words, phone depends on logos after all.

Is this also the case with what Heidegger describes as the ‘voice’, or ‘call’, of ‘conscience’? This is a voice which is never not linguistic, insofar as it bears a determinate verbal content – ‘Guilty!’ Yet what the voice discloses is not the guilt per se; the verbal content,
rather, facilitates a primarily vocal mode of disclosure. The voice ‘comes from me and yet from beyond me,’ Heidegger observes; as such it constitutes ‘something like an alien voice’. It transpires that the verbal content of the call, instead of pointing to any putative guilt, stems from the radical ‘nothing’ that the structure of the call intimates through its alien, uncanny, ‘ec-static’ provenance. That is, we only hear ‘guilty’ as the call’s content because its voice confronts us with a more pervasive lack, the ‘nothing’: what is made to sound in this ‘silent’ call is the ‘nothing’ itself. As with Derrida’s self-deconstructing voice heard from both within and without, the auto-affection of our consciences calling to us is one of self-division. When Heidegger goes on to claim that this voice allows Dasein to become ‘authentic’, this does not imply an overcoming of such uncanniness or finitude, but rather the awareness that what appears initially as the limit point of all possibility is in fact an originary possibilisation. It is because voice exceeds both our speech and our subjective agency that this finitude discloses itself as determinant for human being-in-the-world. So we might find a kernel of truth in that phrase ‘to find one’s voice’ after all: that voice is anterior to, and in a sense exterior to, the person whose voice it is. But a kernel only: ‘to find one’s voice’ implies that a voice is there. The uncanniness Heidegger depicts, rather, would suggest that the voice ‘found’ (and thereby brought into being) is one of provisional self-articulation, of self-voicing.

Heidegger depicts our exposure to this abyssal voice serves as a kind of metaphysical primal scene: confronted with the ‘nothing’, we cannot avoid raising the question of the meaning of being. Questioning, in other words, starts as a giving-oneself-over to voice. Yet, as many have complained, Heidegger’s own account of the starting point for this questioning appears to valorise certain states of mind (e.g. anxiety, resoluteness) over others: aside from the distasteful pathos of quiet heroism this expounds, we find that the ‘ontological’ realm itself is overdetermined in advance by a very ‘ontic’ pathos. Heidegger overtly refuses a pure formalism; but if his account of the disclosure of the nothing does not furnish formal schema then it is left open to the charge of tendentiousness. Heidegger thus risks falling into the same trap as Plato/Socrates, where the apparent possession by voice is so motivated that it holds the interpretive key to the voice’s sounding.
To pre-determine the context into which voice will sound might, in fact, seem a means of circumscribing, and thereby mastering, the very mechanisms of one’s own possession. Derrida, having spoken of the differential vibration as ‘writing’ and ‘trace’, immediately continues: ‘philosophical discourse, mastery of all other possible discourse, tends to gather itself into philosophical utterance, into something which, all of a sudden, the voice of the philosopher can say, bring together, utter, and it is the position of the speaker’s mastery which interests me’. The overdetermination of the daemon’s voice, as well as the myths deployed by Socrates – about the men metamorphosed into cicadas and about Thoth’s invention of writing – would seem, in this respect, to fit Derrida’s model of ‘mastery’ (even if, Derrida emphasises moments later, such mastery is impossible and one can always find within it the nodes of its unravelling). Throughout the dialogue we are warned of the effects that voices can produce. Early on, Phaedrus is described as ‘sick with passion for hearing speeches’ (228b; p. 4); yet it is not only the auditor who is thus affected. Socrates interrupts his first speech to suggest that he has been ‘inspired by a God’, and wouldn’t be surprised if he were to ‘become possessed by the Nymphs as my speech progresses. As it is I’m already more or less chanting dithyrambs’ (238d, e; p. 18). Oratory apparently mutates into metre, then into the song which leads men to forget themselves and starve, then into ‘Siren’ voices. Not only were these original men intoxicated; now they intoxicate in their turn. How better to counter this intoxication than to appropriate the voice through dialegein: spoken ‘dialogue’, but also – dialectic.

The danger in this reading, however, is that it overlooks the centrality of questioning for both Plato and Heidegger: in each case, thinking remains necessarily open-ended. This permits us to trace a more nuanced current at work within the Phaedrus, for which the various possessions of voice – of rhetoric, of song, of the daemon – inform a larger thinking of possession. After all, the centrepiece of the dialogue (if so multifaceted a dialogue can be said to have one centre) is Socrates’s defence of love as a form of possession and madness, the defence he is drawn to give after the warning from his daemon. Whereas the first two speeches had both proposed a purely rational love, now Socrates argues that love resembles prophecy, prayer and artistic creation, other gifts from the gods: gifts not to be repudiated
but cultivated. Love is a divine possession insofar as it constitutes the response of the earthbound soul to true beauty – something of which it retains a memory during its time on earth (again, we note the centrality of memory for Socrates, here as in the myths of the cicadas and of the invention of writing). What starts as irrational, physical lust – whence the need to outline a purely rational model of love in the first place – will slowly, transformed into a love for beauty as such, elevate the soul so it can perceive better the Forms it had experienced before being weighed down on earth.

At its most manichean, this question might be framed as one of how our ‘possession’ by love will lead to ennoblement and not slavish excess. Thus Cavarero will argue of the sirens and muses in the Phaedrus:

The principal function of these figures—who are emblematically feminine—seems to be to emphasise the sonorous, libidinal, and presemantic materiality of logos. What is certain is that in this contagious pleasure, the acoustic register reigns sovereign and stands in opposition to the solitary style of theoría.61

Yet Plato’s thinking seems less insistently binaristic than Cavarero makes out. As noted, the form of theoría he proposes is not solitary but dialogical;62 but more important is how it is embedded in, dependent on, conditioned by, precisely that ‘sonorous, libidinal, and presemantic materiality’ Caverero accuses him of rejecting. Indeed, the feminine emblems of the passage seem more multifaceted than in Cavarero’s portrayal: the Sirens differ from the Muses, and the Muses differ amongst themselves; and throughout the dialogue resounds the echo of a third feminine figure, Diotima, whose depiction of the ‘ascent’ from lust to otherworldly eros in the Symposium, to which Socrates’s palinode is a companion piece, refuses to disown the bodily even as it purportedly divests itself of its own body. Without an erotically charged body there would be no experience of the beautiful as such, would be no love. Indeed, the Socrates of the Phaedrus places even greater weight on the earthiness of the most elevated love: physical lust becomes not only a feature of the psychology of eros, but integral to its vocation in giving access to the good and the true.
And we find a similar pattern in the myth of the cicadas. Those men who became cicadas had at first given way to excessive song, but who now observe humans on the Muses’ behalf:

tell Terpsichore the names of those who have honoured her with dances and raise them higher in her favour; they tell Erato the names of those who have honoured her in the name of love, and so on for all the other Muses, according to each one’s area of responsibility. But they tell Calliope, the oldest of the Muses, and her companion Urania about those who spent their lives doing philosophy and honouring their particular kinds of music. I should say that these two are the Muses who are especially concerned with the heavens and with the way both gods and men use words [logos], and there is no more beautiful sound than their voices [phone].

(259c, d; pp. 44–45)

The order in which the Muses are introduced moves from the physical to the cerebral, just as the myth does itself, where losing oneself in song gives on to divine vocation – and just as do Socrates’s palinode to love and the ascent Diotima describes. It is crucial that the Muses’ voices are ‘beautiful’, seeing as beauty has just been reframed as our souls’ memory of the Forms: it is voice, at once sonorous and ethereal, just as are the Muses themselves, which serves to embody this double bind. Moreover, if the Muses inspire frenzy, then equally they offer a moderating force: both phone in its excess and logos itself. Socrates’s reasoning at this juncture is not unlike William Wordsworth’s celebrated account of metre in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, where poetry strives to ‘produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure’, but deploys metre because, there being ‘some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds’, it needs ‘the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, [and which] cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling.’ In the previous chapter we started to sketch out the somewhat paradoxical dialectic according to which metre both generates and contains vocal excess; now it seems that something similar is taking place in philosophy’s own attentiveness.
to voice. As when Nancy notes the centrality of the mouth, as physical opening between interior and exterior, to the opening-up of extension as such, it is not a question of denying the body, but of tracing from out of it the emergence of an embodied thinking.

If voice is mastered, assimilated wholly into *logos* (be it as philosophical conceptuality or as poetic form) it risks losing precisely that which it strives to grasp. On Socrates’ terms, *phone* cannot be wholly assimilable into *logos* if it is to render this latter possible: the cicadas might commend philosophers to Calliope and Urania, but they will always possess ‘siren voices’; the tempestuous horse of Socrates’s charioteer allegory might be eventually tamed, but it must, if the soul is to experience *eros* in its fullness, also remain tempestuous even when thwarted. The question, then, is not ultimately to dismantle the erotics of voice, nor even to tame or moderate this *eros*, but to channel it, and release it anew. Or in Heidegger’s, the ontological can only ever be thought from out of its entanglements in the ontical. Pursuing further the analogy between Socrates’ palinode of the two horses and Wordsworth’s account of the pleasures afforded, and contained, by metre, we might see how a predicament for philosophical questioning becomes one for poetic measure, where at its most ‘virtuosic’ poetry gives itself over to latencies within its vocal-verbal medium that resist explicit thematisation but nevertheless shape the way in which such excess can be grasped.

For instance, we might recall the failure of address that provides the premise and impetus to Hardy’s ‘The Voice’ – that the poem, for its own animation of its vocal-verbal matter, depends on the inanimacy of its addressee, that its making-present must be spectral if it is to chart, and animate, a presencing within language. But this entails that what is brought into presence is not what the language describes but rather the language itself. Love address gives on to an exploration of the address’ own vocal-verbal medium; it continually works both with and against its rhetorics and its metre in order to embody the contradictions of its address.

In this respect, Hardy’s poem, however much it is framed (and no doubt read) as a ‘dramatic monologue’, takes its title very literally: voice in its breadth rather than the speaking *logos*. This is not to deny its drama: indeed, the final stanza, serving as a comment on the previous three (‘Thus I’), makes clear the staging techniques that have been used throughout. Nor is it to deny the way its metrical frame
and speaking persona can be taken to give forth a stable ‘lyric voice’, that supposedly univocal subjectivity that postmodern poetics has so excoriated in recent years, which not only ‘reify’ or ‘mythologize’ the voice, but, in order to assure such stability, flatten it. And yet, note the sudden exclamatory ‘yes’ in the poem’s second stanza:

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then
Standing as when you drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me, yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

(ll. 5–8)

This exclamation arises from out of a reconstruction of memory which—reading the poem as monologue—is so successful at filling in the absence of the addressee that the speaker is drawn out of this memory, back into the present moment of discourse that the incantation of past memory had supposedly served to erase. It seems a case study of auto-affection: its exclamation both interior meditation and exteriorised voicing. However, we should see this within the conflicting temporalities of the poem as a whole: the juxtaposition of this ‘yes’ with the ‘then’ that immediately follows, for instance, or, beyond the play of grammatical tense and deictics, the intersection of its various dramatic timeframes with the poem’s rhythmic performance. Reading this stanza, one is struck by the internal rhymes of ‘you’, ‘drew’, ‘blue’ (and at a stretch ‘would’) which echo the rhyme words ‘view’ and ‘knew’, and the ‘hear/near’ internal rhyme which anticipates the end rhyme of the following stanza ‘here/near’, by the way that ‘yes’ and ‘then’ syncopate the forward thrust of the triple measure. The latter is particularly striking: ‘then’ as particle of inference is paired with ‘then’ as demonstrative adverb, so that ‘view you then’ is responded to by ‘knew you then’. The present moment of discourse immediately becomes excessive within the poem’s rhythmic frame, just as its deixis unravels the pure presence it purports to furnish.

In the long question of the next stanza the problem of vocal presence becomes that much more fraught:

Or is it only the breeze in its listlessness
Coming across the wet mead to be here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
Heard no more again, far or near?

(ll. 9–12)

Not so much because the woman’s voice is recognised to be absent, but because of the strains these lines place on our own voicing as readers: the question mark demands a rising cadence, whereas the sub-clause militates against, something which makes clear that the grammatical form in its very premise (that the question might receive an answer) contradicts its content (that she is dead). The puzzling scansion of the stanza’s final line only highlights this further—how are we to reconcile its stresses with the four beat pattern of the previous eleven lines? Those moments that feel most powerfully ‘vocal’ are also those which militate against any single voicing.

In attending to these temporal complexities, we have moved away from the ‘voice’ that is the poem’s topic towards the voicings the poem exacts of its readers – a shift from the woman addressee to the readers addressed and the poem’s afterlives. ‘The Voice’ wavers not only between the woman’s voice and that of the poem which tries to reanimate her, but also within the voice that (again, silently or aloud, and even, embodied or imagined) reads and mouths, thereby effecting a slippage from poet-subject (or ‘speaker’) to the reader attending to and setting into dialogue the poem’s countering movements. In place of the monologism Bakhtin ascribes to poetry we encounter a partage of voices and voicings: not just the address, and self-address, staged within the poem, but the competing and mutually excluding voicings demanded by its pitting together different vocal attitudes, different vocal lines, in fraught conversation. If Hardy’s poem is an attempt at making-present – bringing the addressee into presence, engendering a surrogate presence through the poem’s demands for voicing, etc. – then it is also exposed to the absencing movement that bounds its address, its voicing. To understand this as partage des voix, as ‘differential vibration’, is to suggest that voice is always generated out of text as we share our voices with it, implicate ourselves within its vibratory articulation.

And here again we might recall Noël’s figure, gouttes d’air. We noted above both the tropic and prosodic movements through which Noël figures voice – its betweenness, its otherness to itself, lies not just in being figured through simile or e muet, but also through its demands
on our voicing. Its epideictic register means that these demands are not dramatised as interlocution to the same degree as in Hardy’s poem; what both poems share is the demands that our speech patterns become other to themselves in order to fit their prosodic movements. Text opens up fissures in our breath that serve to embody the ‘between’ through which poem and reader address one another, trace a path towards one another. The lines themselves attain life as the ‘drops of air’ we and the poem produce in concert. But in this sense partage comprehends not simply ‘my voice, of yours, of our dialogue’, as Nancy had it, but a series of further dimensions: the plural voicings generated by Hardy’s and Noël’s poems, for instance, the disjuncture between textual generation of voice and the voicing than on any given case issues. If we wish to retain what Barthes had called the diction of a language, the way that a language says itself, we should also attend to the articulation between these various voicings: not just in the poem’s ‘grain’, but as this grain fills our own throats.

On the one hand, moments from poems such as Hardy’s and Noël’s serve to illuminate the phrase ‘differential vibration’, not so much as exempla illustrating a principle as the proleptic sketching-out of what, in each case, this phrase might render thinkable; on the other, we might understand the coherence of these different figures, the figural logic itself, as a vibration which binds together and articulates the various figures – anteriority, presence, deixis, speechsound – through which voice is articulated, and indeed opens up the space for this articulation. To describe voice as ‘differential vibration’, then, would be to bring the vibrations of air against vocal folds/cords, of soundwaves, of sonorous inflections and modulations that characterise the singular vocal performance, to trace the same contour as the vibration of language entering singular articulation, vibration which sets entities into relation with one another, sets speaker into relation with what s/he names, whom s/he addresses, all the while making possible an inexhaustible reserve of new configurations, new meshes, of relation. Gauging the interactions between the myriad figures through which we name ‘voice’, we might start to describe the multidirectionality of each single voicing. Let us now attempt to trace these directions.
‘Yes, as I knew you then’ – as we have just seen, Hardy’s mellifluous triple measure and polysyllabic rhymes are unsettled by the syntactical and prosodic weight placed on ‘then’, just after the reanimation of past memory had irrupted into the scene of address with the exclamation ‘yes’. ‘Then’ at once figures the irretrievability of the past and embodies the present moment of discourse. But, we saw, its temporality is radically forward looking, as its attempt to bring this voice into presence becomes it an exploration of its possibilities of voicing as the modalities of a future presencing. On the one hand, this means that the drama of utterance transposes into a drama of prosodic texture; and yet, this prosodic texture is not straightforwardly sonorous. Indeed, the demonstrative ‘then’ sounds within, and against, the metre and rhyme scheme only as a barely perceptible tremor, its rising cadence surfacing from the poem’s undersong fleetingly, one detail among many competing, and mutually excluding, demands for voicing. Eric Griffiths gives a characteristically eloquent summary of this predicament: ‘the intonational ambiguity of a written text may create a mute polyphony through which we see rather than hear alternative possible voicings, and are led by such vision to reflect on the inter-resonance of those voicings’.¹ But must such polyphony be ‘mute’ – especially as it demands precisely to be sounded in order for us to register its polyphony, its excess over any single voicing? Griffiths’ insistence on its muteness may well be linked to his depiction of these alternative voicings as a ‘vision’: in the transition from auditory to visual register lies (however tacitly) an entire metaphysics of aisthesis. Listening out for these dynamics
within a muteness always registered in the lungs, throat and mouth as well as the eye, we might sketch an alternative metaphysics, its polyphony predicated on future soundings.

Here I wish to introduce another ‘then’, itself marked by complex deictics, but which forms a crucial structural role in the poem. I am thinking of Keats’s ‘When I have fears that I may cease to be’, whose sestet reads:

But when I think, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone and think,
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.2

The sonnet turns from the timeless present tense of ‘When I have fears that I may cease to be’ and ‘When I behold upon the night’s starred face’ to the vocative case – ‘fair creature of an hour’. ‘When’ becomes now. The word ‘then’, which serves to clinch the sonnet's rhetorical structure (think of Shakespeare’s Sonnet XXX as a template) is displaced, not only between temporal attitudes – epideictic and vocative – but also within the broader rhythmic dynamics of the sonnet. ‘Then’ pre-empts the final couplet; but it is not simply structurally but also metrically jarring. To see this, we might ask, simply: should ‘then’ take a stress? It falls on an unstressed ‘position’ in the line, and yet holds an indexical force, and, moreover, constitutes the structural climax of the poem. We could either mark its structural climax with stress, or else register the fact it has been placed on an unstress by refusing stress, so that the structuring principle is rendered sotto voce.3 Or we might be governed by non-semantic concerns. In which case, the elongated phrase and caesura (itself elongated, one feels, by the em-dash) lead to a general rallentando which could variously de-emphasise the word, almost elided as the line gathers pace once more, or else demand further emphasis as impetus after a pause. That descriptive vocabularies from grammar, rhetoric, and music should enter conflict here is indicative of the poem’s blurring of discursive and prosodic voicings. To stress ‘then’ would also set in motion a triple counterrhythm to the duple measure which will attain momentum over the line end: ‘on the
shore / Of the wide’. But this would sacrifice the internal rhyme of ‘on’ with ‘upon’ two lines previously, and its consonance with ‘alone’ in the following line – each time in the same position in the line, creating a sonic patterning which will demand its own metrical weighting.

Metrical syncopation is often depicted as a choice between speech stress and metrical beat, for instance in Mutlu Konuk Blasing’s account:

In the form of a poem a prescriptive shape of the language itself becomes audible, and the ‘voice’—an individuating emotional inflection and rhythm, a voiceprint of the speaker—is heard in and as its manner of submission to the constraints of a prescriptive code.4

For Blasing, this is not simply a question of abstract template versus spoken stress patterns, but of the individual asserting their ‘voice’ against a communal metre. We have already seen how problematic it is to align voice so wholly either with ‘speech’ or with the ‘subject’ who speaks and emotes; to see metre as ‘prescriptive code’ fixes a limit of inside and outside which voice, in its differential vibrations, continually unsettles. And indeed, fixes poetic ‘form’ as static, to be enlivened by the speaking subject, as if animation must be brought to language from without. What we have with Keats’s ‘then’, by contrast, is the demand that scansion do justice to multiple coexisting intonational cues, mutually competing and mutually excluding. The poem’s grammatical wavering between concrete and timeless present finds an analogue in the wavering of our scansion, where scansion is no longer simply a metrical exercise of assigning stress, but a means of negotiating the demands on our voicing. As the poem stages its own vocative utterance, and its own receding from the vocative, it exacts us to – equivocate.

This rhythmic motif is one beloved of Keats, and surfaces, again a point of the deictic-rhythmic-structural climax, in his celebrated late fragment:

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it toward you.

(p. 700)

‘When on the shore’; ‘see here it is’. The latter bring further complexities for scansion, not least through the syntactic pause separating the imperative ‘see’ and the demonstrative ‘here it is’: is this a command to which the demonstrative is subordinated, or does it introduce the gesture by serving as a kind of upbeat (again, grammatical, rhetorical and musical vocabularies converge)? But we see also, just as we did in Hardy’s ‘The Voice’, that the fraught rhythmic dynamics of ‘see here it is’ are part of a more concerted work of linguistic animation. When we read ‘see here it is’, we cannot help but be struck by the indeterminacy of the gesture: is the living-undead hand held out in friendship or to prefigure nightmares yet to come? It has been suggested that this depends largely on how we read the fragment: as a short ‘lyric’, or as a speech from some lost verse drama – the lines were found on the manuscript page of an unfinished verse tale entitled The Jealousies (or The Cap and Bells), and might be dramatic speech to be uttered by a character, or simply a short poem he had noted down on the piece of paper most readily to hand. Lawrence Lipking has called the fragment ‘one of the best examples in literature of a radical ambiguity or “rabbit-duck” – an artefact that can be read in two fully cogent and mutually exclusive ways. If the addressee is a present interlocutor within a drama, the hand is present (either literally onstage, or diegetically through narration); if the addressee is an absent reader, the reader-auditor must fill in this absence through imaginative response. As far as Lipking is concerned, it cannot be both. He concludes: ‘The two versions tend to cancel each other out when combined’ (p. 182).

I am not so sure that they do. If we read it as drama, this provides discursive and narrative contexts which may well disambiguate the gesture. But this would decide in advance against the efficacy of the rhetorical work of de-animation and subsequent re-animation, assuming that the sensorium to which drama appeals is one little attuned to the imaginative world opened up by verse language. Imagine if these lines were not just part of a verse narrative, but were
subsequently *staged*, so we even get to see the actor’s live hand reaching out: when the language’s own de-animation is pitted against the animate hand we see, will we simply take it as untrue, or might we be brought to believe in its own efficaciousness and hence trust Keats’s language as much as, if not more than, the evidence of our own eyes? The space of the stage is already both literal and illusory; accepting the efficacy of the language beyond what is visually present onstage adds a further dimension to its non-literal space. What Keats’s fragment so powerfully stages is not simply a speech act, but the movement of de-animation and re-animation itself, that same movement we saw also to be central to Hardy’s poem: that if it is to perform its work of animation it must first render its object inanimate, whether that object be, as in ‘The Voice’, the apostrophised addressee, or ostensibly the demonstrative ‘this’ of Keats’s living hand (even if the work of animation reaches its climax through the vocative-interpellative ‘see’). Far from being a rabbit-duck of genre, it transpires that the dramatic reading of this fragment is deeply embedded in ‘lyric’, just as the lyrical reading is hardly without drama – but here, a drama not simply of one speaker addressing another, but one arising out of the poem’s temporal dynamics.

Animation *through* language becomes animation *of* language. The rhythmic intensity of ‘see here it is’ animates the presence of the hand by its multidimensionality, by pitting against one another different vocal registers, different vocal lines, by exacting of its reader different, and incompatible, voicings. If this is how the poem becomes ‘present’ through performance, then such presence is always inflected by intonational cues not taken up, by its provisionality and those readings that remain in reserve, in excess of any singular voicing. And this, again, reflects the uncanny presence of the hand itself, as at once animated *and* inanimate: both ‘This living hand’ and the hand which is ‘cold, / And in the icy silence of the tomb’. Here we might recall Bernard Noël’s ‘gouttes d’air’ from the previous chapter, whose oscillation between presence and absence, whose elliptical naming (the fact that the lines both gesture towards voice as drop of air and do not name it directly, and invite alternative interpretations), form the basis for the peculiar movedness Noël would figure. Voice, if it is to speak and sound, will always be other to itself, constitutively ‘between’. Below, we will see how Paul Celan’s addresses attempt to construct just such an in-between as the site of encounter.
and ‘conversation’ that poetry must, he argues, continually strive toward. If this has often been taken in Celan’s work to have a specifically ‘ethical’ dimension – where the poem speaks to, and on behalf of, the ‘other’, the ‘strange’ – then its ethics is also one of generating the space in which such alterity might be gauged and calibrated. In this, it becomes a site not just of the encounter between humans, but of language animating itself so as to facilitate this encounter. In this respect we might add to an observation Barbara Johnson makes about ‘the ultimate apostrophic poem’, Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’. Shelley, Johnson argues, ‘attempts to build the bridge between the “O” of the pure vocative, Jakobson’s conative function, or the pure presencing of the second person, and the “oh” of pure subjectivity, Jakobson’s emotive function, or the pure presencing of the first person.’ Johnson’s insistence on the ‘purity’ of vocative, of interjection, of presencing, seems problematic – in the foregoing we have seen that the discursive and prosodic cannot be extricated straightforwardly, if at all. Yet what is most glaring in her account is the absence of a third term from Jakobson’s ‘Linguistics and Poetics’: the poetic function, or (to follow Johnson’s set of equivalences) the ‘pure presencing’ of language itself. Johnson’s focus is on the animation of the addressee; my suggestion is that such animation takes place only through the poem’s turning inward to explore its own animus.

To search, in the rhythmic dynamics of address, for a broader animation of language, returns us not only to the concerns with vibration and oscillation of the previous chapter, but also the problem of language’s origin. In particular, how does this motility of language remain within a system of referential signs? Johnson has suggested the infant’s demand to the mother, insofar as it ‘assures life even as it inaugurates alienation’ can be understood as ‘the originary vocative’ (p. 38). ‘It is unsurprising’, she says, ‘that questions of animation inhere in the rhetorical figure of apostrophe’. Might the hyperbolic, extravagant nature of the apostrophe itself (as archaism, as claiming to actualise an impossible fiction) shed light on this residue of originary vocalisation? In the apostrophes and hyperbolic sound patterning we will encounter throughout this chapter continually resound both a deictic urgency and a powerfully phonic excess whose curious mix of cry and hedonism may well accord with the model of lyric infantilism that Blasing sketches, according to which poetry, as
formal disciplining and seduction of voice, recalls the ‘primal history […] of the training of the oral zone—a sexually charged zone because of its link to alimentary functions and survival—to produce linguistic sounds’. Rosolato suggests that the fraught memory of our earliest experiences with voice is retained most tangibly in music, as the fetishisation of this vocality. Crucial here is the figure of the operatic soprano, recalling not just vocal hedonism but a merging of infantile cry and maternal voice: the child’s call to the breast and the breast itself. It is the non-linguistic vocality retained in that pre-linguistic cry suppressed by the devocalisation that is, on his account, our initiation into language. Similarly, Abraham and Torok’s conception of the transition from introjection into verbal language places the residue of infantile vocality that survives the establishment of language itself in non-verbal orality: the ‘incorporation’ that characterises the oral phase, but which will inflect the psychodynamics of oral life from then on.

As the empty mouth calls out in vain to be filled with introjective speech, it reverts to being the food-craving mouth it was prior to the acquisition of speech. Failing to feed itself on words to be exchanged with others, the mouth absorbs in fantasy all or part of a person—the genuine depository of what is now nameless. The crucial move away from introjection (clearly rendered impossible) to incorporation is made when words fail to fill the subject’s void and hence an imaginary thing is inserted into the mouth in their place.

Giving up on speech, but also on voice, the baby finds a new kind of prosthesis: a thumb or other object incorporated into the mouth to fill it where vocal utterance has failed. This prosthetic is not only physical; it is sustained by fantasy: in this it becomes the precursor to the subsequent strategies by which language will confront the ‘nameless’ after the failure of words – linguistic incorporation is, it seems, a paradigmatically ‘lyric’ predicament. But what are these strategies, and what do they tell us of the model of language motivating Abraham and Torok’s analyses? The move from introjection to incorporation is thematised simultaneously as a move from vocalisation to fantasy object, and from words that would communicate desires to a substitution of the literal by the imaginary. Elided in this
homology is the distinction between vocal exteriorisation and verbal language, as though this shift in itself leaves no remainder. The fantasy language is characterised by alternative syntactic linkages: the blurring of real desires with imaginary objects, or else associations between objects together which conscious syntax would prohibit: the split of the linguistic and the physical, however painfully acquired through introjection and then incorporation, has subsequently been accepted, even in our fantasy world, as a fait accompli. What makes Johnson’s observation regarding the vocative compelling is that, like Kristeva’s insistence on intonations and rhythms in excess of the ‘symbolic’ realm of referential language, she envisages a language which animates rather than merely refers, opening up different forms of linkage to that of the syntactic combination of referents: the relations between speaker and addressee, and by extension the word and what it names, are now understood gesturally and rhythmically as well as in terms of reference.

This is by no means to claim that poems, through their use of figures such as apostrophe and their broader prosodic-rhetorical work of animation, are quite simply providing a linguistic outlet for those vocal impulses which have been repressed since our traumatic initiation into speech. Indeed, to say simply that in the figures of voice as O and oh we might hear resound within verbal language a residue of originary vocality and its linkages would be to overlook that it is voice’s condition to be figured, as we saw in the first chapter – including being figured as ‘origin’. But ultimately it is not any purported vocal origin to language that I wish to trace, be it developmental or metaphysical; rather, at issue is an unthought within our theories of language, so often conveniently laid aside as ‘paralanguage’. In the dynamics of address we find that apostrophes rarely remain simply apostrophe, be it as they verge on interjection, or on paronomasia and anarchic sound-patterning, or as they are drawn into a far more extensive rhythmic texture into which deictic and prosodic time are intricately woven. It is here that we might start to attend to an animation not simply of poet, speaker, or addressee, but of language itself, might start to search for, and to dynamise, a broader principle of animus.

§

To speak of animus is to blur the two meanings implicit in the Latin term: the ‘soul’, and an intuition of movedness. When
speaking of ‘lyric’ this is particularly thorny; would an appeal to the ‘soul’ not fall back into the post-romantic ideology of the ‘lyrical voice’ as ‘spontaneous overflow’? W.R. Johnson in *The Idea of Lyric* remarks the ‘shift from the I-You pronominal form to the meditative form’ that takes place between the lyric of Catullus and Horace and that of Keats and Mallarmé. From this he concludes that lyric as a genre has gone from being fundamentally outward-facing to being concerned with interiority: this is what permits John Stuart Mill’s famous observation that ‘Eloquence is heard, poetry is over-heard’, and Eliot’s division of ‘three voices of poetry’, of which the first is ‘the poet talking to himself—or to nobody’. Allen Grossman in his *Summa Lyrica* gives a more speculative account which, implicitly following Hegel, ascribes developments in lyric as a genre, and the increasing centrality of lyric as the poetic mode *par excellence*, to the fundamental transformation of the conception of mind and interiority at the beginning of philosophical modernity:

[I]t is clear that from Homer and Plato through Descartes the knowability of other minds depended upon the hypothesis of an intelligible essence for man, a soul, on the one hand, or a common nature on the other (such that all minds were knowable by each mind intuitively). With the withering of confidence in these hypotheses […], the entailed knowability of other minds also disappeared. Hence, poetry became lyric overwhelmingly, because lyric was the social form of the unknowable singularity of the liberal individual. But in poetry it is the formal aspect that effects the transmissibility of the world represented. As formality (prosody, line, and counted stress) ceased to be preferred (or possible) as constituents of poetry, the sentiment of interior being became less and less transmissible, and representation as lyric becomes caught on the same knot as the rational will.

Grossman’s historical sweep is illuminating insofar as the shift to interiority coincides with a shift towards free verse. In this sense, it offers an intriguing development on Hegel’s own account of the transition from Classical to Romantic poetry where the plasticity of Greek versification is replaced by ictus-based metres and rhyme schemes. For Hegel this was indicative of the split between sound and sense: the ictus attains its centrality as word stress is subordinated to
semantic prominence, whereas the importance of rhyme traces an opposite path: it offers ‘one possible compensation’ for the loss of the plasticity of quantitative Greek verse precisely by its imposing an arbitrary phonic scheme.\textsuperscript{17} The implication of Hegel’s observation is that, were the arbitrary scheme taken away, there would be nothing to prevent poetry dissolving into ‘prose’. This is not to say that it will do away with line endings; rather, line endings will be motivated semantically instead of prosodically, and thereby signal the intention animating the poet’s utterance, endowing meaning to their words and rhythms from behind these words and rhythms.\textsuperscript{18} It is as what Grossman calls ‘formality’ is done away with, moreover, that lyric reaches its apotheosis as the non-transmitting transmission of the ‘unknowable singularity of the liberal individual’.

Rather provocatively, this implies that those critics and poets who would denigrate versification as outmoded are even more in thrall to bourgeois individualism than is the poetics they reject. Yet Grossman, in his focus on the transmissibility of feeling (earlier in the \textit{Summa} he states that all ‘discourse about poetry is displaced discourse about persons’; p. 235), does not pick up on a far more intriguing consequence of this historical shift. Prosody, he suggests, loses its status because it serves as transmission between different interiorities, and we lose faith in the foundations of this transmissibility (be it due to our no longer believing in the soul as ‘intelligible essence’, or in a ‘common nature’ to all humans), so we give up on the vehicles for transmitting interiority. This, however, is to assume that interiority is stable, as opposed to itself having a history; it is also to assume that prosody simply transmits, and has always served to transmit, meaning from one interiority to another. What would happen if we were to see prosody as more than simply transmission, but rather as part of that vibratory nexus that in the previous chapter we suggested elides the opposition between interior and exterior, becomes medium for the articulation of a subject? In the next chapter, we will see how this elision of inside and outside, this anteriority to any fully-formed subject, means that the ‘ecstasis’ of an individual – that is, following its Greek etymology, the standing-outside-oneself that shapes such a ‘self’ – points towards a collective subjectivity: it is not simply that poetic forms are ‘shared’ and hence widely accepted as forms of transmission, but that each voice is constructed from out of a \textit{partage} – in Nancy’s terms \textit{le partage des voix}, in the
terms of Jacques Rancière, *le partage du sensible*. That is, the rhythms in which we think always precede us, and exceed us – the subjectivity shaped by the prosodics of language is both internally plural and given over to external collectivity. Subordinating prosody to semantic motivation is one means of establishing an ideal interiority untouched by the outside – hence Grossman’s invocation of the ‘liberal individual’: metaphysics becomes a politics. This idealism in the conceptualisation of subjectivity is thus intimately bound up with the reduction of linguistic meaning to reference, and the denigration of all those non-referential aspects of meaning – intonation, inflection, pitch, pace, rhythm – to ‘paralanguage’. To resist such idealism would entail a fundamental shift in how we conceptualise ‘voice’: no longer a cipher of the interior self, but rather the site of a permeable self, a ‘between’ where interiority demonstrates itself to be at base ecstatic.

This returns us to the outward-facing model of lyric adopted by W.R. Johnson. As noted, whereas Grossman takes the shift from outward- to inward-facing poetics to be a move from the public forms of epic and dramatic to lyric as the vehicle for inwardness *par excellence*, Johnson sees it as a shift within lyric itself. The poet who to a degree bucks this trend is Baudelaire, who, Johnson notes, is continually ‘looking outward as well as inward… He may sing of flight and boredom and vicious, destructive anodynes for the pain of existing (*mal*, not *Flowers of Evil* but *Flowers of Pain*), but he never stops embracing present realities and recreating them into poetry’ (p. 11). It is Baudelaire, moreover, who famously said that ‘hyperbole and apostrophe are for lyric not only the most agreeable but also the most necessary forms of language’, his advocacy of apostrophe entails a theory of modern pronominal lyric, and in *Les Fleurs du mal* he provides its exemplary work.

Why should hyperbole and apostrophe be privileged in lyric? Moments earlier in this same essay, on Théodore de Banville, published in 1861 (the year of the second edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*), Baudelaire had characterised Banville by his commitment not just to lyric, but to the lyre: ‘the lyre expresses that almost supernatural state, that intensity of life where the soul sings, where *it cannot but sing* [elle est contrainte de chanter], like the tree, the bird and the sea’ (p. 164). If apostrophe and hyperbole are lyric’s most ‘necessary and agreeable’ figures, it is by virtue of their capacity to express
such intensity. But if this is to remain a ‘pronominal’ rather than ‘meditative’ lyric, then it cannot simply be an expression of subjective intensity: and indeed, the intensity of which Baudelaire speaks belongs not to the subject but to ‘life’, and a life in which the soul, singing, becomes non-human, approaches the state of the tree, the bird and the sea. The state might be ‘supernatural’, but its effect is to figure human intensity as part of nature – a natural scale, as it were, far removed from Herder’s mediating voice. Instead of nature being interiorised into the ‘lyric subject’, this lyric intensity entails a decentring of the very language which would articulate subjective experience. This is what motivates his cry, moments later: ‘il faut être absolument lyrique’ (pp. 166–7).

To a twenty-first century ear, this phrase cannot but be filtered through Rimbaud’s Une Saison en enfer, and for Baudelaire too what is at issue ultimately is the question of modern lyric. Baudelaire both cherishes and repudiates the anachronism of Banville’s work, and apostrophe and hyperbole are embraced in part for their archaism – as much in Baudelaire’s practice as his essay. There is no little defensiveness in Baudelaire’s rebuttal of the ‘suspicion’ (which, if he ascribes it to his reader, is evidently his own) that Banville’s ‘anachronism’ issues from his ‘lyric convictions’, culminating in the rhetorical question: ‘can one commit an anachronism in the eternal?’ (p. 167). But immediately thereafter he will pursue this very line of argument further:

Modern art has an essentially demoniac tendency... But Théodore de Banville refuses to look into these swamps of blood, these abysses of dirt. Like ancient art, he only expresses the beautiful, the joyful, the noble, the great, the rhythmic. So, in his works, you will not hear the dissonances, the discordances of the music of a Witches’ Sabbath, nor the yelps of irony, that revenge of the defeated.

(p. 168)²⁰

Praise here serves as part of a strategy of cordial repudiation: Baudelaire distances himself from his friend and co-traveller by venerating him. However, the ambivalence of the essay is directed not only towards the lyre, but towards modern art itself. If Baudelaire here aligns himself with this ‘demoniac tendency’, he nevertheless
hopes to salvage something of Banville’s ‘lyric soul’, and bring into coherence these two apparently incompatible intensities: the belles heures of the lyre and the modern artist’s discordant yelps of irony, often figured through the archaism of apostrophe itself – such as the swan that attempts to bathe in a waterless Paris gutter whilst dreaming of its ‘beau lac natal’, interpellated by the celebrated vocative: ‘Andromaque, je pense à vous!’

Yet, if this address is outward-facing, then it would be a misnomer to call the entities Baudelaire apostrophises, as Johnson does, ‘present realities’ which are ‘recreated’ by the poet. For here again the central rhetorical work performed by apostrophe and vocative is not to recreate a pre-existing world but to bring the entity apostrophised into presence. In place of the model of poem as mimesis lies a model of poem as event: apostrophe, in the act of naming what it addresses, ‘creates’ the apostrophised entity’s ‘reality’. If this is clear in the cry to Andromache, where the mythical figure is made present in the address, then, we shall see, it equally holds in apostrophes to a human addressee who, like Keats’s ‘living hand’ and Hardy’s ‘Woman much missed’, is de-animated in order that the poem can re-animate it anew. This is something Barbara Johnson identifies in ‘Moestra et Errabunda’, and which I will discuss in the ‘Sonnet d’automne’ below. Such making-present, however, takes place not simply by means of the apostrophe itself, but a broader metonymic palette: Andromache is made present primarily through the link between the swan and the exiled princess of The Trojan Women, but is also facilitated by an association with the widow of another of Priam’s sons, Helen, daughter of Leda raped by Zeus in the form of a swan, and hatched from a swan’s egg – who had eloped, of course, with Paris, Hector’s brother, whose name mutates into Paris, stomping ground of the poet-flâneur. The presence the poem engenders through its naming is always a transfigured presence.

As we reach deeper into the poems’ intertexture, we discover also that it is by no means certain that these ecstatic addresses are solely outward looking. Barbara Johnson’s remark of Shelley, that the O of apostrophe and the oh of interjection collapse into one another, is no less applicable to Les Fleurs du mal. In ‘L’irréparable’ he accosts his addressee thus: ‘Dis-le, belle sorcière, oh! dis, si tu le sais’ (p. 54), where the ‘oh’ is introduced only after the vocative interpellation of ‘dis-le, belle sorcière’. And in the final stanza ‘Un Voyage à Cythère',
after his encounter with the body of a hanged prisoner, he addresses first Venus (Cytheria) and then an unspecified ‘Lord’:

Dans ton île, Ô Vénus! je n’ai trouvé debout
Qu’un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image…
—Ah! Seigneur! donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon cœur et mon corps sans dégout!

(p. 119)²⁴

In these lines, the intensity of apostrophe is evoked not simply through ‘Ô Vénus!’, but two lines later by an ‘Ah! Seigneur!’’. This latter is a far more complex address, as it stages his own response to the encounter by appealing to a ‘Lord’ which may be the Judeo-Christian God, but which may also be the body he encounters and in which he sees himself. Yet, at the same time, it focalises inward, turning from the description of the body to the conclusion that the poet (or ‘speaker’, if one prefers) wills himself to take from the encounter. The ‘Ah’ here, as the ‘oh’ of ‘L’irréparable’, wavers between apostrophe and interjection: the ‘lyric soul’ is figured, between Œs and Ahs, as a porosity of the poet speaking out to the world, and back into himself.

This would set Baudelaire’s apostrophes apart from what Jonathan Culler sees as post-enlightenment lyric’s desire to reconcile subject and object through an act of intellectual will. Says Culler: ‘to apostrophize is to will a state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to your desire. In these terms the function of apostrophe would be to make the objects of the universe potentially responsive forces’.²⁵ On this account, the apostrophic call to external entities facilitates a reflection on the subject’s own willing – both the will to animate the inanimate, and the will to establish oneself, through the apostrophe itself, ‘as bardic, visionary voice, and thereby inscribe itself in the tradition of poetry that seeks to make things happen by acts of naming’.²⁶ This means that romantic and post-romantic apostrophe (Culler’s examples are from Blake, Shelley, Baudelaire, Rilke) straddles two different beliefs in the efficaciousness of speech: firstly, the belief that language can make things happen by acts of naming; secondly, a compensatory position which accepts that this efficacy may well be only a fiction (so we read ‘apostrophe as sign of a fiction which knows its own fictive nature’²⁷), as our disenchanted rationality tells us it must be, but holds that one
can nevertheless apostrophise this fiction into existence by making it a lyric poem, and thereby transform the person who apostrophises into a lyric poet. The poem might not be felicitous as a speech act, as it were, but it can still be felicitous as a poem. Indeed, the awareness of the inevitable failure of its efficacy, that it is simply making use of a trope employed by so many poets throughout a long tradition, can provide the poem with much of its urgency: the irony inherent in being both distanced from, and shaped by, the rhetorical strategies at one’s disposal is thus laced with pathos. But in this case, it would appear that for all that apostrophe gestures outwards, through its acts of naming, it can equally be read as ‘an act of radical interiorization and solipsism’, as it brings entities of the world to identify with the speaking ‘I’ (p. 146). It is not simply, on this account, the oh of interjection, but also the O of apostrophe that articulates what Barbara Johnson called the ‘pure presencing of the first person’.

Yet when, in ‘L’ennemi’, Baudelaire apostrophises/interjects ‘Ô douleur ! Ô douleur ! Le Temps mange la vie’, it is uncertain whether he is addressing an exterior pain or evoking his own, and this uncertainty is crucial to its thematising what he had termed, in the essay on Banville, ‘that intensity of life where the soul sings’. ‘Pains’ have long posed a problem for the philosophy of mind – do they belong to us, do we ‘have’ pains, or are they us? Can pain be separated from the subject that feels? The uncertainty as to whether Baudelaire is addressing himself or a transcendental entity is crucial to the permeable, ec-static subjectivity the apostrophe articulates; in this sense it recalls Herder’s Philoctetes and his utterances of ‘Ach’, ‘oh’ and ‘o’, but also ‘Weh’ in which the pain is grasped as both exterior and inalienable, and where referential word is reduced to interjection. Within this context, we might discern in ‘Une fantôme’ and ‘Tout entière’, where Baudelaire turns to address himself through the apostrophic ‘ô mon âme !’, an internal division akin to that found in Derrida’s account of hearing oneself speak, or in the uncanny call of Heidegger’s voice of conscience, at once ‘from me and from beyond me’. In this sense he anticipates Celan’s aphorism: La poésie ne s’impose plus, elle s’expose: not the outward-looking attitude of a pre-formed subject encountering the world, but the articulation of a constitutive ecstasis.

§
One of the most remarkable features of Baudelairean apostrophe is its deictic urgency, especially in those instances (twenty-seven out of the 127 poems collected in the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*) where direct address, either with an apostrophic Ô or a vocative case, interrupts an anecdotal or descriptive register – such as in ‘À une passante’, where the description of a fleeting encounter with the eponymous *passante* gives way to a vocative address to this ‘Fugitive beauté...’, or the ‘Sonnet d’automne’, with its exclamation ‘ô pâle marguerite!’. Such urgency has narrative force; but it also, I will suggest, renders audible lyric’s constitutive excess over the New Critical model of dramatic monologue. Such urgency and directness seem to conflict with apostrophe’s etymology as turning-away (*apostrophe*), and the famous account of its uses given by Quintilian: ‘the diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge’. Quintilian notes that this can appear a counterproductive ploy – ‘it would certainly seem to be more natural that we should specially address ourselves to those whose favour we desire to win’ – yet it also facilitates ‘some striking expression of thought... which can be given greater point and vehemence if addressed to some person other than the judge’ (ibid.). Apostrophe, as knowing artifice, would stage its own modes of address; herein lies its rhetorical power. This also means that it is constitutively split, between the (possibly fictive) second person addressee, and the ultimate audience, in Quintilian’s examples a judge. Baudelaire’s fragment to an alternative opening of *Les Fleurs du mal* with its figure of poetic alchemy exhibits this doubleness, straddling two addresses, and addressees – to Paris to be transformed from mud into gold, and to an audience which is requested to witness this alchemical transformation:

Ô vous, soyez témoins que j’ai fait mon devoir  
Comme un parfait chimiste et comme une âme sainte.

Car j’ai de chaque chose extrait la quintessence,

Tu m’as donné ta boue et j’en ai fait de l’or.

(p. 192)

The alchemical apostrophe to the ‘tu’, Paris, takes place as a performance, and a performative (‘soyez témoins’ being an exemplary instance of Austin’s illocutionary act): not only does the address
happen *before* an audience, but it must construct this audience in order to work its alchemy. The poet’s naming will only reach fruition if witnessed; it is the response to the performance that endows these words with their incantatory force – as though the awareness of its fictive nature is mobilised to overcome its fiction, to retain its aspirations, however illusory, to efficacious speech.

And this, as J. Mark Smith has argued, requires that we not remain external to the poem, arbitrating on performance, but rather become embedded within the poem’s addresses – although, he insists, never as actual or implied addressee. We become ‘witnesses’ to the poem as we voice it – and at the same time witness us voicing ourselves. It is, in his apposite term, a form of ‘attunement’:

> Lyric speech, turned away, seeks a third, but not to be its “you,” not to be its audience. This third is never one who will, from the place of “you,” *answer*. S/he is one, wholly potential (and hence neither present nor absent), who will attune the instance of his or her own speaking to the lyric’s representation of speech.\(^{34}\)

Smith’s account of apostrophe as always ‘turning away’ (as if its etymology fixes the after-history of the trope), implies that ‘attunement’ retains its distance; but this leads us to wonder – how would we ever then be *attuned*? It is precisely this distance that pronominal lyric, when it ceases merely to stage a ‘you’ but rather interpellates it, seeks to undermine, as much through the indeterminacy and multidimensionality of address as through its concretion. The desire to define this ‘third’ which lyric speech seeks out is the desire to re-establish a stable – and stabilising – persona upon a language defined by its motility – as is the insistence that poems are representations of speech acts rather than themselves events which speak. The implication is that speech precedes the written poem, so as to be *re*-presented; as we have seen, it is as much the case that writing generates, if not speech, then certainly the plurality of voicings which provide lyric with its *animus*.

I will return to this ‘attunement’ below. For now let us note that there is, in Baudelaire’s observation, another kind of ‘turn’ going on, besides the apostrophic ‘turning away’: the troping by which poetry purports to effect its alchemy of the word, at once an ‘extraction’ of essence and a transformation of essence, whether in turning mud into gold or in rendering the implacable city responsive through its
address. We saw that the vocative address to Andromache depended on a variety of interlinked metonymic substitutions, and indeed throughout Les Fleurs du mal we find apostrophes coincide with metonymic naming (such as ‘Ô beauté, dur fléau des âmes, tu le veux!’ in ‘Causerie’; p. 56). This is particularly striking in two examples we will look at in greater detail below: the ‘fugitive beauté’ of ‘À une passante’ and ‘marguerite/Marguerite’ from ‘Sonnet d’automne’, whose name describes the addressee’s transformation from being likened to a daisy (‘marguerite’) to becoming the lover of Faust (‘Marguerite’, French translation for Goethe’s Margarete/Gretchen). In this final example, it would seem that the apostrophe both sets up and obstructs direct naming. It is a commonplace in commentary on this poem to speculate on who this mysterious ‘Marguerite’ might be referring to. Aside its intertextual references, however, and its fitting the rhyme scheme (only two rhymes are used throughout the sonnet), ‘Marguerite’ also facilitates the transformation of flower into name, marguerite into Marguerite. Both an animation and humanisation, ‘Marguerite’ traces the literalisation of metaphor into name; as such it becomes an allegory for the work of animation of address itself. Insofar as ‘Marguerite’ names anything, it names this very process.

Despite its vocative, its direct address, its proper name, ‘Marguerite’ still employs rhetorical turns. Yet I would not wish to take this incursion of the ‘non-proper’ to imply the ‘impossibility’ of naming as such. Rather, address and trope are means of registering, and engendering, the directionality which characterises much of the most powerful lyric writing. And here, I would like to attend to yet another ‘turn’, in addition to the apostrophic turning-away and the turns of trope, and the volta of the sonnets, regularly marked by Baudelaire with shifts to the vocative: what Paul Celan in ‘Der Meridian’ calls Atemwende, a ‘turn of the breath’. Indeed, for Celan’s own addresses, the intersection of turning-toward and turning-away is crucial. In ‘… rauscht der Brunnen’, from his 1963 collection Niemandsrose, the shift from the plural ‘Ihr’, addressed to words, to the singular ‘du’ addressed, through words, to a human interlocutor, can be read both as an attempt to bridge silence and recreate from out of this silence an encounter, drawing together two of the most famous statements from ‘Der Meridian’: that ‘the poem clearly shows a strong tendency towards silence’ (p. 48), and that ‘The poem becomes—under what conditions—the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns
towards phenomena, addressing and questioning them. The poem becomes conversation—often desperate conversation' (p. 50). It starts:

Ihr gebet-, ihr lästerungs-, ihr gebetschafen Messer meines Schweigens.$^{39}$

The poem opens by figuring voice, both as it assumes the vocative case and through the double genitive of ‘Messer / meines Schweigens’, itself aligned in the next stanza with ‘Ihr meine mit mir ver-/ krüppelnden Worte’ [You my words being crippled / together with me]. Words, knife of silence, either cut open silence, or are the vehicle through which silence cuts open: it is this double cutting-open (one is reminded of Heidegger’s working of the cognates of reissen – to rend, to tear)$^{40}$ that shapes the encounter with a singular ‘du’. In the terms of the previous chapter, we would see voice as opening up the horizon for speech, what Nancy called the distribution of voices: cut open by words, cutting open by way of words, silence opens up the possibility of face-to-face human encounter. As Celan puts it, the poem’s ‘space of conversation’ is deployed to ‘establish what is addressed, […] gather it into a “you” around the naming and speaking I’.$^{41}$ The ‘turn’ from medium and obstacle to addressee would reverse the turn that Quintilian identifies with the persuasive tool of apostrophe.

Yet, the sheer weight of tautology Celan brings to the address at this juncture makes this a vector of particular intensity: ‘Und du: / du, du, du’. We have already seen the peculiarly rhythmic dynamics of Baudelaire’s addresses; here the tautology serves as counter-rhythm, but also, through its monomaniacal repetition, leads one to wonder as to how direct this speech act in fact is. We have already seen with Hopkins’s woodlark how tautology, instead of insisting on the word’s denotation, becomes opaque to denotation, an obstacle to the very address it purports to embody; this, already complicated by the indeterminacy of its ‘du’, is further compounded as it dissolves into an unfinished metaphor ‘Später / der Rosen’ which is abstract even by the standards of late Celan. As he continues:

Wieviel, o wieviel Welt. Wieviel Wege.
The direct address only points up the sheer plurality of paths open to it, as though these lines, which promise to constitute the encounter the poem searches out, in fact rescind the very possibility they gesture toward. This might be the lesson of Psalm’, the poem from which Niemandsrose takes its title, with its opening address: ‘Gelobt seist du, Niemand’ – a ‘no one’ towards whom we ‘flower’. The verb blühen, with its peculiarly dynamic and yet a-human directedness (recall Baudelaire’s ‘tree, bird, and sea’), would describe that movement through which the poem can articulate its encounter with ‘du’; but more than this, it facilitates the construction of a ‘wir’ which straddles the poem’s singular address to this no-one, and an epideictic register through which the lyric would proffer metaphysical truths:

   Ein Nichts
   waren wir, sind wir, werden
   wir bleiben, blühend:
   die Nichts-, die
   Niemandsrose.42

Again, direct address eschews the ‘proper’ through its own naming strategies, and this non-proper becomes crucial to the poem’s articulation both of its conversation, and of the collective space it seeks to open up.

Might we then agree with Smith, who, speaking of another Celan poem, ‘Sprachgitter’, itself containing two ‘yous’ whose relation is ‘far from clear’, argues that ‘it is the denial of address that turns lyric speech toward a third’?43 To do so would be to say that we readers are not interpellated by Celan’s ‘du’ in any way; it is reframed as a representation of interpellation, staged for an audience clearly demarcated from the ‘du’ addressed. It strikes me that this would be to divest the poem of much of its urgency as well as its metaphysical ambition – but strikes me also that it would be no more correct to say that we in any straightforward sense are the ‘du’ themselves: the point is not to establish a stable identity from which to read, but rather participate in the poem’s construction of ‘I’, ‘you’, and ‘we’ as opening up provisional identities. Indeed, this would accord with Celan’s own depiction of the temporal condition of the poem: ‘In order to endure, [the poem] constantly calls and pulls itself back from an ‘already-no-more’ into a ‘still-here’.44 Its deictics are precarious, but
therein lies their power, as they fold into themselves and inflect the turnings of trope.

This is the poems’ temporal condition, but also their work of animation. The flowering of language and speaker in the compound *Niemandsrose* at once gestures towards figuring ‘no one’ and ‘nothing’ into linguistic articulation, gestures moreover towards a motility of language as rendering possible such articulation – an articulation in which speaker and addressee are joined into encounter; yet at the same time, this figuring, as tropological ‘turn’, would veer away from grasping this same encounter. It is this experience of lyric time that demands a turning of our breath – a turn, moreover, registered physically, and prosodically, as *Atempause*, ‘breathpause’ (or, in Waldrop’s translation, ‘pause for breath’, p. 48), cutting into silence, cutting silence.

Poems, Celan suggests, are both paths to encounter and ‘detours’ (*Um-Wege*, yet one more ‘turn’); as such they are ‘paths on which language becomes vocal’ [*die Sprache stimmhaft wird*], and in so doing demands ‘a listening You’ (p. 53). As Smith notes, *stimmhaft* is not quite ‘voice’, but works, as did Herder’s ‘natural scale’ at the many other cognates of the verb *stimmen*, which links not only attunement (*Stimmung*) but also harmonisation (*Einstimmen*): voice shapes its addressee into a listening ‘You’ by attuning both interlocutors to one another. Just as we saw with the differential vibration we examined in the previous chapter, voice here becomes the ‘articulation’ of a subject not in the sense of expressing subjective experience, but as that jointure-differentiation through which something like a subject establishes itself as subject: not just jointures of those binary pairs language/body, self/other, inside/outside, presence/absence, but the articulation of these different levels of conceiving of the meaningful texture of experience. Voice comes to underpin Celan’s thematisation of poetry’s directionality – its confrontations with silence, with otherness; its turnings, and pauses, of the breath.

§

When Culler argues that ‘apostrophe can be identified with the ambitions of lyric’, it is insofar as, apostrophising, the poem turns away from empirical addressees and thereby constitutes the poem as ‘a special sort of linguistic event’.\(^{45}\) What interests me in the apostrophic and vocative addresses from Keats, Baudelaire and Celan, however, is
how they are deployed within a broader animation of language; it is this animation – an animation which extends to comprise the poems' tropological turnings and rhythmic dynamics as well as gestures of address – which endows these lyrics with their ‘event’-character. If one wishes to retain a category like ‘lyric voice’, then it would not serve as metonym of ‘lyric subjectivity’, but rather indicate a site for the intersection of these multidirectional movements. This leads to another point of divergence from Culler. Discussing the construction of the poet-figure, he argues, in ‘Apostrophe’, that ‘The poet makes himself a poetic presence through an image of voice, and nothing figures voice like the pure O of undifferentiated voicing’ (p. 142, my italics), and in ‘Lyric, History and Genre’, that:

Paradoxically, the more such poetry addresses natural or inanimate objects, the more it proffers figures of voice, the more it reveals itself at another level as not spoken, but as writing that through its personification engenders an image [my italics] of voice, for the readers to whom it presents itself again and again. By addressing the flower or other nonempirical listeners the poet works to constitute him- or herself as poet, in the tradition not just of epic, with its address to the muse, but of lyric’.

(p. 889)

In other words, the ‘figure’ of voice, apostrophe, is transposed into the ‘image’ of voice: the poet speaking as poet. With this coincides a fundamental shift in the meaning of ‘voice’ itself: positing it as an ‘image’, Culler has replaced an auditory with a visual register, and, if ‘figure’ implies a linguistic process of trope, ‘image’ suggests an entity behind the language. What happens if we interrupt this movement, and attend to these figures of voice – not just the ‘oh’ of interjection and the ‘O’ of apostrophe, but the deployment of voice in other ‘figures’, figures of sound, in which the opposite scission has been effected on voice, now framed as phonic pattern, – as places where this animation is worked through, and where, despite its separation into either rhetorical or phonic figure, something of a vocality which resists and exceeds this dualism might be retained? In other words, understand the figuring of voice as a form of configuration through which voice sounds in singular articulation, rather than a figurative ‘troping’?
Paronomasia – wordplay or pun – lies in a grey area between figures of speech and figures of sound, and this may well explain Baudelaire’s fondness for it. Puns on Ô abound throughout Les Fleurs du mal. Again, the most famous example comes from ‘Le cygne’, when the swan is imagined to address the water with the vocative: ‘Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu?’ More common, however, are puns on ‘au’ (‘to the’), reinforcing the directionality already figured by apostrophe itself. In ‘Je te donne ces vers’ the Ô is anticipated not only by ‘au’ but by the homophone ‘haut’ and even the assonant ‘maudit’:

Être maudit à qui, de l’abîme profond
Jusqu’au plus haut du ciel, rien, hors moi, ne répond!
—Ô toi qui […]

(p. 41)

In ‘Le mort joyeux’ this punning is extended to play on vers/vers/vers: verse, worms, but also the directional adverb ‘towards’:

Ô vers ! noirs compagnons sans oreille et sans yeux,
Voyez venir à vous un mort libre et joyeux ;
Philosophes viveurs, fils de la pourriture,

A travers ma ruine allez donc sans remords,
Et dites-moi s’il est encor quelque torture
Pour ce vieux corps sans âme et mort parmi les morts!

(p. 70)

If the most evident pun here is on poem and worm (the creatures with neither ears nor eyes being asked to see and hear), then we can also note the relational, directional meaning drawn out by the à travers three lines later, and recalling the pun of Ô and au: the poet draws towards (vers) him the worms (vers) through his verse (vers). But in each instance, it is not simply a question of wordplay, but a broader sonic extravagance; the ‘hyperbole’ so agreeable and necessary to lyric is now reframed within the poem’s auditory intertexture: as assonance, but also as counterrhythm against the alexandrin.

So when Culler speaks of ‘the time of apostrophe’ as ‘a special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say “now”’, we should understand this temporality as indelibly rhythmic.
We have already seen how the deictics of the vocative coincide with caesura and stress pattern in Keats’s ‘Then on the shore’ and ‘See here it is;’ in chapter one we also saw the rhythmic thrust afforded by the apostrophes and interjections of Herder’s Philoctetes. Yet what happens when, as in poems like ‘À une passante’ and ‘Sonnet d’automne’, this temporality is given a specifically narrative dimension? In ‘À une passante’ Baudelaire encounters a woman passing by, apparently in mourning and yet fashionably, almost coquettishly dressed (the feston and ourlet being intricate emboideries). He fleetingly ‘drinks in her eye’ before she disappears. It is at this point that the register shifts tense, but then from descriptive to vocative:

Un éclair... puis la nuit!—Fugitive beauté
Don’t le regard m’a fait soudainement renaître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l’éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d’ici! trop tard! jamais peut-être!
Car j’ignore où tu fusis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!

(p. 92–3)50

Baudelaire here displays the full array of his repertoire of apostrophe: he addresses an absent addressee to reconstruct her presence; the direct address is facilitated by metonymy, by a syntax broken up into exclamation. But once again the apostrophe coincides with metrical density. Whilst one could see this as a shift in narrative urgency,51 it seems that part of the urgency lies in its excess over a merely narrative frame. This would, to a degree, fit with Culler’s claim that ‘[a]postrophe resists narrative because its “now” is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a now of discourse, of writing’ (p. 152); but the temporality of this ‘now’ (like Keats’s and Hardy’s ‘thens’) is peculiarly rhythmic. The cry of ‘Fugitive beauté’ is only established as taking the vocative case, as opposed to constituting a further third-person description, by the ‘te’ of line 11, two lines after the address itself. And yet, there seems to be little ambiguity as to what kind of speech act this is: by virtue of the repertoire that has been constructed throughout Les Fleurs du mal, it is immediately recognisable as a vocative – its syntax, its deictics, its structural position at the turn of the sonnet, and the prolongation of the enjambment...
followed by sub-clause. Rather than apostrophe generating this temporality, it is now signalled by the poem’s broader temporal dynamic – something which is in the final tercet registered metrically, most notably through the parallelisms, chiasmi and symmetries between hemistiches in the final couplet, where ‘Car j’ignore où tu fuis’ is answered by ‘tu ne sais où je vais’, and ‘Ô toi que j’eusse aimé’ is answered by ‘Ô toi qui le savais’ (the 2 + 4 stress pattern of line fourteen, moreover, is anticipated by line twelve: ‘Ailleurs, bien loin d’ici ! trop tard ! jamais peut-être!’).

The volta in ‘Sonnet d’automne’ is also in complex relation to narrative structure – having started as a conversation piece (if it can be called a ‘conversation’ when Baudelaire tells his beloved ‘Sois charmante et tais-toi!’ [be charming and shut up] – moreover, it is her ‘eyes’ which speak, or which he takes to be speaking) before turning inward to become ‘reflective’ lyric, it attains its added urgency from an external impetus:

Aimons-nous doucement. L’Amour dans sa guérite,
Ténébreux, embusqué, bande son arc fatal.
Je connais les engins de son vieil arsenal:

Crime, horreur et folie !—Ô pâle marguerite !
Comme moi n’es-tu pas un soleil automnal,
Ô ma si blanche, ô ma si froide Marguerite ?

We have already noted how ‘marguerite’ is transformed into ‘Marguerite’; now we can see that its animation of language resides not simply in its naming strategies but in its metre. Just as in ‘À une passante’, tenseless exclamation is central to the deixis (for ‘Un éclair... puis la nuit’ read ‘Crime, horreur et folie’); and once again, the ending oscillates between regular and irregular stress patterns—the symmetry of line 13, falling into four three-syllable feet, followed by a far more complex symmetry and anaphora in the final line. In ‘À une passante’ the anaphora produces a parallelism that follows the two-hemistich structure of the classical alexandrin line; in ‘Sonnet d’automne’, by contrast, the anaphora syncopates against the medial caesura, and would be scanned as a ‘romantic’ rather than ‘classical’ alexandrin (i.e. three sets of four syllables rather
On Voice in Poetry

than two sets of six). But this does not resolve the difficulties in scansion: in the word ‘froide’ there is an e muet; does this come after the caesura or before it?

Ô ma si blanche | ô ma si froid | e Marguerite.
Ô ma si blanche | ô ma si froide | Marguerite.

The latter reading (the so-called *coupe lyrique*, rather than *coupe enjambante*) retains the unity of word stress and syntactical unit, but upsets the metrical grouping: the former breaks up word stress in order to conform to metrical decorum. My aim here is not to arbitrate between the two scansion but to note that at the climax of the poem’s address, when it confronts the insuperable absence of ‘Marguerite’, the line not only overflows the metre of the sonnet as a whole, but then wavers between two possibilities of scansion. The metrical constraint again releases vocal-verbal movements it cannot subsequently account for. And with the two options for scansion, two attitudes of voicing – that in which speech patterns are bent to the will of metrical pattern, and that in which speech syncopates against metre (and, in each case, a metrical pattern that itself diverges from all the other lines in this sonnet). In this, just as with Keats’s ‘see here it is’ and ‘then on the shore’, it ceases to be simply an opposition between spoken and metrical rhythm, and becomes a negotiation of competing vocal lines. The tercet both insists on its being voiced, and interrupts any individual vocal performance. It exacts of its reader, to co-opt Celan’s coinages, both breathpause and breathturn. And moreover, it is precisely this pause, this turn, which lie at the basis of the line’s animation: it does not so much represent an animate speech act as, opening up a plurality of voicings, strive to animate speech. Again, scansion is brought to equivocate: the turning of the breath becomes not simply poetry’s attitude to the language it speaks and the world it addresses, but to the way it attunes our own speech.

Such plurality of voicing follows the pattern of ‘differential vibration’ observed in the previous chapter. Voice never becomes full presence but rather lives in its excess over presence, like Noël’s ‘gouttes d’air’, like Celan’s addresses which do not simply aim to bring a ‘you’ into encounter, but to shape the space within which this encounter can arise as the precarious temporal matrix of the
The poem’s continuing-to-be. But we also see that the plurality of voicing is linked to lyric’s written character. If lyric is indeed, as Culler says, marked by ‘a special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say “now”’, then writing’s ‘now’ is continually displaced through the generations and equivocations of voice, remaining irreducible to any single voicing; a pause of the breath suspended indefinitely. The oscillation towards and away from a ‘present’ vocalisation becomes integral to the poems’ rhythmic dynamics – dynamics which comprise deictics, tense, prosody, address: figures of presence as well as forms of making-present.

Given its association with the ‘lyre’, and more recently with the utterance of an individual speaking subject, it is perhaps counterintuitive to think of lyric as a paradigmatically written genre, and yet it may be that the vocality and orality specific to lyric are engendered by techniques released by writing itself. Indeed, the increasing dominance of lyric as a genre, which we saw ascribed by Hegel and Grossman to the establishment of the liberal, interior subject in modernity, can also be linked to the shift from oral to literate cultures, where poetry ceases to perform the same ritual functions as before. Walter Ong and others have noted that the predominant poetic form in oral cultures is the verse narrative; here the performance aspires not to perfect word-for-word reconstruction but to regenerate the poem on the basis of a framework provided by metre, pre-existing rhetorical formulae, and so on. For the written poem, the mnemonic function is less central, opening up the possibilities of other rhythmic vectors. And it has also been suggested that the shift from ritual to textual dissemination was registered in lyric’s rhetorical repertoire. Even once poems had ceased to be composed for social rituals, as Gordon Williams argues with reference to Horace, such rituals continued to be inscribed within the poems’ tropic and gestural conventions as part of their ‘imaginative structure’. William Waters takes this to signify a shift from the context-based rituals of recitation and rhetorical performance to a paradigmatically context-less lyric; this lack of context becomes constitutive for the addresses poems make, and indeed their specific temporality: the difference, as it were, between elegy and funeral oration in its voicing and hearing. The poem’s ‘voice’ belongs to its several afterlives. Yet even when they arise within poems that have offered a narrative context, the addresses make use of their being written for the
dynamics of their address. This is not to deny the model of lyric as performance to an audience, ‘rhetorical transaction’ in Culler’s phrase;\(^{57}\) rather, it is to suggest that its orality and vocality arise from out of its written character, not by being transcribed into a written artefact but by being released into voicing; herein lies its indefinitely iterable ‘event’. And released, moreover, through its syncopations which turn back on themselves, its equivocations in vocal line, vocal attitude, demanding plural turnings of the breath. Voice is not so much poetry’s ‘origin’, then, as that towards which it continually reaches – not an object to be grasped but a plurality of voicings it opens up, and to which we as readers are attuned each time anew.
At first, the citizens gave Caius Coriolanus their ‘voices’, but, pressed by the Tribunes of the people, they conclude that he had asked for their voices in scorn. One of the citizens describes his request thus:

‘I would be consul,’ says he: ‘aged custom, But by your voices, will not so permit me; Your voices therefore.’ When we granted that, Here was ‘I thank you for your voices: thank you: Your most sweet voices: now you have left your voices, I have no further with you.’ Was not this mockery? (II.iii.154–59)

What the citizen takes exception to is that, asking for the citizens’ ‘voices’, Coriolanus has so fixated on the word itself as to render it suspect. It is not a bad summation of the ironic tone with which Coriolanus wearily approaches yet more citizens who turn up at the Forum:

Here come more voices. Your voices: for your voices I have fought; Watched for your voices; for your voices bear Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six I have seen and heard of; for your voices have Done many things, some less, some more. Your voices! Indeed, I would be consul. (II.iii.111–17)
It is, of course, not for their voices that he fought: if he fought his battles to obtain the recognition of others, then it was a recognition to be determined not by the citizens’ votes but by the patrician code of fame which the plebeians’ revolt will endanger: his name, after all, is changed to mark his glory at the battle of Corioli.2 By placing the tangible bodily marks of his wounds in juxtaposition with these ‘voices’ – an indeterminately physical, indeterminately figurative, possession of an indeterminate ‘you’ – he shows precisely how much he holds in contempt the ‘body-politic’ of this new citizenry of which the metonym ‘voice’, binding self-articulation and political representation, is the central trope.

Throughout Coriolanus this body-politic shifts uneasily between the figurative and the physical, most famously in Menenius Agrippa’s allegory of the limbs rebelling against the belly. But what is striking in Coriolanus’ own rhetoric is the literalisation of this figurative register. Just after Menenius’ homily, which ends by likening the rebellious citizens to ‘the great toe of this assembly’, ‘worst in blood to run’ (I.i.138), Caius Martius (as he is then) pushes the conceit further:

What’s the matter, you dissentious rogues,
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Make yourselves scabs?

(I.i.147–49)

Such are Martius’ first words. This rhetoric reaches its extreme when the bodily function in question is the voice, in the confrontation with the Tribunes which leads to his banishment. Again he works the conceit of public opinion as a body making itself sick:

Therefore, beseech you,—
You that will be less fearful than discreet,
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on’t, that prefer
A noble life before a long, and wish
To jump a body with a dangerous physic
That’s sure of death without it—at once pluck out
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
The sweet which is their poison. Your dishonour
Mangles true judgment and bereaves the state
Of that integrity which should become’t,
Not having the power to do the good it would
For th’ill which doth control’t.

(III.i.150–162)

‘Pluck out / The multitudinous tongue’: just as the people ‘rubb[ed]
the itch of their opinion’, now they will lick that which the tongue
finds sweet but which is poison for the body-politic as a whole.
Again, the figurative palette of voice as political representation is
deply enmeshed in its literalisation (‘tongue’ has already appeared
within the bodily-metonymic register of ‘voice’ on eleven occasions).
But at this moment it is not simply the rhetorics which, being literal-
ised, do violence on this voice. The metrical parallel of ‘at once pluck
out’ and ‘let them not lick’, both of which gravitate towards four full
stresses, their tautness contrasting with the polysyllable ‘multitudi-
 nous’ between them, internalises Coriolanus’ rhetorical violence into
the physical-prosodic violence emanating from a body.

The irony, of course, is that the plebeians’ voices are ‘needless
vouches’ (II.iii.103) – Coriolanus, we learn before he goes to ask for
the people’s voices in the Forum, only requires the Senate’s approval
to become consul: the rest is mere ‘custom’. What democracy calls
for is gratuitous performance, and moreover, the citizens are aware
of this, as this brief exchange shows:

**Coriolanus**

You know the cause, sir, of my standing here.

**Third Citizen**

We do, sir; tell us what hath brought you to’t.

(II.iii.56–57)

They know why he is there, yet demand that he tell them anyway,
which sits uneasily with the rhetorical tendency to litotes of the patri-
cian class in general (Cominius starts his encomium to Coriolanus:
‘I shall lack voice: the deeds of Coriolanus / Should not be utter’d
feebly’ (II.ii.76–77)). But Coriolanus is not alone in being unable
to recognise the centrality of performance to this moment in the
history of republican democratic politics. Jacques Rancière argues
that Livy too – a likely source, along with Plutarch, for the play (and
notably Menenius’ fable of the belly) – misunderstood the context for the dispute between plebeians and patricians: the ‘real context’, Rancière tells us, is ‘a quarrel over the issue of speech itself.’3 The plebeians’ major transgression – and insight – lies in their ‘giving themselves names’: ‘Since the plebeians have become creatures of speech, there is nothing left to do but to talk to them’ (pp. 25–26). Hence, in Shakespeare’s account, the insistence by the citizens that Coriolanus ask for voices which he does not, in the letter if not the spirit of the law, require; hence also his refusal to treat these voices as worthy of ‘speech’ becoming a treasonable offence.

And hence also one further stake in Coriolanus’ continual literalisation of the ‘voice’ metaphor. Rancière argues that politics is the very struggle for voice to be ‘counted’ as logos: the transition from inarticulate ‘cry’ [cri] into ‘speech’ [parole]. It is ‘the logos that separates the discursive articulation of a grievance from the phonic articulation of a groan’ (p. 2). In this sense, politics is from its inception ‘literary’, that is, concerned with the limits of what language can say and do. Such ‘literariness’ extends far beyond the precincts of literature as institution, or genre, of writing; yet it also has consequences on what we might consider the politics specific to ‘literature’ itself. If politics is concerned in the first instance with the limits of the sayable, then literature’s political commitments will entail staking out what literature in fact is, what its own limits are. We might think of so-called ‘dialect’ literature, or writing committed to the vernacular more generally, in which the very acceptability of such speech within political institutions – for it to be accepted as speech – often attains an almost allegorical power: a reflection both on the acceptability of nonstandard speech within political discourse, and on the norms of the literary itself. On this logic writing only starts to broach the question of political representation insofar as it shifts the parameters of literary representation.

There is, in Rancière’s argument, however, one further stage. The question of whose voice gets counted as speech is not simply a question of literary-political norms of acceptability.4 For, Rancière suggests, when voice comes to be recognised as speech, this hearing transforms the articulation of the person/group whose voice ‘speaks’. Only when we think it possible for our groan to be taken as expressing a grievance, so Rancière’s argument goes, do we start to experience it as grievance, do we feel entitled to justice, and experience our suffering as ‘unjust’.
In this Rancière echoes those thinkers, such as Condillac and Rousseau, for whom, as we saw in chapter one, it is the communication of interjections which establishes both language and social recognition; yet his ostensible starting point is Aristotle’s *Politics*, and the distinction it makes early on between animal *phone* and human *logos*. Aristotle observes that: ‘whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust’ (*Politics* I.2, 1253a). What distinguishes voice from speech is not simply *meaning* but, first of all, instrumental reason. From this issues speech but also our sense of justice: instrumental reason as determinant of both moral and semantic value. The human-animal distinction is psychological and epistemological only insofar as it is political and ethical: that we not only feel sensory stimulus, but feel it as communicable, not just to be determined semantically as such and such a grievance, but also communicated to such and such a community which would recognise this grievance as grievance.

Politics on this account becomes, at base, the struggle for how our collective sense experience is articulated, divided up, and shared (meanings he brings together in the phrase *le partage du sensible*). The difference between *phone* and *logos* is a ‘difference between two modes of access to sense experience’ (p. 2); to have one’s voice recognised as speech is to demand access to ‘justice’ not simply as a legal institution, but as a condition for how the world discloses itself more generally: a *redistribution* not just of wealth, or of state institutions, but of the sensible itself. Here we might see a striking overlap with bell hooks’s celebrated call to arms:

> moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back’, that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice.5

What is at stake in the shift from voice to speech, on this account, is nothing less than *freedom*, the fact of being a subject.
But in such a literary politics does voice simply become ‘speech’? Perhaps it is the very institution of *logos* that should be treated as suspect:

Since speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream. No one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout. It was taken to be nothing but the call of a wild animal. This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise.6

On Édouard Glissant’s account, the ‘creolization’ of the coloniser’s language takes place through a fundamental destabilisation of *logos* by *phone*. The point is not to propose an anti-language – and indeed, the pitch, intensity, acceleration, of ‘Creolized’ speech may have originated in a ‘conspiracy to conceal meaning’, but it must eventually, Glissant argues, come to serve as the ‘opening’ of meaning if it is to become a ‘language’ in its own right (p. 125, translation modified). But such a conception of ‘language’ refiges *logos* irrevocably: language is defined less by a ‘stable syntax’ than by its engendering ‘an open community’. The opacity of the scream is not foregone entirely – it comes to indicate the constitutive opacity of every individual, of all linguistic articulation; as such opacity becomes the condition of both linguistic ‘openness’ and ‘open community’. There is a homology between the opacity of voice, as embodied by the scream, and the ‘the evergrowing network of recognised opaque structures’ that characterise the culturally decentred world he predicted, and we live in (p. 133). When vocal noise ceases to be grasped as anti-language and, in fact, facilitates the linguistic structuring of sense experience, it replaces a ‘pseudo-humanist’ colonising universalism with a fundamental reconception of the human (p. 162). It is – and I will come back to this, working Rancière’s rhetorics of linguistic economy – not so much a *redistribution* of the sensible, as its *revaluation*.

We now start to see the political stakes of Coriolanus’ ironisation of the term ‘voice’, his physicalisation of the ‘tongue’. First of all, it signifies a refusal to accommodate within the body-politic the plebeians’ articulations of grievance: to treat their ‘speech’ as still nothing but voice is to return it to non-linguistic corporeality. But it is more than this, especially given the ironic slippages between discursive
registers, and between the metonymic and prosodic, that happen throughout *Coriolanus*’ discourse on voice and voices – and, for that matter, its deployment of voice and voices as a work of dramatic verse. What is both unsettling and alluring, for Coriolanus, but also for *Coriolanus*, is the indeterminacy of voice – that as trope it can be physicalised both rhetorically and prosodically, that voice is not just body, not just speech, but constituted between the two, and indeed constitutes this ‘between’. Coriolanus can only insist on the purely physical nature of the plebeians’ voices by admitting the excess of voices and tongues over their determination as *either* body *or* speech – to defend this opposition involves moving outside it, admitting its indefensibility.

At this moment, ‘voice’ ceases to function as metonym for political representation, ceases to be the trope around which can converge a political ‘identity’, with the attendant tropes of ‘giving’ and ‘finding’ voice – a tropic register for which ‘getting one’s voice heard’ and ‘making oneself visible’ are considered equivalents despite the incommensurability of auditory and visual, and their respective paradigms of linguistic meaning (sounding/articulation of a subject, reference to an exterior object). But no more does it offer a straightforward poetics or politics of ‘embodiment’: for Glissant, after all, the scream’s resistance to logos is a strategy of communication, not the sheer effusion of vocality. In *Coriolanus*, voice does not so much *figure* political instability as *generate* it. In the previous chapters we have seen how thinking ‘voice’ requires ‘figuring’ it – not as figurative depiction of a pre-existing entity but as its singular configuration. Here we find that the plurality of voice’s figural movement destabilises the sensorial distribution of a body-politic and its attempt to regulate its different functions and members.

However, we also start to see a series of difficulties that will shadow the current chapter. When Glissant speaks of pseudo-humanist universalism, he has in mind, first of all, a thinking that would dissolve the opacity of individual languages, peoples, and persons; but it also serves as allusion to the long history through which ‘universalist’ European humanism has served to colonise its various ‘others’. Universality shows itself to be a position blind, whether unconsciously or strategically (and unconsciousness may well itself be a strategy), to its own bias, the partiality which undermines its claim to speak for all. How can I square this awareness of the dangers of the
universal with the aspirations of a study that aims at ‘voice as such’? This difficulty is compounded insofar as, when I read Glissant’s resistance to a colonising universalism, I do so from the perspective of the white male European: my heritage is both that of Western metaphysics’ attempts to grasp the universal, and the colonisation of the Caribbean, the subjugation of millions into slavery. In chapter two we saw that Derrida’s ‘quasi-transcendental’ approach to voice was influenced by his experiences of his own voice as Franco-Algerian secular Jew in the decades preceding Algerian independence; one’s embeddedness in a particular historical conjuncture serves as starting point for a thinking which will never wholly leave this conjuncture behind. This means that we cannot dissolve the particularity of any instance of voice, but more than this. Derrida’s account is autobiographical, as is that of bell hooks; by contrast, I myself proceed by bringing various discourses on ‘voice’, spoken by ‘voices’ different to my own, into conversation, but I am then continually speaking on behalf of, and in place of, others (hence appropriating their voices back into my own). Moreover, this method invites one to assume a transcendent, universalising vantage point through which to trace their various commonalities and divergences. The risk is that I end up setting up my voice as one more white-male-European ‘master discourse’, however well-intentioned. But the other side of this double bind, as Derrida’s subsequent reflections on intonation and rhythm make clear, is the need to keep in focus the ontological stakes of ‘voice as such’, the metaphysical formations shaping these different workings and politics of voice. The following pages do not pretend to resolve these difficulties, but then, it is hardly clear that resolution is what is required. But they will remain vigilant.

§

Aristotle’s depiction of voice in the Politics differs in crucial ways from the account we saw in chapter 2 from De anima. In this work he argues that ‘Not every sound, as we said, made by an animal is voice [...]’, 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 [semantikos], and is not merely the result of any impact of the breath (De anima II.8, 421a). At this juncture, voice, and not merely logos, is endowed with meaning: voice’s excess over ‘any impact of the breath’ precedes its becoming ‘speech’. This is a particularly fascinating
moment in *De anima*, given its tripartite model of nutritive faculty (possessed by all creatures), perceptual faculty (possessed by animals and humans), and the exclusively human faculty of mind/intellect (*nous*). If animals, as Aristotle seems to acknowledge here (‘not every sound’: so, implicitly, *some*), have ‘voice’, and voice requires imagination, then suddenly it seems as though animals have some nascent faculty of *nous* after all – or else that perception and intellect are not as easily extricable as the division of faculties would suggest. In the far more schematic separation made in *The Politics*, the appeal to ‘justice’ serves to stabilise, and normalise, the metaphysical anomalies posed by voice and, like Coriolanus, does so through the dualism of noise and language. So when Rancière argues: ‘The sign derived from the possession of the organ – articulated language – is one thing. The manner in which this organ exercises its function, in which language expresses a shared *aisthesis*, is another’,7 we might make a further-reaching observation. Firstly, that this model of language as organ or faculty is itself dependent on a particular configuration of this shared (*partagé*: divided up, articulated, distributed) *aisthesis*. But, that the schematic separation between voice and speech serves to regulate the possible transformations of this *aisthesis*

Rancière portrays his reconfiguration of *aisthesis* as an ‘aestheticisation’ of politics – albeit one far removed from the ‘perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art’ that Walter ascribed to Fascism. For the political is ultimately a ‘system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it...’8 This entails, first of all, that all politics is ‘literary’: ‘The modern political animal is first a literary animal, caught in the circuit of a literariness that undoes the relationships between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each’.9 But it also entails – although to my knowledge Rancière never actually frames it thus – a reconfigured relation between *poiesis* as ‘poetry’ and as ‘making’, following the Greek root *poiein*. It is this double sense of *poiesis* that the following pages will explore – the points at which ‘poetic’ making achieves a *poietic* making through its shifting the ways in which sense experience is distributed.10
And yet, is Rancière’s own account not also founded on an absolute separation of the categories of voice and speech? This extends beyond the depiction of the transformation from voice to speech, *phone* to *logos*, to the subsequent model he outlines of linguistic meaning. Let us return to a passage already quoted, from The Distribution of the Sensible: ‘[Politics] is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it...’\(^{11}\) Note how the pair ‘visible and invisible’ is presented as equivalent to ‘speech and noise’; once voice has entered speech, linguistic meaning is conceptualised in accordance with a visual register: politics ‘revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it’.\(^{12}\) This switch of register sustains Rancière’s strict epistemological distinction between speech and voice; more than this, it delimits the possible shifts in sense-perception by determining in advance the distribution of the senses themselves within language. What is at issue is an economics of the linguistic sensorium – taking economics in its broadest sense, as the question of the construction and circulation of value.

Simply put: to redistribute is not enough. The deafening of the ear to the prosodic, the construction of voice as ‘paralanguage’, conveniently to the side of language and therefore not interfering with it, is ‘economic’ insofar as it regulates what is ascribed with meaning and value, the checks and balances of our expenditure of energy and desire, as Bataille might put it.\(^{13}\) Yet the following will not follow Bataille in proposing a counter-economy of excess: as we have already seen, the ‘excess’ of voice lies in its irreducibility to *phone* as well as *logos*, what, in previous chapters, I have grasped as voice’s constitutive ‘between’. Might the very anomaly of voice open up faults in the sensorium and its political-aesthetic distribution? In this way, voice would serve as point of coherence for those diverse poetics, and *poietics*, which aspire not simply at redistribution within a pre-given linguistic-sensorial economy, but at the fundamental revaluation of this economy.

Such a ‘literary’ politics must outstrip the model offered by Rancière, predicated as it is on such speech-voice binarism. It is here that Glissant’s account of the creolization of language attains its significance – not as an inversion of Rancière’s account but for
its more nuanced understanding of vocal-verbal articulation. His description of the slaves' screams and their camouflaging of language in 'extreme noise' is well known, yet should not be read in isolation: moments earlier he had offered what might seem the opposite claim:

[...] the alienated body of the slave, in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived, in an attempt at complete dispossession, of speech. Self-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage. Even in his reproductive function, the slave is not in control of himself. He reproduces, but it is for the master. All pleasure is silent: that is, thwarted, deformed, denied. In such a situation, expression is cautious, reticent, whispered, spun thread by thread in the dark.

When the body is freed (when day comes), it accompanies the explosive scream.

(pp. 122–23, translation modified).

How can the slaves' expression be at once extreme noise and silence? How can the scream be an articulation both of dispossession and of being freed? Glissant's interest is in the liminal points of articulate speech, limits which are, in the first instance, not semantic but phenomenal, where speech withdraws into opacity, be it as noise or silence. If Glissant's account starts with a series of vocal distortions of the dominant (and dominating) language, then voice soon outstrips a framework of resistance only. As noted, its opacity becomes the basis for an 'opening' [ouverture] of language. Reframing the relation between voice and speech, noise and language, it shifts the parameters of what language can be, how language can mean: again, this is language as economy, both the expenditure of energy and the construction of value. If the 'scream' can, on different occasions, articulate both dispossession (as 'extreme noise') and emancipation (as 'explosive scream'), this is precisely because the scream is not restricted to one position with respect to language, but has a different meaning depending on its specific historical moment. In her autobiographical reflections on the source of her need to 'talk back' hooks remembers a growing up into 'a world of woman speech', but one in which this speech was domesticated: 'I was never taught absolute silence, I was taught that it was important to speak but to talk a talk that was in itself silence' (p. 7). The discursive and the physical are inextricable. But more than this, the historical and
On Voice in Poetry

autobiographical cannot be extricated from the metaphysics of language towards which this thinking strives: it is experienced reality, Glissant and hooks suggest, which tells us of the essence of language. Thus the opacity of the scream, whilst initially registered as interruption of meaning, can subsequently be grasped as the condition for meaning-making as such. Where Rancière understands the freeing of the body as a freeing into language, here we start to imagine freeing of language itself. This is how Glissant proposes that we redistribute, and revalue, the sensible.

A ‘literary’, poietic, politics would turn in on language so as to cause disturbances and transformations in the distribution of the sensible. This is not restricted to ‘literature‘ or ‘poetry’: indeed, the phrase ‘We are the 99%’, as it outlives the Occupy movement and shapes both mainstream and left political discourse, may well prove a more effective poietic instance of language than any recent poem that I at least could name. What each of these poietic gestures share is the need to set up a fictive, speculative space through which they think ‘otherwise’. Sean Bonney’s 2011 long poem The Commons describes its own political aims thus:

the idea is simple
& permanently freakish:
to live outside of servitude
the confidence & cowardice
of those who force us
into fiction

Forced into fiction is not only ‘literature’ itself, which loses any claim to truth and remains tolerated only on the condition of remaining wholly innocuous, but the larger project of thinking the world otherwise, of undoing the ways in which words and bodies are ordered and determined. The fictive register, which domesticates the literary by deeming it not true, ironically ends up permitting foundational rethinking, where literature, not unlike the knowing fiction of apostrophe that in the previous chapter we saw Culler to consider characteristic of lyric, continues to believe in its potential truth in spite of its fictive character. And, just as romantic apostrophe will never be consoled by apostrophising itself into a lyric tradition rather than apostrophising entities into being, the force of Bonney’s poem
lies in its radically non-fictive desire ‘to live outside of servitude’. In the *Poetics* Aristotle suggested that poetry was ‘more true’ than history because history concerned itself only with events which had happened, whereas poetry was concerned with events which could happen, and thus belonged to the sphere of possibility (1415b). Yet, more than this, it aims not just at possibility but at myth. Glissant notes two social and ritual functions to (ostensible oral) poetry: firstly to demystify pre-existing myths, and subsequently to ‘reimagine community around its own myths’. Poetry is ‘fiction’ insofar as it is counterfactual: it is *not yet true*.

A *poietic* politics, then, is necessarily utopian. But this also means that a *poietic* politics is in the first instance concerned with its own modes of articulation, rather than with ‘real-world’ effects. It is by shifting the limits of these modes of articulation – by redistributing, by revaluing, the economy of its linguistic sensorium – that it can reflect on ‘politics’ in the narrower sense. This, I suggested above, is perhaps clearest in the case of vernacular writing. Even in Dante Alighieri’s *De Vulgaris Eloquentia*, the Latin text written on the possibility of Italian (and Provençal, and Occitan) verse, we find its author is soon drawn from a discussion of the appropriateness of writing poetry in Italian into a central debate in the language politics of fourteenth-century Italy: which region speaks the most ‘correct’ Italian? At a period when his fellow Florentines were asserting the claim of their dialect to linguistic hegemony, his response is striking for its evenhandedness, but even more so for the conceptualisation of language it proposes:

> The Illustrious, Cardinal, Courtly, and Curial Vulgar Tongue in Italy is that which belongs to all the towns in Italy, but does not appear to belong to any one of them; and is that by which all the local dialects of the Italians are measured, weighed, and compared.

What starts as the intervention into a specific argument in contemporary language politics soon expands into a reflection on language as such. For Dante comes to see language itself as marked by the internal plurality and diversity of speech itself: ‘Italian’ becomes a postulate rather than an empirical given, it exists through its varying and mutually incompatible instances but cannot be identified
wholly with any of them. The turn to the vernacular, instead of simply insisting on language's empirical ‘reality’, in fact demands a rethinking of linguistic ideality, such that speech does not furnish the basis for a univocal, standardised language, but rather, in its constitutive plurality, demonstrates the impossibility of establishing any such language.

Moving forward some centuries, one might think of the reaction to James Kelman's winning the Booker Prize in 1994 for *How Late it was, how late*. One commentator in *The Times*, Gerald Warner, described the work, written in Glaswegian vernacular, as ‘monotonously foul-mouthed’, whilst another, Simon Jenkins, in an article entitled ‘An Expletive of a Winner’, likened the novel to an experience he had been accosted on a train from London to Edinburgh, before reaching his rhetorical climax in the rallying-cry: ‘If it comes to war my English will win’. Indeed, Kelman's victory even led one of the judges on the panel, the Rabbi Julia Neuberger, to resign in horror, denouncing the novel as ‘crap’ (showing that ‘expletives’ are not the preserve of Glaswegians). I suspect that Jenkins, Neuberger, Wagner and I all share a very similar brand of ‘English’; what is striking in Jenkins's exclamation is less that he appeals to England's colonising history, than that in his resistance to Kelman's novel he is brought to admit the possibility of plural Englishes. Moreover, *How Late* shows how socio-economic exclusion is displaced on to linguistic exclusion: the protagonist, Sammy Samuels, continually attempts to articulate a grievance within the systems of social security, criminal justice, and the NHS, and is continually prevented from doing so because he does not possess the right sociolect. Being interviewed by the police, Sammy is instructed: ‘Dont use the word “cunts” again it doesnay fit in the computer’. But if here the refusal of speech is ascribed to ‘the computer’ (rather than the bureaucracy it stands for), then this is given human form in a consultation with a doctor regarding his sightloss. Sammy asks, ‘I mean, what do ye approach a charity?’ to which the doctor answers: ‘Well I dare say that if a claim in respect of a found dysfunction is allowed then an application in respect of a customer's wants that may be consistent with the found dysfunction becomes open to discharge by the appropriate charitable agency.’ Sammy's reply – ‘So I should approach a charity?’ – reminds us that behind the supposedly neutrality of adminspeak lie strategies of obfuscation. When in exasperation Sammy exclaims ‘Christ sake!’, he is told simply: ‘I find your language offensive.’ After the police had asked him to refrain
The Multitudinous Tongue

from swearing, he did so – the next eleven pages are free of ‘expletives.’ This time, however, he ripostes: ‘Do ye. Ah well fuck ye then. Fuck ye!’ (pp. 223–24).

Here we see the coherence of Kelman’s political commitments and a ‘literary politics’ that would redistribute the sensible. This is a far remove from, say, Coriolanus, a play which can be – and has been – taken variously to espouse conservative-aristocratic and liberal-democratic values: either mounting a defence of the status quo, evincing distrust of the rabble-rousing tribunes, and proving that great warriors count for more than democratic representation; or else providing a depiction of the hypocrisy of outmoded codes of honour and inability to adapt to the peaceful coexistence of nations/city-states. Yet, I have suggested that its most powerful reflection on the politics of voice lies not in the question of who is allowed to speak, and for whom, but in the way its rhetorics and prosody work the relations between body and speech, physical and political voice, destabilising these categories and staging their destabilisation; this is not easily reducible to any overt political ‘content’. By contrast, Kelman’s treatment of his vocal-verbal medium, notably with its pointed dissolution of the distinction between third person voice of narration and the voice of its protagonist, serves almost as allegory on political exclusion. Or less allegory, perhaps, than vehicle – the means through which such political reflection can articulate itself. The poietic transformation of its linguistic sensorium becomes the condition for the writing’s political commitment.

It is thus crucial that the response to Kelman’s Booker victory was not merely that he had written bad literature, but that his novel was not literature at all. Vernacular writing is an aesthetic politics before it is a politics of aisthesis. This is the same argumentation as found in Rancière, but also in Dante, where the particular demands of a literary medium lead, by way of a reflection on localised language politics, to a reconceptualisation of language itself. But Kelman’s differs insofar as he radically refigures the relation between text and voice: nonstandard orthography should be seen not as the ‘phonetic’ transcription of accent but as an attempt to alter our relation as readers to the implicit sonority of alphabetic script – to demand not simply a different form of attention, but a different conception of what language is and does. As Kelman has argued, when people ‘not only... approach the work as though it were an oral text, they
somehow assume it to be a literal transcription of recorded speech,'\textsuperscript{23}
literature is reduced to an ethnographic inventory of dialect usage. Kelman’s initial argument is that this understanding of the ‘oral text’ has accepted in advance a model of literariness according to which a ‘dialect’ is transcribed into a literary context, as though the ‘literary’ were a stable category rather than something continually in flux (not least because writers produce new kinds of literature which the category needs to adapt to accommodate). As vernacular writing creates new configurations of speech, we once again shift from a model of voice put into text to a model of text generating voicings.

It is as generation of voice, moreover, that we see vernacular poetics outstrip the politics of ‘giving’ or ‘finding’ voice, and the representationalist logic according to which voice stands for a particular ‘identity’, tacitly assuming the existence of such identity as a stable category. On the face of it, Linton Kwesi Johnson. ‘Sonny’s Lettah’, with its epistolary form playing on the conceit of a written document spelt in ‘dialect’ (the ‘letter’ is written by Sonny to his mother from ‘Brixton Prison’ in ‘Landan south-west two / Inglan’) it might seem a paradigm case of dramatic monologue giving voice by narrating the systematic denial of voice.\textsuperscript{24} Yet when Sonny describes being overcome with rage after seeing the police assault his younger brother for no reason, this conceit of transcribed voice is overrun:

\begin{verbatim}
soh mi jook one in him eye
an him started to cry
mi tump one in him mout
an him started to shout
mi kick one pan him shin
an him started to spin
mi tump him pan him chin
an him rap pan a bin

an crash
an ded
\end{verbatim}

Listen, for instance, to how the syncopations seem torn between musical and metrical beat: the rhyme words in the even numbered lines of the stanza always arrive just before the beat established by
the rhyme word of the odd numbered line, and how this endows greater stress on the silences at the end of the lines. The poem’s great success lies in the ability of the text to generate by itself syncopations that both internalise and transform the rhythms of reggae; in this he resolves what in his earliest works he had felt as the overarching difficulty for his poetry: ‘my poems may look sort of flat on the page. Well, that’s because they’re actually oral poems, as such. They were definitely written to be read aloud, in the community.’

But if you are me, you will listen only: there is a strange double-bind by which vernacular writing is predicated on future voicing, but, embedded the politics of accent, will refuse to be voiced by many of their readers – including the present one who, possessed of an English RP accent, will not dare (for reasons of embarrassment but also the awareness of complicity in colonisation and its long shadow) mimic Johnson’s own pronunciation. This is not only a means of insisting on the specificity of speaking voice, but also of retaining what Glissant called the opacity between voices. And indeed, there is a second ‘opacity’ for the write RP reader to confront: the risk that valorising ‘the vernacular’ leads to an exoticisation of ‘the other’ (my accent is rarely considered ‘the vernacular’) – a tendency ironised by James Kelman when he quips: ‘it jist comes oot, ah says, it’s the natchril rithm o the work klass, ah jist opens ma mooth and oot it comes.’

In this regard it is, I think, crucial that Johnson’s soundworld is not reducible to its phonetic evocation of individual vowels and consonants, such as in the spelling of ‘soh’, ‘tump’, ‘pan’, etc., but also involves the dynamisation of its suprasegmental contours – again, a shift in the linguistic sensorium, and away from the regime of the sign. This is even clearer in another Caribbean-born, British-based poet, Anthony Joseph. In the prose section that opens his Teragaton (1997) he frames his vocal-verbal experimentation as a search for origins, not entirely unlike Ball’s withdrawal ‘into the inmost alchemy of the word’ – only instead of this alchemy being posited as metaphysical substrate, it indicates the sedimented accumulation of an oral life that Joseph’s own language – the English that colonised his ancestors – will never itself voice: ‘My English is not native or natural. It’s one language to replace another that’s been lost, forgotten or rinsed. The closest approximation of the original I have is the one spoken in the Caribbean with original African wordbeat.’
On Voice in Poetry

poetic project is to reach below the surface of ‘dialect’ into the core of the words’ physical matter – where verbal opacity meets historical trauma, and the violence wreaked on speech seeks to draw out language’s unthought. And indeed, it is this which leads Joseph to turn to musical forms – as indeed Johnson had done – in order for their rhythms to work at the prosody of speech, as in the following:

d’sweet soca calypso dat bawls bass-he bucks&ways
involuntarily
riddim makeim wile-redye-possession by de drum
he sing—

(‘De Moko Jumbie’, p. 36)

Despite the ‘phonetic’ spellings of ‘dat’, ‘wile’, ‘de’, etc., the texture of the poem is marked less by individual speechsounds than by its ‘riddim’ – a riddim that does not simply attempt to mimic the rhythms of soca and calypso but to remake linguistic rhythms themselves: to bring syntax and metre to crumble under the demotic transfiguration of voice into animate – involuntarily bucking and swaying – matter. Individual attention to the discrete unit of sound gives way to larger scale temporal movements, and within this renewed focus on linguistic time the words cease simply to transcribe and now generate their voices. It is thus that they might recreate the ‘wordbeats’ smothered under centuries of colonial domination, not as an origin to be found, but rather as a future to be founded.

Joseph’s attempt to grasp an unthought at the core of language thus demands a fundamental shift in the very processes and modes by which language thinks. Its poetics thus entails a poiesis. As we saw above, hooks associates the liberation of voice with becoming a ‘subject’, and indeed equates ‘the right to voice’ with the right to ‘authorship’; yet, in previous chapters we have seen how voice complicates linguistic agency, be it through the internal divisions symbolised in the trope of hearing-oneself-speak, or the radical exposedness of Baudelaire’s and Celan’s vocatives suspended between apostrophe and interjection. The relation between poetic ‘making’ and unfreedom, moreover, is crucial to ‘Sonny’s Lettah’: rhythms cease to mimic the intensity and violence of his confrontation with the police and become the vehicle for such intensity and violence, as though Sonny is himself possessed by these rhythms. Such possession by rhythm comes to figure a broader political dispossession. How can this model
of a permeable subject, articulated through language rather than taking possession of language, be squared with the emancipatory politics it envisages? How are we to reconcile this complicated conception of linguistic agency with the political struggle to attain agency through language?

§

To pursue this problem, I would like to alter focus a little, by taking up Rachel Blau duPlessis's trenchant question: ‘Am “I” forbidden to poetry by one—but one key—law of poetry—the cult of the idealized female?’ How, that is, can she (or ‘she’) assert subjecthood in and through language, through an act of ‘making’, when the language is so bound up in a history of denying such subjecthood to people named as ‘she’? Similarly, much of Lisa Robertson's *Debbie: An Epic* strives to work out the conditions for saying ‘I’: ‘to forget / species anxiety’, as she puts it. It is not just that our language is pervaded by, and subsequently reinforces, structures of gender domination, what Robertson in the ‘proem’ to *Debbie* calls ‘the curvise grammar of gender’; poetry in particular has served as point of intersection for archetypes of masculinity and femininity, ideologies and cults of authorship. Hence Blau duPlessis’s confrontation, in one of her ‘Drafts’ included later in her essay – ‘interested experiments in theorizing’, she calls them – with the female ‘maker’ from Wallace Stevens’s ‘The Idea of Order at Key West’; hence Robertson’s continual challenge to Virgil as the patronymic authority for all subsequent epic.

Blau duPlessis frames her draft as being by ‘the female [Allen] Grossman’, yet, as noted, its central reference point is ‘The Idea of Order at Key West’, as the first stanza makes clear:

I was closer than ever to the lunge of
Power, power
stood up; it was myself.
I cleared the water back.
I was the maker.

In Stevens’s poem, the woman ‘maker’ sits by the ocean, rapt in her song, observed by the poet-speaker and his companion (the enigmatic ‘Ramon Fernandez’). As the poem progresses she becomes a symbol for the aspirations of poetry in general, as the song aspires not simply to
absorb singer and audience in its aesthetic experience but to remake the world (hence she becomes the ‘maker’), – and also its the failure of this aspiration: if ‘She was the single artificer of the world / In which she sang’ articulates the poietic capacity of her song, then the end of that same stanza, in which ‘there never was a world for her / Except the one she sang and, singing, made’, seems to give up on this aspiration to poiesis: poetry does not create and recreate our world, but rather creates its own, parallel world that will give the illusion of being our world for as long as we remain absorbed in this illusion. In this, the woman singer, already become the object of the male poet’s appreciation, is subsequently appropriated into his reflection on his own aspirations. First, her song becomes symbol for poetry itself; then, relying on that well-rehearsed series of archetypes, the male poet will translate the woman’s song – ‘pure’ voice without language – into verse, thereby drawing it out of the merely sensual, and into a linguistic realm. It is the eventual failure of the woman’s song – that ultimately she was absorbed into the world ‘she sang, and, singing, made’ – that facilitates the (male) poet’s own claim to poietic making.

The ethnomusicologist Elizabeth Tolbert has argued that language ‘harbors a shadow, feminine, musical identity, whose prosodic, emotional, and social aspects are ignored in order to reify referentiality as the marker of the uniquely human. Through the din of their ideological constructs, these other “musics” and “languages”, although barely audible, can still be heard.’ There is something fascinating in the double bind being worked through in Tobert’s rhetoric: on the one hand, identifying the ‘feminine’ with that set of tropes – music, prosody, emotion, sociality – that would construct woman as ‘other’ to logos; but at the same time asking that we hear alternative musics and languages which would interrupt such chains of binary opposition. And it is precisely this double bind that Blau duPlessis attempts to prise open. The woman singer-archetype goes from being ‘maker’ to being both ‘marked’ by the male poet-figure and a ‘marker’ for him in his own quest to establish himself as ‘maker’:

[...] I am marked,
I am the marker
I am ‘suddenly’
the boundary stone left by another maker
luminous marker [...]
In the shift ‘From make / to mark’ there is a corresponding shift from voice to that opposition of pure materiality or pure language: marker as stone, marker as symbol. Indeed, it is only by becoming inanimate matter that one can be transformed into a symbol.

If Blau duPlessis is concerned with the conditions of silencing women, Robertson stages her attempt to establish herself as author, offering ironic reflection on its ‘anxiety of influence’ inspired by ‘the paternal library’. As she puts it in the ‘argument’ to the poem:

‘With what suave domesticity Virgil strolls among the deep shelves of the paternal library. The metric pulse of the catalogue or calendar charts his walk. To narrate an origin as lapidary, as irrevocable, is only to have chosen with a styled authority from the rankled aisles of thought. For if Virgil has taught me anything, it’s that authority is just a rhetoric or style which has asserted the phantom permanency of a context.’

Robertson’s insight here is that authority is, before all, else a rhetorical posture – but a posture whose diction some find far easier to assume than others. ‘I speak to judge crimes of filiation’, Debbie tells us (l. 69), and ‘father’ recurs throughout, as purported cause for Debbie’s poetising (‘as if because of father I went down to / the soft forced notions of boats…’, l. 223), as ‘Founder’ (l. 300), and as a weight to be cast off (‘father’s real soul owes oblivion / to himself so slips into that long lake / and goes. Good-bye Father. I Debbie† speak …’, ll. 235–37). Casting off this weight, claiming to speak, the asterisk directs us to a footnote which qualifies Debbie: ‘Moot person in moot place’. Such self-assertion is thus mitigated.

But Robertson also notes that this rhetoric creates its own ‘origin’: when Debbie judges the crimes of filiation, she engages overtly in counter-myth. Blau DuPlessis’s appropriation of archetypes from male poets and theorists is also bound up in the political work of counter-myth. So why is it that, when Blau duPlessis reflects back on her poem, she concludes that ‘even a counterfactual version of Grossman manifests the agencyless, choiceless position of the mother’ (p. 40)? Perhaps it is due to the strategy of reappropriation itself – that it remains structured by the very archetypes it would contest. Perhaps also at issue is the binaristic model of agency in which it finds itself. We can compare this to Debbie’s mootness – which implies, not only
the lack of self-assertion, but also an identity or personhood continually in flux, which cannot be fixed in one ‘place’. This would, moreover, reframe the significance of the pentameter lines which recur throughout *Debbie*, but particularly in an ‘Interlude’ poem aptly entitled ‘Virgil’s Bastard Daughters Sing’. One might be tempted to read this as an ‘appropriation’ of masculinist metre and its ‘tradition’, especially given that she speaks in the ‘argument’ of the ‘metric pulse’ which ‘charts [Virgil’s] walk’. Yet metre, neither internal nor external, a public artifice shaping one’s cadences, exacts a complex linguistic agency: as such it is germane to the thinking which *Debbie* pursues. ‘I say the mouth is public / and human creatures straddle debt’ (ll. 367–68) – ‘the mouth is public’: this is certainly what it feels like when intonation contours issue from your throat which are not your own. The equation of lyric possession with political dispossession implicitly posits a stable, monadic subject that either acts upon language or is acted upon; by contrast, we see Debbie permeated, and animated, by the ecstasis of cadence.33 We might in fact find a similar argument at work in Blau duPlessis’s discussion of the muse-figure: ‘it has been forcefully suggested that access to language is gendered in particular ways that puts all speakers in a feminized position in relation to a Logos (called, to complicate matters in an almost unseemly fashion, the Phallus). Does imagining a beneficent muse neutralize the feminized position of a man confronting Ultimate Logos, project his sense of awe and silence onto her away from himself?’ (p. 35). The implication here is that the constitutive ecstasis that makes up our agency in, with, and against language, can be gendered as either male or female (themselves linked, quite explicitly in Blau duPlessis’s account, to tropes of activity and passivity respectively); given its evasion of the pairs active/passive, subject/object, inside/outside, it is little surprise that linguistic agency should take on an ambisexual character.34

As Robertson puts it: ‘Though the tendency of the age is to forge disturbance / my ordinary movements of words nurse my limits’ (ll. 257–58). Self-articulation takes place in giving oneself over to such movements, so as to channel, to dynamise; testing of one’s vocal range becomes a means of constructing a moot identity. Robertson’s cadences indicate prosody as the site of the permeability of the subject: instead of asserting agency these poems complicate what agency in language might be; in place of a pre-established ‘identity’ that
expresses itself in language they depict identities as provisional articulated in and through language. The internal *partage* of any single voice is of a pair with the *partage* of a collective sensorium. Rancière argues that a ‘political collective is not, in actual fact, an organism or communal body. The channels for political subjectivization are not those of imaginary identification but those of “literary” disincorporation.’ The ecstasis of individual articulation indicates not only an internally riven subject, but a subject already given over to the ruptures of the collective. It is out of such rupture that a *poietics* of voice might attempt its work of counter-mythic history.

We have seen how Blau duPlessis and Robertson inhabit mythic archetypes (the epic poet, the muse) in order to work out their conditions for their own self-articulation; and it is this insight that galvanises Bonney’s *The Commons*. Where Robertson assumes the posture of epic and employs pentameter lines, Bonney makes use of another classic genre: the sonnet sequence, divided into three ‘sets’. Originally subtitled ‘A Narrative / Diagram of the Class Struggle’, Bonney aims both to demystify the myths of capital, and offer an alternative mythic imaginary, recalling Glissant’s understanding of the political vocation of poetry. Bonney’s poem charts the prosodic articulations of a subject in language, both grasping its latent collectivity and hoping to channel its future collectivisation.

For Glissant, the rediscovery of orality was crucial to this vocation: not to return some putative, unattainable source, but rather reintroduce the shared rituals of oral poetry; this leads him not only to point to the centrality, in Caribbean poetics, of the oral narrative poem (as opposed to the narrow, and to his mind, individualistic conventions of lyric), but also in his own poetry to employ a quasi-glossolalic coinage of new mythic figures (not unlike Artaud’s *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*). And for Bonney also we find voice become the locus for the construction of a collective subjectivity. This is not so much through its connection to oral ritual (though agitprop is crucial to his rhetorics), but nor is it restricted to the construction of persona, the tropes of giving and finding voice, or sonic experimentation. Bonney’s is, in the most literal sense of the word, a ‘polyphonic’ poem, where different voices surface without becoming determinate speakers – be it through the incorporation of ‘found’ materials (song lyrics, housing and unemployment benefit forms, works of radical political theory and manifestos – intellectual property being theft),
or the juxtaposition of vocal lines and vocal attitudes. Indeed, if it is more literal than the Bakhtinian understanding of polyphony as ‘heteroglossia’ or ‘dialogism’ (that is, more than one speech style coexisting without a master narrative style to regulate them) then it is perhaps also more literal than the musical coinage as well, in which voice is dissociated from verbal language to signify melodic line.

Polyphony, in this sense, becomes crucial to the poem’s political aims: as the poem progresses an isolated lyric ‘I’, a *poète maudit* of 21st century London, gives way to a chorus of indeterminate ‘Is’ from throughout history, so as to establish a collective ‘we’: the poem would thus constitute a ‘multitudinous tongue’, through which collective subjectivity can be articulated in a singular configuration. The blurb to *The Commons* describes voices surfacing from the ‘hidden places in history’ so as to confirm the ‘contemporary Greek proverb…, “smashing up the present because they come from the future.”’ It is a fiction which wills itself to cease to be merely fictive, where the counterfactual transmutes into prophecy of future fact: this is its speculative, literary politics. The orality of *The Commons* – twisting of vocal lines, vocal attitudes, competing demands for voicing, the impossibility to situate voice in one speaker – is part of this myth-construction: it embodies the myth as plural, as virtual, and hence impossible to situate in a single body. As he describes it in his ‘Letter on Poetics’, borrowing two of Rimbaud’s aphorisms: ‘The “systematic derangement of the senses” is the social senses, ok, and the “I” becomes an “other” as in the transformation of the individual into the collective when it all kicks off’. At stake in the redistribution of the linguistic sensorium is the very possibility of the collective subjectivity which will articulate a future freedom.

In this, its reflection on language as the means and medium at its disposal becomes a *poietics* which seeks not simply to subvert what it calls ‘police’ language but also to recreate language as a utopian space for thinking an alternative, real freedom. Early we read that an unnamed ‘he’:

[...]

had rented it all back,
was wrecked,
stranded outside his favourite laws,
free as seas
or unbounded hail
as a spore left inside the language,
not a code made of letters,
but social utterance flaming,  
everything was wrong but it happened.  

(p. 7)

Being ‘a spore left inside the language,’ Bonney’s ‘he’ resembles the lyric ‘I’ which, as he puts it elsewhere, serves as ‘an interferer, an inconvenience, a potential parasite within the clean capitalist body’.\textsuperscript{39} This happens precisely as this spore refuses to be reduced to ‘a code made of letters’ and comes to embody ‘social utterance flaming’. And again:

But who is speaking here,  
such archaic pleasantry  
insolent noise making  
mere freakish difficulty:  
history is those who sit  
inside their prepared vocab

(p. 21)

As it was for Coriolanus, anti-establishment language becomes ‘insolent noise making’; once again, the opposition of speech and noise serves to domesticate by remaining within a comfortable dualism with which to gauge this insolence as ‘mere freakish difficulty’. And yet, the word ‘freak’, used throughout \textit{The Commons}, is lifted from Betty Davis’s 1974 song ‘He was a Big Freak’, further complicating the question ‘who is speaking here’. It is this double insolence of voice, which refuses either to be reduced to mere ‘noise’, or to be ascribed to singular speaker, that opens up the possibility of a counter-history to ‘those who sit / inside their prepared vocab’.

This counter-history extends beyond the freedom of one outside the law from the earlier passage, and indeed signals the aspiration to a far more capacious freedom, again to be seen through its transformation of language. And for Bonney it is voice which becomes both locus and agent for this redistribution and revaluation: ‘you reach a fork in the voice’ (p. 34), we are told in the second set, the point at which the poem most explicitly reflects on its own processes; and later in the same set:

/ listen  
these ringing geometric gaps
have forked our voice, these
- oh, cancelled -

(p. 43)

The ‘forked’ voice hints back at Milton’s revolutionary hero, the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, and his transformation by God into a serpent. If Satan’s tongue is ‘forked’ as punishment for his duplicity, then it is also the moment when his speech is turned to noise: ‘he would have spoke, / But hiss for hiss return’d with forked tongue / To forked tongue’ (*Paradise Lost* X.517–19). Bonney’s ‘forked’ voice is not simply ‘double’ but multidimensional, forking away in order to engender collective voices and voicings, refusing to be reduced to mere noise or ascribed to a determinate ‘speaker’. The ‘forked tongue’ of Milton’s Satan meets the ‘multitudinous tongue’ Coriolanus would ‘pluck out’ – that the official history and its language would see ‘cancelled’. But it also recalls Robertson’s ec-static cadencing: the voice is ‘forked’ by gaps that come from the outside, but these forks then open up the possibility of alternative modes of articulation. Bonney’s collectivisation of subjectivity takes place not through flattening of the diverse vocal attitudes and lines that work with and against one another, but rather a continual double movement of fragmentation and coherence. Internal division becomes the basis for a genuine articulation (again: joining-separation) of the collective. It is in this way that Bonney can finish this set of sonnets with the prediction of

the body’s acoustics
structurally / tearing
your playhouse down

(p. 52)

The collectivity of voice is, here, explicitly aligned with ‘the body’s acoustics’; and here we might return to Blau duPlessis’s and Robertson’s attentiveness to linguistic sound. Blau duPlessis describes how:

pieces of earth formed at the deepest level
rose forth tidal and ceaseless
horrible juice of sounding, almost like
speech, but this was not speech.40
As with Bonney’s fork in the tongue, this ‘juice of sounding, almost like / speech’ comes from without, but rises forth into the throat and mouth, reshares what speech is ‘like’. Debbie tells us straight away that ‘Names’ are something, that ‘I’d like to wear in / my lungs’ (ll. 2–3). The sensuality of language becomes integral to the poietic gesture of naming, but that this sensuality elides the oppositions of inside and outside: just as authority is a posture to be assumed, so names are something to be ‘worn’.

When Debbie sets about revaluing the economy of the linguistic sensorium, it is by appeal to a ‘debt’ which would outstrip the gendered ‘anxiety of influence’ in order to open up an economy of its own – the construction and circulation of a different system of value, the harnessing and expenditure of excess:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{the cold bride who in} & \text{– even beneath the heavy} \\
\text{unmovable life had been cut} & \text{crown of filial debt} \\
\text{from speech by the legal} & \text{– of} \\
\text{ruin of apparently contra-} & \text{sinking herself in fluency} \\
\text{dictory queens finds} & \text{during the night: sequined} \\
\text{irreparable means} & \text{eros churns even doubt’s} \\
\end{array}
\]

This shift is already figured in Robertson’s play between the ‘heavy / crown of filial debt’, and accompanied by a Bataillean sense of expenditure: ‘I’d like to live with an economy / that’s beyond me – but I have long long / tethers attached’ (ll. 390–92). And here it becomes significant that against debt is ‘eros’, just as her erotic attraction to her own story was countermanded by the claims of the ‘Father’. It is within the dialectic of constraint and release that Robertson will carve out a space not for the redistribution of the linguistic sensorium, but for rather a revaluation of its economies of meaning. As Bonney quips:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{but anyway, inside this language} & \text{there is no word for sky.}^{41}
\end{array}
\]

It is not simply enough to ‘subvert’, ‘reclaim’, ‘appropriate’: the task is to press against the limits of the sayable in order to articulate new desires and open up a space in which we might experience the world anew. In particular, it is the recognition that in a language where
the word ‘sky’ evidently exists, there is still ‘no word for sky’: naming has served, precisely, to block off (in Adorno’s apposite phrase) utopia. The absolute opposition of language and noise is part of the way our own ‘sensible’ is distributed; what these poets’ work points towards is a radical shift in this opposition: their political gesture of voicing alternate forms of experience opens on to a more expansive, speculative politics of enlarging, redistributing, revaluing, our linguistic sensorium. It is dwelling on the conditions of being able to speak, grasping an enlarged logos conditioned by verbal opacity, that these poems in their different ways propose themselves as counter-historical mythmaking.

§

But surely, does this focus solely on a utopian poiesis not risk ignoring poetry’s ineffectualness: that it ‘makes nothing happen’ but simply ‘survives, / A way of happening, a mouth’; does utopianism become, not an enlargement of aspiration, but mere consolation, as for Stevens’s ‘maker’? The double bind of such poetry is that it is acutely aware both of its apparent futility and yet its life-giving need to exist:

recent eruptions of unmeaning
in Kabul etc, where
we have never been
have made poetry obsolete:
but still my red shoes
would go dancing

(p. 17)

This need, whose ‘red shoes’ allude both to the possessed dancer of Hans Christian Andersen’s fable and to socialism, is here figured as both hedonism and as political imperative. But then, perhaps this focus on pleasure is too readily dismissed. Think of W.E.B. Du Bois’s eloquent description of ‘The Sorrow Songs’:

Little of beauty has America given the word save the rude grandeur God himself stamped on her bosom; the human spirit in this new world has expressed itself in vigor and ingenuity rather than in beauty. And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the
rhythmic cry of the slave—stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistake and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.44

Here, the concept of beauty becomes not simply the articulation of ‘the rhythmic cry of the slave’, but the basis for a freedom beyond enslavement: in this it points forward to a future not yet imagined nor yet imaginable, becomes the proleptic embodiment of that future. Again, we might think of what Rancière describes as the ‘literariness’ of politics: to transform the norms of aesthetic taste is to open up possibilities for political self-articulation that had hitherto remained veiled. To dismiss this alignment of the aesthetic and freedom as ‘ideological’, a throwback to Schillerian aestheticism,45 is to miss the fact that ‘beauty’ here is not a norm or set of norms, but rather names art’s exploration of aisthesis in its enlarged sense. Art is impoverished when divested of its aesthetics, when reduced to a tool for political ‘critique’ – and impoverished not just as art but as politics also. For all that How Late provides an excoriating critique of the injustices of the criminal justice and benefits systems in 1990s Britain, its most powerful political gestures often lie in the sheer pleasure it takes in wordmaking: ‘Sammy had aye liked wandering. That was one thing. He didnay so much like it, he loved it, the auld wandering; up hill and down dale, ye wander up ye wander down, that was Sammy.’46 Not just in the play on ‘wandering’, hills and dales (with its nods to Wordsworth and Shakespeare), but in the tautological and rhythmic excess that hints at the survival of Sammy’s spirit in the face of a society geared to destroy him. To call this mere ‘appropriation’ of an ‘élite’ tradition would be to reinforce the high-low distinction, indeed to deny ‘the aesthetic’ to all but a select few in a misguided sense of ‘democratisation’. But it is also to return Kelman’s writing to the precincts of instrumental reason, away from a vocal-verbal hedonism in whose poietic excess the construction of linguistic value is called into question.

It is this same sense of sheer hedonism and possibility that pervades bell hooks’s autobiographical account of how she first obtained the
impulse to ‘talk back’. She describes listening to her mother talking with family and friends as a friend, and continues:

The intimacy and intensity of their speech—the satisfaction they received from talking to one another, the pleasure, the joy. It was in this world of woman speech, loud talk, angry words, women with tongues quick and sharp, tender sweet tongues, touching our world with their words, that I made speech my birthright—and the right to voice, to authorship, a privilege I would not be denied.⁴⁷

This pleasure, subsequently absorbed into the cadences, alliterations and assonances of hooks’s writing, provides the basis for an ‘authorship’ that is at once political and aesthetic – an authorship which would bring her into conflict with the patriarchal social structures that created the (domestic) space for such ‘woman speech’. Vocal hedonism here too exceeds the very structures that first allow it to sound, provides a basis from which to contest and outstrip these structures. In vocal excess we might hear not just a transformed sensorium of language, but in this transformed sensorium a salvaged freedom. It is when language becomes excess that we sense the possibilities it thereby opens up.

Voice is the site at which this distribution of the sensible is shaped and reshaped, but more than this, voice is precisely what is stake in this distribution. What all the poets discussed in the preceding pages have probed is how voice is heard, and what claims it makes on our hearing. In each case, the refusal of voice to become either pure noise or pure speech is crucial to the poets’ attempts to redistribute the sensible. Voice is both the material support for this working-through and its medium, as voice constructs itself as ‘between’, as marked by excess – the excess which permits this poietic politics of the voice.

For Adorno and Rancière, the time for an art whose poiesis explicitly puts itself at the service of a political project is now past: at the time of the French Revolution, says Rancière, it was possible for a poet’s turning inward to explore the modes of expression to become not only a thematisation of artistic freedom but an allegory for political freedom; it is not that art became heteronomous at this particular juncture, that it consciously committed to a political project, but
'The Multitudinous Tongue'

rather that the project of early romantic lyric coincided with the political articulation of subjectivity of the late eighteenth century (as it would a little over a century later with Mayakovsky and the October Revolution). Soon enough, ‘Lyric writing, uprooted from representative heteronomy by its identification with the sensory writing of politics, must separate itself from it to recover its autonomy’.48 That Flaubert’s and Mallarmé’s democratic poetics could be articulated in a posture of aesthetic aristocratism (Flaubert speaks of literature as ‘an absolute way of seeing things’ [une manière absolue de voir les choses]; Mallarmé sees art’s political vocation as ‘purifying the language of the tribe’49) is indicative of this separation. For Adorno, in the era after Auschwitz, after high modernism, after socialist realism, the era of the increased commodification of aesthetic experience, art’s only choice, in order to retain any hope of survival, was to assert its own autonomy. Only as autonomous can art offer resistance to the instrumentalisation of language: ‘This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead’.50

And today, is resistance enough? Perhaps autonomy is the place where art dies. When poetry turns away from the poietic to conceive of its relation to society purely negatively, it becomes either an ‘aesthetic’ object of pleasure or a site for ‘critique’ – falling on one or other of the either-or that Rancière’s account of aisthesis as the linguistic mode of accessing sense-experience aims to interrupt. What the works of Bonney, Johnson, Robertson, and others do is seek out new configurations of voice, exact of us counterintuitive voicings, so that we start to intuit otherwise. Here the ‘lyric I’ is, in Bonney’s phrase, not simply ‘an interferer’ but ‘can be (1) an interrupter and (2) a collective, where direct speech and incomprehensibility are only possible as a synthesis that can bend ideas into and out of the limits of insurrectionism and illegalism’.51 It is one thing to say that the lyric I bears the marks of its condition as collective; it is another for it to sketch out a collective subjectivity as a political project. This is the challenge Bonney sets himself, and exacts of his readers.

It is, no doubt, an impossible challenge. But if poetry is to confront the poietic vocation that Glissant and Rancière not only ascribe to it, but also demand of it, then we should remember that deafness to prosody is an integral part of the distribution of our sensible – such deafness is of a piece not just with political theory’s dissolving of
voice into speech, or voice into a figure for representation, but also with the model of poetic articulation, noted in the previous chapter, whereby one subject transmits their interior thought and experience through language to another subject, and for which prosody is, at best, a vehicle for this transmission: it ‘represents’. The deafness to prosody is founded on a model of language, and on a model of mind; but it also finds its sustenance in a model of political subjectivity: the singular, interior subject of liberalism. The faux-sophisticated poetics which dismisses voice out of hand, either as fatally attached to bourgeois subjectivity (‘voice’ reduced to cipher of subjectivity), or as searching naively for the ideological chimera of an unmediated orality (‘voice’ reduced to signify pre-linguistic purity), bears all too happily the scars of its own alienation, bears these scars as a badge of honour rather than the admission of its own capitulation. But in so doing it accepts wholesale the metaphysics, and political economy of meaning, of the society it claims to ‘critique’. To think otherwise, on these terms, can only ever be escapism.52

To reattune our ears to voice, as neither noise nor speech, neither metonym of a particular identity nor marker of the authenticity of individual expression, but as a site in which the subject is made, unmade, and remade anew, is to attempt to redistribute our own sensible, to open up alternative points of access to sense experience. These are the political stakes of poetry’s exploration of voice.
5

Getting the Measure of Voice

Voice, I have been suggesting, can only ever be grasped by being figured: not simply a ‘figuring as’ – as speechsound, as metonym for subjective expression, as pre- or proto-verbal effusion, as possession by language, initiation into language – but also a ‘figuring through’ – figures which comprise gestures of apostrophe and interjection, the sonic world of glossolalia and onomatopoeia, and the prosodic figures shaping cadence, inflection, tempo: nodes and vectors of condensation, intensity, and release, vocal attitudes, vocal lines, through which poems make conflicting demands on our own voicing, a voicing at once necessarily finite and yet always bound up in that tacit plurality by which all phone tends toward polyphony. To speak of voice is, in this sense, to attend to its configurations, to the patterns of its self-configuring, but it is also to reconstruct voice as necessarily ec-static, necessarily medial: voice only becomes ‘voice’ as outside itself, other to itself (all of which is to leave – provisionally or definitively? – a blank or x wherever it is we might wish to posit ‘voice itself’). But it is precisely this ecstasy, this mediality, which makes ‘voice’ the starting point and vehicle for a metaphysics that aims to orient us both within language and within the world, for a politics founded out of our collective subjectivity in order to envisage a future freedom.

In this, what we are attempting to do is, as Heidegger borrowing from (or co-opting) Hölderlin once put it, ‘take a measure’. Such measure-taking, proposes Heidegger, is a means of ‘gauging the between’; that voice should itself be characterised by its ‘between’ again makes it an apt vehicle through which we might, measuring
voice, measure ourselves. To speak of ‘measuring’ voice, however, also calls up the etymology of *metre*. Heidegger is at pains to distance his account of ‘measure-taking’ from metrics: it ‘has its own *metron*, and thus its own metric’ (p. 219). It is a characteristically peremptory gesture from Heidegger, who habitually shrinks back whenever his thinking gravitates towards the conceptual mechanisms of poetics; it is a gesture we need not follow. How would poetry's ‘measuring’ voice differ from its ‘figuring’ voice through particular rhetorical and prosodic gestures? To ask this question entails a shift of focus: the concern is no longer with the phenomenal configuration of an individual voice or voicing, but with attending to the conditions by which such a voice might configure itself. It is an attempt to trace the animacy of voicing; measure-taking becomes the crux of, and what is at stake in, poetry's work of animation.

§

In previous chapters we have seen this in terms of the multidimensional excess generated by a poem's specific ‘measure’; what I have termed a dialectic of constraint and release. Let us then track this dialectic further. Perhaps the most celebrated allegory of this dialectic is found in John Donne's ‘The Triple Fool’, whose speaker places his love into ‘whining poetry’ on the rationale that ‘if I could draw my pains / Through rhyme's vexation, I should them allay’. This is not simply a question of one vexation overcoming, or displacing, another; rather, as the famous couplet has it: ‘Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce, / For he that tames it, fetters it in verse’ (ll. 10–11). Verse on this account functions as fetter for a pre-existing ‘grief’. But, we soon discover, the fettering of passion in verse serves only to release it anew, as, set to music, the performance ‘frees again / Grief, which verse did restrain’ (ll. 15–16). Indeed, here Donne's speaker experiences the added embarrassment that now his passion is no longer personal: most clearly insofar as love and grief’s ‘triumphs so are published’ (l. 20), with the singer's art ‘delighting many’ (l. 14), but also because the singer set the words to music not to express the pains which inspired the poem, but rather ‘his art and voice to show’ (l. 13): a platform for his virtuosity, for a testing of vocal range. We now find two forms of exteriority: the ‘fetter’ provided by metre, and the poem's public afterlife. If this is a ‘dialectic’, then it is certainly not one which resolves into stable synthesis.
But perhaps the two are not so different after all. For ‘numbers’, as conventions for segmenting speech, are themselves already public. That their ‘fetter’ should engender excess not reducible to metrical syncopation, an excess which also incorporates the public life – and afterlives – of the poem, furnishes a reflection on how the individual’s inflection is governed by a collective repertoire of cadence. It is unsurprising then that the excess over ‘fetter’ should be registered prosodically – that the allegory, we might say, should take place not only in the poem’s narrative but in its ‘numbers’. For instance, the poem only places heavy stresses on the first syllable/position of the line on two occasions: on both that word is ‘Grief’.

If the first constitutes a ‘trochaic inversion’, in the second we find the rhythmic dynamics engender a far greater condensation around this word: ‘And, by delighting many, frees again / Grief, which verse did restrain.’ The weight placed on ‘Grief’ is made all the more emphatic by the enjambment followed by caesura, especially given its parallel with the comma between ‘And’ and ‘by’ on the preceding line. But this is complicated further, given the problems of scansion and voicing of the rest of this line. Do we read: ‘Grief, which verse did restrain’, or: ‘Grief, which verse did restrain’? The former, according stress via lexical prominence, would introduce what Hopkins would call a ‘counterpoint’ of two concurrent metres; the latter, insisting on placing a stress on the fourth position of the line, would thereby emphasise the pastness of verse’s restraint. Wavering between the two – one more ‘mute polyphony’ registered as multidirectional sounding – the tonal ambivalence of ‘verse did restrain’ attains ever greater levels of irony as the poem comes to reflect on its constitutive excess.

Donne’s poem thus charts a shift from one conceptualisation of metre to another: an external constraint imposed on pre-given (and implicitly pre-linguistic) mental/affective content is superseded by an understanding of metre, and verbal art more generally, as the generative ecstatics of this mental/affective content. On this latter account, moreover, the very notion of such ‘content’ starts to unravel. Metre becomes a kind of prosthetic to thought which not only shapes thought but becomes itself a vehicle, and mode, of thinking. We have already seen the prosthetic condition of voice itself, at once active and passive, interior and exterior; metre’s own prosthetics will afford an insight into the workings of voice itself. Just as in our
earlier remarks we saw a doubleness between voice as *measure* and voice as *measured*, here we see that metre – one form of measuring voice – becomes prosthesis to an already prosthetic phenomenon.

To identify voice prosthetics in Donne risks charges of anachronism, of course: however long other prosthetics (spectacles, wooden legs, etc.) have been around, only in the last 150 years of telephonic and gramophonic technologies have we become accustomed to prosthetics for *voice*. But, just as Derrida takes the acousmatic or disembodied voice to point to a logic of disembodiment already latent in the philosophical attempt to secure constant presence through the metonymy of voice, so-called ‘phonologism’ (see ch. 2, pp. 55–6); and just as David Wills argued that the prosthetic should be understood as the fundamental paradigm both for linguistic relation and for the body articulated in language (p. 58); so I would like to suggest that a logic of voice-prosthesis is at work in the employment of metre, precisely as its cadences, radically external to this subject’s personal ‘voice’, shape the self-voicing of its subject. We are not so far here from Yopie Prins’s discussion of Robert Browning’s phonograph recording of his poem ‘How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix’. Browning, reciting his poem, forgets the words, eventually cutting short the reading to say: ‘I’m terribly sorry but I can’t remember me own verses, but one thing that I shall remember all me life is the astonishing [inaudible] by your wonderful invention’.5 The words themselves fail him, but as Prins notes, his reading retains its metrical thrust. She concludes: ‘these modern sound technologies do not leave print behind, if we look for the logos (and not the phone) embedded in the techne. The mechanical mediation of voice is already figured within the poem that Browning attempts to recite, in the mechanism of the metre’.6 What the phonograph makes clear is already latent in metre as ‘mechanism’ (and, implicitly in Prins’s term, as ‘machine’). Such an approach permits us to see continuities throughout the history of verse art, which would draw together the mnemotechnics of the oral rhapsode (indeed, the critique Ion receives from Socrates, where his memory without knowledge is purportedly shown up to be useless, echoes the critique of writing itself) with the uses of voice technology employed (if less to mnemonic ends, it must be said) by Henri Chopin and others.

But does this constitute looking ‘for the logos (and not the phone) embedded in the techne’? We have already seen ample reason to be
suspicous of so schematic a separation between logos and phone; yet more striking is Prins’s inference that metre serves as ‘voice inverse’ because it is ‘an abstract rhythm never quite articulated as human speech’ (p. 57). The shift from phone to logos is a shift from concrete to abstract. This is deeply ironic given Derrida’s critique of ‘phonologism’: it is precisely as voice is dissolved into logos that it can be held up as an ideal which secures constant presence, and frees us of the event-like transience of individual voicing as described by Eric Havelock, Walter Ong, and others. In trying to save metre from ‘metaphysical’ voice, from the clutches of ‘phonocentrism’, Prins takes refuge in the model of voice as abstraction that for Derrida is the privileged philosopheme of ‘logocentric’ metaphysics.

But let us pursue Prins’s insight that metre might attain its force over our cadences, might shape the intermingling of what I have called vocal attitudes and vocal lines, by becoming a kind of prosthesis. What kind of prosthetic might Charles Olson’s typewriter constitute? In ‘Projective Verse’ he argues that ‘we have suffered from [...] manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice, a removal by one, by two removes from its place of origin and its destination’. And yet, far from returning poetry straightforwardly ‘to the voice’, whatever that would mean, Olson invokes the technology of typescript – notably the invention of the typewriter and the possibilities of the tabular page.

It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work.

(p. 245)

Insofar as the typewriter serves as ‘the personal and instantaneous recorder of the poet’s work’, it comes to resemble a gramophone, and indeed to accord with what Steven Connor has, building on the work of Friedrich Kittler, called a ‘gramophonic’ logic, whereby text – here
not simply the linear accumulation of words, but the tabular organisation of typescript – is the ‘record’ of voice. The analogy between versification and recording technology receives explicit articulation when Gerard Manley Hopkins explains his recourse to diacritics. It is not simply that his poems should be read not ‘with the eyes, but with your ears, as if the paper were declaiming it at you’, as he had written to Robert Bridges in 1878 about ‘The Loss of the Eurydice’; years later he would say to his brother Everard that, ‘with the aid of a phonograph each phrase could be fixed and learnt by heart like a song’. The phonograph also offers, Hopkins suggests, the possibility of belatedly creating a tradition of verse recitation: ‘the phonograph may give us [this tradition], but hitherto there could be no record of fine spoken utterance’ (p. 221).

‘Song’ is a strange analogy for Hopkins to choose: not so much because songs diverge from one performance to another, even when pitch and rhythm are fixed, but because he should not have pursued any analogy between poetic text and musical score, and hence between the different models of interpretation employed by musician and reader. This oversight remains even in Olson’s own invocation of the typewriter as musical ‘stave’. Beyond this, both share a somewhat paradoxical understanding of poetry’s vocal ‘origin’. We have already seen that Hopkins has figured an originary voice as ‘the cry within’, far removed from the contours of speechsound; similarly, Olson’s invocation of the throat as ‘that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all acts spring,’ seems to posit voice as stable materiality: the site of a movedness generated by the poet’s ‘breath’.

However, we should also notice that voice, for Olson, is not only ‘origin’: it is also ‘destination’ – to adopt Garrett Stewart’s phrase, voice is ‘sounding board rather than source’. Below we will see how this can help recalibrate our understanding of Hopkinsian ‘sprung rhythm’; for now let us recall Jaap Blonk’s Fonetische Études, briefly discussed in chapter 1. These études are not just notations of phonemes using the IPA script; arranged into visual scores which evoke a shape of contours, the phonetic étude reaches beyond the syllabic unit. Within its visual patterns the IPA script ceases to be merely imitative of the sounds required and comes to exact alternative forms of correspondence between visual text and vocal performance. Blonk’s use of an ostensibly symbolic rather than
alphabetic script for notating phonemes appears to promise a more
direct denotation, not just of verbal sound but also of the geography
(geo-logy? geo-phony?) of mouth and larynx. The promised literal-
ism of their relation to sound is countermanded by its visual liter-
alism, as it offers up both homologies and discrepancies between
visual-spatial and sonorous-temporal movements. This overlaps
strikingly with the spatial analogy of Olson’s ‘composition by field’.
For the Olsonian ‘stave’ also will chart the dynamics of the voice
through visual forms of interaction between elements that are irre-
ducible back into the correspondence of voice and typescript. What
starts apparently as a transcription of voice becomes a generation of
voicings – a destination transfigured from any ‘source’.

In chapter 2 we saw an account of language-as-prosthesis dis-
cussed for which ‘language’s first reference is made to a body, a non-
originary and divided body’. Wills’s understanding of language as
relation to the world of bodies (both those of the speaker and those
named by the speaker), with language and body standing in binary
opposition to one another, risks losing sight of its inhabitation in
the world – that language adjoins body only insofar as it sounds
from out of a body, bears bodily inscription. In this respect we might
see Blonk’s use of symbols rather than alphabetic script to imply
reference not to bodies in the world, but to the body from which
voice issues – language not as naming but as arising from out of a
body. However, as the IPA symbols attain bodies of their own, cast off
their transparency to become visual performances, we find a more
complex temporality of script come into focus, which serves also to
recast voice’s ‘body’. Indeed, here we could remember Chopin’s own
microphone-prosthesis, which make perceptible not just spatial but
also temporal displacements within the prosthetic voice: most clearly
in the performances juxtaposing live and recorded voices, splicing
them together, subjecting both to further distortions. In each case,
we cannot set up a schism between language and world because the
linguistic is never extracted from its worldliness.

And here again, Olson’s open field poetics, Blonk’s and Chopin’s
sound poems, have been anticipated by ‘The Triple Fool’. We have
already noted the shift from a conception of metre as fetter to
one of metre as release; coinciding with this is an analogous shift
that concerns the relation between voice and text more broadly
(something which immediately brings one to wonder, as Prins does,
whether metre is therefore necessarily ‘textual’). Whereas the initial account of ‘fettering’ grief implies the transcription of voice into text, a ‘gramophonic’ logic, the poem then describes how this text subsequently moves outwards to engender plural voicings: voice as destination, not origin, as implicitly and constitutively plural, even in singular, concrete performance.

At this juncture we might return to Stewart’s insight: voice as sounding-board rather than source. However, I would propose taking it in a very different direction to Stewart himself, as he restricts his analysis to the play of phonemes, to the fact ‘the phonemic will not stay put within the morphemes apparently assigned by script’ (pp. 4–5). For, I would suggest, it is precisely this reduction of vocal sound to the individual segment, and with it of linguistic meaning to the individual referent, that is at issue. There is no little irony that this sanitisation of voice from ‘metaphysics’ should prove so reliant on the pseudo-Platonism of a hypostatised linguistic unit. Just as Agamben, seeing voice resist its determination either as sound or sense, phone or gramma, posited a ‘negative ontological foundation’, Stewart aims to salvage voice from metaphysics by attending to ‘acoustic (though not vocal) signifiers’ (p. 28), by attending to the non-coincidence of phonemic matter with morphemic construction of meaning. The hypostasis of the both sound and meaning as (phonemic, morphemic) unit leads ineluctably to a model of voice as negativity: ‘the lexical codes getting jammed in the message... a semantic dissonance, a disturbance in the whole sequence of signification’ (p. 5). Voice is understood as resistance to a certain conceptual framework because it resists the determinations imposed upon it by this framework; that the framework itself might be called into question is not even mooted as a possibility.

My suggestion, by contrast, is that we listen out for higher-level rhythmic contours, the so-called suprasegmentals or non-segmentals. This is easier said than done: that prosody, intonation and phrasing should be grasped negatively in terms of the segment finds an analogue in this suggestion that the value of voice is purely negative. The bias in favour of ‘semantic dissonance’ and the conception of voice as phoneme go hand in hand, hence the importance of attending to intonation and phrasing as those moments when voice, conditioning linguistic meaning, exacts a far more capacious understanding of how language means, along the lines of what Émile Benveniste
Getting the Measure of Voice

has termed *le sémantique*. That the physical production of sound should have become phonetic in the first place becomes increasingly mystifying. We need to attend to plural contours and inflections, interpretative cues, choices, double-binds; both at the broadest level to make sense of the breadth of vocal-verbal meaning, but more narrowly to describe the cognitive-somatic mechanics of the ‘mute polyphony’ of poetry’s measuring of voice.

§

Let us imagine what a tentative pre-theory of this poetic ‘measure’ might look like. It would start from the suprasegmental, that is, from the contour instead of units of vowel, consonant, syllable or linguistic foot (i.e. number of unstressed syllables surrounding a stress; whether ‘feet’ in the sense of trochees, iambics, dactyls, etc., are germane to English versification is quite another question). It is from this basis that we would understand poetry’s own ‘segmentation’: not the accumulation of individual segments into higher-level patterns, but rather means of cutting against contour and cadence. This involves the depersonalisation of prosody: whereas pragmatic accounts of intonation and prosody understand these phenomena functionally, in terms of communication (notably a means of disambiguation), ‘measure’ would endow these contours with an agency in excess of subjective intention, be it through textual or mechanical inflections on our voicing, through the imposition of ‘isochrony’ (the equal timing of feet in accentual metres, or syllables in syllabic ones, perceptually if not objectively), or the establishment of a prosodic repertoire that shapes the way in which a poem voices itself, gives itself to be voiced. ‘Poetic’ measure would in this respect indicate that even in the context of the pragmatics of verbal communication, our cadences are never wholly our own. ‘Depersonalisation’ implies that the starting point is ‘the person’; in the following it will often seem that it is the ‘personal’, by contrast, which is secondary when linguistic self-articulation is concerned. This is crucial if we are to follow the second understanding of measure, through which we attempt to measure *ourselves*. Yet it is not a pre-theory we are after: a mode of listening, rather. Let us prick up our ears.

Hopkins famously told Robert Bridges that ‘sprung rhythm’ offered ‘incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm – that is rhythm’s self – and naturalness of expression’. To speak of ‘rhythm’s self’ is
fascinating; whilst Hopkins presumably means simply ‘the essence’ of rhythm, by implicitly attributing selfhood to rhythm he is also suggesting an agency that belongs to rhythm and not expression, a prosodic animation in excess of the inflections and contours of spoken utterance. This is worth bearing in mind when we confront the perennial paradox that, however much the avowed motivation of ‘sprung rhythm’ was to return verse language to the rhythms of ‘actual speech’, Hopkins was acutely aware that few would have any sense of how to scan it (and not just among his contemporaries – this is something almost a century of scholarship has done little to abate). Indeed, as it is customary to remark, however much his diacritical marks – ‘so much needed and yet so objectionable’, as he admitted (p. 225) – might have been proffered as means of guiding performance and signalling sprung rhythm’s commitment to speech stress rather than to the metrical frameworks of what he calls ‘running rhythm’ (foot metrics), they ineluctably end up not stabilising pronunciation but leading to a proliferation of possible voicings. This has been taken to show up the flaws of a ‘performative’ approach to Hopkins’s verse, which wishes to insist that ‘the signs for meter are guides to pronunciation, and so decoding those signs necessarily leads to a “right” reading, despite the fact that very few readers tend to agree on how to read these signs.’

I’m not sure that a focus on the generation of voicing in performance need entail the positivistic claim of a single ‘right’ performance: the marks might ‘guide’ a reading without being prescriptive to that degree. One does not need to posit a single hypostasised performance to suggest that the poetry’s diverse prosodic effects are predicated on the possibility of performance. A ‘guide’, after all, is hardly a command.

A more intriguing question is why this commitment to speech stress should embroil Hopkins in further systems of writing. Might we not agree with Michael Sprinker that Hopkins’s employment of diacritics is indicative of the supplementarity inherent in all writing, and the ensuing impossibility of positing an originary voice, be it as pure anteriority or just as ‘natural’ spoken expression? ‘Attempting to recapture the presence of spoken language, Hopkins is compelled to proliferate systems of writing. What he achieves is not the representation of spoken language, but the production of a text in the rigorous though radically unstable conception given that term by Derrida.’ Sprinker here summons up Derrida’s observation about
Artaud: ‘Having always preferred the shout [cri] to the text, Artaud now attempts to elaborate a rigorous textuality of shouts’. This would bear out also what we saw with Blonk’s Fonetische Etudes, where both the symbolic notation and visual patterning of supposedly non-linguistic sound interrupt the logic of transcription they might initially be expected to support; and something similar is at work in Henri Chopin’s voice recordings, where the inscriptions become not simply acoustic but textual. Cédric Jamet has remarked how repetition in Le Corpsbis both ‘reproduces sameness’ and ‘propels an ongoing, continuous differentiation of the sounds’.

He concludes: ‘Repetition appears to cause a constant play between precipitation and dissolution, suggesting a “becoming language” amidst the sounds’ (p. 139), leaving us with a ‘simultaneously pre-linguistic and post-verbal body’ (p. 141). Sprung rhythm might not, on the face of it, have much in common with the Theatre of Cruelty, let alone with poésie sonore, but in each case the commitment to voice has led not to the disappearance of text but to its reconfiguration. When Hopkins in his letter to Everard invokes the phonograph as a means of disseminating his poetry instead of the page, what else is he doing but replacing one material inscription – the written word – with another – soundwaves on a wax cylinder? And what is Chopin doing other than employing more recent technologies of inscription (notably magnetic tape) in order to generate further configurations of voice?

Hopkins’s ‘rigorous textuality’, however, is not restricted to his use of diacritical marks, nor to ‘sprung rhythm itself’ (which, Martin rightly remarks, is less a single system of precepts which can be formalised than ‘a theory in development’, conceived and reconceived throughout his life); it also includes the highly sophisticated metrical patterning through which his texts voice themselves, and make their multiple, mutually excluding demands on our own readerly voices. As Clive Scott has noted, Hopkins, ‘however much he may seem to disparage foot-scansion by arbitrarily selecting a falling rhythm for sprung rhythm, obviously puts much store by metre, and a metre governed by the foot rather than by stress alone’. In other words, it is the tense co-existence of foot metrics and speech-stress rhythms, the shift away from speech as well as the apparent attempt to construct a versification that would mimic ‘natural’ expression, that characterises his singular prosodical palette. Moreover, Hopkins’s
employment of his accentual marks is far from consistent, and on many occasions can hardly be said to mimic prose rhythm. The late sonnet ‘Spelt from Sybil’s Leaves’, for instance (which dates from 1884–86, so at least seven years after his letter to Bridges), specifies 57 of 112 beats in the poem, often directly against ‘natural’ speech stress; and in ‘The Wood-lark’ we find divergent uses of accentual marks only a few lines apart. The accent on line 2, ‘What can thát be’, syncopates against the metre, whereas the marks during the central passage (‘And crúsh-sílk póppies aflásh, / The blóod-gúsh bláde-gásh / Fláme-rásh rúdréd’) insist on lexical stress. Indeed, if these latter intensify the rhythmic effect of the paratactic accumulation of stresses, the effect is already present without the accents (editions before MacKenzie’s 1990 Complete Poetical Works did not include them); the accent on ‘thát’, by contrast, emphasises the indexical and performs a disambiguating role on our intonation. In each case, we find the so-called ‘naturalness of expression’ pushed to such a degree of markedness that it is left denatured – jutting out against the contours of speechsound we come to hear ‘rhythm’s self’. Rather than trying to recreate speech rhythms (a shared assumption which in the ‘sprung rhythm’ debate has led to so much spilt ink), Hopkins is using speech as a starting point from which to open out onto his extraordinary – and extraordinarily multidirectional – rhythmic performance. Diacritical marks offer one more tool in a verse repertoire by which Hopkins will manipulate and dynamise his vocal-verbal medium: what I have been calling its ‘work of animation’.

And in this regard it is crucial that Hopkins has in mind a source other than ‘natural’ speech – a source that, we have already seen, is itself bound up in the constitutive ecstasis of voice: the woodlark’s ‘cry within’. One might, in this regard, think of his evocation of the windhover’s ‘riding / Of the rólling level úndernéath him steady aír’. Prosodically this reads as metrical as well as performative prescription, conforming to the pattern of alternating ‘paeons’ and ‘trochees’ that would conform, give or take, to the falling ‘paeonic rhym [sic], sprung and outriding’ that Hopkins, in the earliest manuscript copy, had specified ‘The Windhover’ was to assume (facsimile included in MacKenzie, p. 145). We might also consider it an imitation of the kestrel’s flight, both through its semantic emphasis and its rhythmic push and pull, to graft as it were its extralinguistic movements onto his vocal-verbal medium. It has been suggested, even,
that it is mimetic at one further level: James Wimsatt has argued that the divergence here of Hopkins's sprung rhythm from a prose rendering makes speech sound function ‘as an opaque icon, immediately expressive of the pertinent emotion, in this case, awe’. The danger in such a reading is that it immediately posits abstractions behind language, and so imposes conceptual stasis on the dynamism of Hopkins's prosody; as can be seen in the desire to identify a single emotion, rather than, say, the movement and comparative indetermination of affect, and by the fact that ‘awe’ itself takes the form of an abstract noun. Joshua King describes the experience of reading Hopkins thus – ‘Asked to press boulder against boulder of stress or skim over wide, unstressed stretches, the anticipated performer of a sprung poem must reconcile strength and length by emphasizing, resting, and gathering pace’. Each new performance must attune itself to these vectors of intensity, acceleration, syncopation, condensation. The conflicting constraints of scansion marks, foot metrics, and ‘sprung’ rhythm’s accentual patterning, the pitting against one another of lexical stress and intonation contours, serve to fetter speechsound, but thereby to make perceptible counterrhythms that resist any determinate relation to the fetters themselves. But also – and King's continual focus on the demands being made on the reader-performer is crucial here – it is an animation that figures itself through its continual demands to be voiced, but to demand a voicing whose polyphony exceeds any single performance.

If there is a homology to be found between the windhover's flight and The Windhover's prosody, it lies, I would suggest, in Hopkins's attempt to grasp their shared principle of animation – what in ‘The Woodlark’ was figured as ‘the cry within’. The dynamics of speechsound – lexical stress, intonation contour – are further dynamised by the segmentation of verse language; yet throughout there is an anterior dynamis at issue. This leads Hopkins not into imitation of the bird’s ‘gliding’ but rather inwards: in place of extralinguistic movement evoked through language, these movements are activated in language as the basis for a concerted reflection on the movedness of language. The anterior animation of language is registered through the dynamism of the poem's prosody. Herein lies the significance of performance for ‘sprung rhythm’: not a ‘correct’ reading but rather the continual attempt to attend to its multidirectional thrust. ‘When the cry within / Says Go on then I go on’, says the woodlark:
animacy in question is both the impulse of such a ‘cry within’ and the plural ways in which one can subsequently ‘go on’. And here also, alongside the intersection of these two understandings of ‘animation’ we come to see the broadened conception of ‘measure’ at issue, one not unlike Hopkins’s understanding of inscape, and of poetry as ‘speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape’s sake’. On the one hand, ‘measure’ would describe the patterning through which Hopkins generates, fetters, releases, this animation of language (metre, but also motivic structure, recurrent prosodic clusters and vectors); on the other, this patterning, opening up homologies between linguistic segmentation and the opening of meaning as such, becomes the means through which we might measure ourselves.

In Hopkins’s measures we thus find a shift from the intonation contours of an individual’s utterance to ‘rhythm’s self'; it is by virtue of its depersonalisation of voice, its construction of an agency beyond speech, that it comes to gauge the ‘between’ – a ‘between’ which will remind us the degrees to which our cadences are, even in a pragmatic, communicative context, never wholly our own. But these ‘measures’ also function to make cohere the poem as a work of verbal art – something which attains that much greater significance in a period since ‘free verse’, where the measure needs in each case to be established by the poem itself. In order to understand how poetry might constitute a ‘measure’ to gauge our own ‘between’, we need then to ask first – how does a poem cohere? Reading the work of John Wilkinson I have long had the intuition of prosodic vectors accumulating and combining over long stretches to attain a kind of structuring force. These vectors become ‘motivic’: both as motifs that refer back to one another, and as the sense of indicating some kind of indeterminate ‘motive’, in a way which might be likened to Kant’s famous description of the object of a judgement of taste as exhibiting ‘purposiveness’ without the presentation of any particular ‘purpose’. What would it mean to understand these motifs as ‘measures’? Above we saw Prins, tacitly following Wimsatt and Beardsley, describe metre as an ‘abstraction’; what if we displace the question from the opposite of concrete and abstract to reflect on the impersonal force of cadence? If these vectors, worked from out of the verbal material of the individual poem, do not furnish an abstract template exactly, then perhaps they attain nevertheless an impersonal agency which will subsequently segment and dynamise
this material: voice, made ‘other’ to itself, opening up further possibilities for inflection. This becoming-other, I will suggest, is crucial to the way in which Wilkinson’s measures function as a gauging of ‘voice’ – not just of speechsound, but of its entire metonymic range. For Wilkinson, as we shall see, what is at stake in this measuring of individual prosodic vectors is a mnemonics through which disparate focalisations, tropic turns, registers, will synthesise momentarily, offering the possibility of motivic structure as well as texture; as the embodiment of this synthetic vantage point. The poem’s voicing thus becomes the locus for a far more concerted reflection on the linguistic movements by which these tropes, foci, registers, can cohere into singular configuration. But it is not only a question of the coherence of the poem: the particular poem I will look at aims to grasp and contest the coherence of a different kind of movement – the movement of petrofinancial capital.

‘Like Substances’, the opening poem to Wilkinson’s 2008 collection *Down to Earth*, works a series of prosodic vectors until through their recurrence they graduate from undersong, to patterned tremor, to nodes of coherence. Alongside this, the poem strives to chart the protean displacements of capital, from the tar sands of Alberta and the US automobile industry, to fragments of life on roadsides and at gas stations (it is not for nothing that the collection is described on its dust jacket as a ‘road poem of the American mid-West’). Here we find that the poem’s ‘measure’ is a form of ‘measuring’, its metric deployed for a reflection on the petrofinancial complex definitive of early twenty-first century life (this was a collection put together in the years before the 2008 crash, and published two months after the fall of Lehman Brothers).

The first stanzas run:

Of its greatness the sun sups of gasoline,
smacking forecourts, licking hearts
lubed with sealed-in blood—break them
methodically, remove while they yet pump,

for each component’s certain to outdo
more cautious visions, to exceed or floor
graphs by actuaries: out crawl carers
surreptitiously, welling from their open pit.32
Of earlier work by Wilkinson, Simon Jarvis has described encountering a prosodics ‘at once too rhythmically aberrant to produce anything like a metrical set, and also too insistently recurrent, too preoccupied with the fine collisions of repetition and difference to languish into inert arrhythmia’. ‘Like Substances’, by contrast, does offer determinate prosodic motifs and intonational clusters which, even if not providing a ‘metrical set’ exactly, then nevertheless offer up a broader rhythmic palette: notably, the four syllable intonational cluster ‘Of its greatness’, ‘-ness the sun sups’, ‘sups of gasol[ine]’, ‘smacking forecourts’, ‘licking hearts’, ‘surreptitious’, which will then find echoes in ‘a collector’ (l. 12), ‘filling quotas’ (l. 18), ‘not a baton’s’ (l. 24), and the five/six syllable ‘lubed with sealed-in blood’ (l. 3), ‘compress to utmost drops’ (l. 21). ‘Welling from their open pit’ (l. 8) seems to draw these two motifs together, just as it provides the cadence for this opening tableau where syntactic unit, prosodic unit and image converge. This, I feel, differs from the gravitation, in lines 5 and 6, towards a ‘pentameter’ line, insofar as the latter appeals to a pre-established contour (and indeed, given the fate of the pentameter over the last century, ineluctably enters a logic of citation). And yet, certain effects of the invoked pentameter line will remain when these vectors start to guide our ears and eyes: for instance, as they suggest a voicing that diverges from speech stress (e.g. ‘remove while they yet pump’, which fits both the pentameter line and the second of the rhythmic clusters noted), but by so doing release alternative energies which will subsequently syncopate against this metric, even if it does not gravitate back to ‘speech stress’ exactly (for instance the prosodic slackness of ‘actuaries’ leading the density of surrounding stress to buckle in on itself). We will come to hear echoes in similar but not identical phrases (notably the line ‘in her subservience, drying offerings racked on poles’, p. 5), and to sense extra impetus in another prosodic gesture characteristic of the poem, and of Wilkinson’s versification more generally: the accumulated sequences of strong stress (e.g. ‘sands crush’, ‘Down beats’, ‘kids sweat blood’; we might even hear the compound ‘sealed-in blood’ in this way). These vectors might arise as it were ‘organically’ out of the poem’s prosodic fabric, but as they attain motive force, so they establish their impersonal agency. This is measure less as abstraction from spoken rhythm than as the patterned embodiment of its ecstasis.
What I am listening out for here may be likened to what Ben Etherington, in what I expect will soon come to be seen as a watershed essay, has termed a ‘cellular scansion’, where individual prosodic-sonic clusters constitute ‘cells’ whose ‘component elements generate poetic tissue that, cumulatively, structures our experience’. Even as phrases diverge from their initial instances, they gesture back towards the cell; as such the cell becomes generative as it points towards these possible incarnations and modifications. Etherington’s account of such scansion comes out of an attempt to grasp the workings of a very particular rhythmic performance, that of Edward Brathwaite’s trilogy Rights of Passage (1967), and to understand this performance as embedded within the sociological complexities of the Caribbean poetic culture of the time. This would trouble any attempt to extract a method of scansion which one can subsequently apply to so different a poetics – and one with a markedly different relation to the history of English versification, the conceptualisations of foot metrics, and so forth. But there is, nevertheless, a distinct overlap between Etherington’s description of the functioning of the ‘cell’ in Rights of Passage and the different motifs I have tracked throughout ‘Like Substances’. Here too one’s sense of cadential coherence offsets the fragmentation at the level of focalisation – indeed, introduces sonic nodes of connection through which the poem can construct its ‘argument’ (in the broadest sense of that term, encompassing both narrative and critique) through its prosody, rather than translating argument into prosody.

So when ‘heart’ joins together these two rhythmic vectors, ‘licking hearts’ and ‘lubed with sealed-in blood’, its prosodic ligature also serves a metonymic chain the poem works throughout, binding this ‘pump’ of the human cardiovascular system (and oldfangled romantic trope) to the pumps of oil extraction and consumption, from the oil wells to the gas station. When at the end of the first section we read ‘Could ever air’s writ / attract Melaina to the forecourt left / dark for her form, heart she made pound’ (p. 3), the prosodic symmetry of the final line is set up by one of the motifs noted earlier: ‘Melaina, to the forecourt’ (I at least find that the possibility of prosodic echo guides my pronunciation of the name ‘Melaina’ towards diaeresis), and hears an echo in ‘for her form’ (strengthened by assonance) and ‘she made pound’. These, like Etherington’s cells, are not simply replications but generative half-echoes, its intertexture of similarity
and difference the singular prosodic experience out of which its argument will emerge.

At the end of ‘The Defeat of Artemis’, a long poem near the end of the collection, we start to hear these same motifs return (‘Glints of murmur caught’, ‘break through dazzling shifts’; ‘beneath moss, dappling cheeks’, ‘row of teats’, ‘squirm in light’ all shortened versions of the four-syllable contour clinched with ‘bellied limewood’), and then provide what reads like a gloss on the opening poem’s title:

 [...] If what’s substantial dies the death, what’s like substance is a different matter wholly, born of mien not means, like substance manifests itself, sow-like, bird-like, heart stung into its full breast—Great is Artemis:

 [...] (p. 65)

Shifting back from this gloss (which plays, as does the first poem, with the double meaning of ‘like substances’ – what is similar to substances, and entities that are in substance alike) to repeat once more the latter poem’s own leitmotif, ‘Great is Artemis’, the collection shows itself as a single, if fragmented and multidirectional, train of thought.37

§

What Etherington calls ‘cell’, I have thus far been describing in terms of ‘measure’; yet by ‘measure’ I wish to grasp not only its generative construction of the poem’s soundworld, but also something of the relation between an individual – and individuating – voice and the poem’s prosodic intertexture. How, for instance, should we hear the exclamation ‘oh no’ in the following, from the fourth and fifth stanzas of ‘Like Substances’?

Of its greatness the sun asks more to burn, yet more to evaporate: obedient, oh no wobbling, carers set to,
filling quotas in an immolation park, smirking by the lines.

Is this almost bathetic shift in diction an ironised interjection that corrects the previous description (not ‘obedient’ but ‘wobbling’), or an equally ironic, almost apostrophising ventriloquism (‘don’t wobble, will you’)? Not for the first time, we see that double figuring of voice, where ‘oh’, caught between interjection and apostrophe, becomes integral to the poem’s rhythmic dynamics – just as in Herder’s rendering of Philoctetes’ groans, as in the interruption effected by the exclamation ‘yes’ in Hardy’s ‘The Voice’, in Baudelaire’s shift to a vocative register, Celan’s turnings and pauses of breath. But what distinguishes Wilkinson here is the counterpointing of a concrete vocal utterance against the plural, impersonal ‘voice’ that the poem, through its prosodic measure, would establish. That is, in addition to its indeterminate pragmatics, which both conditions and withholds the speaking presence brought forth, ‘oh no’ at once gestures towards (oh no wobbling) and diverges from (oh no wobbling) the four-syllable vector outlined above. The indeterminacy in its figures of spoken utterance is displaced onto its relation to the poem’s measures as a whole.

Measure becomes the gauging of a ‘between’ which broaches, and separates, the embeddedness of individual within the all-encompassing movement of capital; it seeks to salvage something ‘human’ not crushed under the chain of production, consumption, and speculation (again, the metaphorics of ‘heart’ is crucial), but only on condition of decentring any single human perspective. This tension between decentring and the construction of ‘a voice’ brings us back, momentarily, to Olson’s poetics, where the artistic assertion of a sovereign (and unapologetically phallic) subject – ‘There it is, brothers, sitting there, for USE’ – is unsettled by the recognition that ‘the projective act, which is the artist’s act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man’.38 Voice serves, through its indeterminacy, as both the marker of an autonomous self, and the site of the permeability of this self – the awareness of other ‘dimensions’ to be gauged. For Wilkinson these dimensions are more immediately political, as the multidirectional measuring of voice becomes crucial to the kind of political thinking he wishes to set in motion. Yet this is a politics not afraid of its own dimensions: not simply in confronting
the protean movements of capital and its all too tangible human cost, but also as it works the delicate interplay between the articulation and decentring of a singular subject, and the mechanisms of its own virtuosity as both vehicle for its thinking and object of such thinking. Ultimately, this is what is at stake in the poem’s attempt to establish a vantage point at once synthetic and plural, in each case opening up a ‘between’ that can articulate different structural levels within petrofinancial capital: different human perspectives, but also tropic registers, vocal lines. The question is to establish coherence without imposing a determinate centre; this becomes a political as well as aesthetic imperative.

Against the potentially totalising formation of voice into a ‘measure’, the figuring of singular voice as interjection or apostrophe acts as counterweight. And we find something similar when apostrophe and interjection irrupt into Hopkins’s own measures – measures which, as we have already seen, aim to gauge, to measure, the ‘betweens’ of man and world, of worldly and divine, and indeed to do so by opening up another ‘between’: of the prosodic movedness of words and that dual animation by which we are moved to words, the animating breath of a speaker and the animating ‘cry within’. Hopkins’s address to the windhover is particularly thrilling precisely because, in its climactic exclamation ‘O my chevalier’, it becomes an address to what the windhover’s flight ultimately points to, but which also secures the homology between the movement of the bird’s flight and the poem’s prosodic movement: hence the poem’s subtitle, ‘To Christ our Lord’.

But, turning to this address, I would like to focus on a different ‘oh’, interjection rather than apostrophe, from the line ‘Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here / Buckle!’ The line is either a ‘scanner’s nightmare’, or delight, depending on temperament: any of nine syllables might take a stress. Yet one syllable which Hopkins’s scansion marks stipulate should not be stressed is ‘oh’, due to the slur onto ‘air’, indicating that it should be almost elided into the latter word – and this in spite of the comma between them, in spite of the shift in register, in deictics, grammar. The interjection returns us from the description to moment of utterance, figuring the sheer rapture of observing the bird’s flight, but we are told expressly that it must remain sotto voce. In order ‘to give due weight to one of those deictic words, so crucial to the realisation and actualisation of
moments of “inscape” in Hopkins’s work’, Clive Scott proposes that we stress ‘here’ at the end of the line (ibid.); yet the double accent on ‘plume’ (only made available in the 1990 MacKenzie edition, which postdates Scott’s scansion) would militate against this. The line stages its moment of utterance, and indeed through its accumulation of speech stress sets up nodes of ever increasing intensity, but these figures of utterance are smothered by the measure. But before we read into this an allegory of subjective self-abnegation through prosody, we should note a countermovement: namely, that the temporality of utterance, although overridden by the measure, is not thereby silenced, but is rather endowed with an aporetic weight. Its animating exclamation is generated through the prosody just as it refuses to be registered prosodically. Whereas, above, we spoke of a dialectic of constraint and excess, it now seems that the excess can no longer be restricted to the same plane as the metrical constraint that releases it. To gauge such excess we now, as it were, need to shift from x- to y-axis.

In this, Hopkins’s resembles another celebrated address to God:

O Lord, since you are outside time in eternity, are you unaware of the things that I tell you? Or do you see in time the things that occur in it? If you see them, why do I lay this lengthy record before you?40

So starts Augustine’s meditation on time in the *Confessions*. Trying to grasp what lies outside of time, he immediately has recourse to markers of deixis – the opening apostrophe, the rhetorical questions which demand its interlocutor’s presence, which perform a mind in the act of wavering, the self-referential ‘this lengthy record’: at once a scene of utterance and a scene of writing. This reflects the great temporal complexity of the *Confessions* as a whole, as a conversion narrative interspersing theological argument, sermons, prostrations before God, in each case modes of linguistic temporality. Indeed, the problem of eternity itself is framed as a linguistic problem. In the beginning was the Word; but what kind of word was it? God’s speech is the setting-into-motion of time, yet as it sounds to human ears its motion must be temporally bounded – ‘Did you speak as you did when your voice was heard in the clouds saying: *This is my beloved son*? At that time your voice sounded and then ceased. It was speech
with a beginning and an end’ (XI.6). But if this is the case, God exists in time after all. If this risks contravening his infinity, the question of how human words might articulate the divine risks overlooking human finitude. Throughout, one is struck by the predicament of Augustine trying to use his words and their peculiar temporality in order to address God from within time, to bring God’s eternal truth into time-bound human understanding. ‘You, lord and father, are in eternity; but I am torn apart in time’ (XI.29).41

‘Torn apart’: here Augustine characterises the interaction of recollection, attention, and anticipation which opens up time as the horizon for our finitude, what he calls a *distentio animi*, distension of the soul, in which our extendedness into time is thematised through the lexical field of *distendum* as the ‘distraction’ (and distractedness) which marks our everyday existence. In Gerard O’Daly’s summary, this is a model of ‘temporality as fragmentation and dispersal’.42 The challenge becomes one of how a time-bound thinking might overcome its inherent fragmentation; and here we should remember the broader ambiguity pervading Augustine’s thinking as to whether we ‘measure’ time or whether time itself provides the ‘measure’ for worldly duration.43 Can we, measuring time, come to grasp God’s eternal presence, even if by *via negativa*, or are we only able to describe time’s effects on our experience? Augustine’s chapter on time is known to metricians for its attempt to ‘measure’ time through reciting verse (the iambic *Deus creator omnium*): he asks whether we can say for certain that the long syllable is twice the length as the short one, or whether such isochrony is perceived only, necessarily bound up in both recollection of the previous syllable and anticipation of the next.44 Yet isochrony attains a wholly different temporal significance when Michel Deguy reflects on the temporality of French syllabic verse. Here, the equal weighting of the unvoiced syllable facilitates what Baudelaire, in a perhaps less straightforwardly theological bent, called ‘l’expansion des choses infinies’.45

Baudelaire’s figure takes a double genitive: both an expansion that belongs to what is infinite, and an expansion into the infinite; in another show of doublyness, the poem attempts less to grasp this expansion than to engender it, through its rhetorics of the infinite and by way of the prosodic expansions of Baudelaire’s versification. Metre, Deguy argues (*mesure* in French: measure), opens up a discrepancy between the counting of syllables in verse and the
weighting of syllables in speech, notably through the conventions of the aspirated \textit{e muet} and the breaking up of diphthongs into separate syllables through diaeresis. As such it ‘distends its sonorous elements and pauses, opens apart words, syllables, phonemes’.\textsuperscript{46} Not only does this set up the possibility of a syncopation between spoken stress and the metrical unit; it gives phenomenal weight to the ‘uncounted supplement which renders possible diction’s whole extension’ (p. 28). By invoking Derrida’s ‘supplement’, Deguy would indicate that at issue is not simply the opposition of ‘rhythm’ and ‘metre’, but the inflection of writing into speech rhythms. And the supplement inheres at a further level: the syllabic unit which introduces the principle of counting remains itself, strictly speaking, uncountable:

The pause, or blank […] inserts the uncounted supplement which renders possible all extending of diction, each reader being able to vary infinitesimally this gap; introduces the \textit{distentio animi}, or time, into the phonic substance of that metronome which constitutes a rhythmic phrase, or line of verse […] In the rhythmic cadence… the infinite takes measure. Verse is that unfolding in which the infinite takes on a finish and the finite infinitises. Verse is that with a metred limitation which is worked by distension, extensibility [\textit{Le vers est cette chose ayant sa limitation métrée qui est travaillé par la distension, l’extensibilité}] —expans-i-on de chose infinie.\textsuperscript{47} (p. 28)

The extensibility of language within metrical measurement constitutes a clash of two different temporalities: the measure is rent open by the poem’s rhythms, yet it is this same measure which had engendered the excess opened up; it is thus that the word, finite both in its reference and in its sounding, comes to gesture aporetically towards the infinite. Deguy too is attempting, in his attention to the counted but typically unvoiced syllables of the \textit{e muet} and diaeresis, to enact a shift from x- to y-axis.

Like we saw Agamben do in the opening chapter, Deguy posits an excess over the sound-sense dichotomy that opens up the possibility of this dichotomy; as with Agamben, this runs certain risks. Firstly, it seems that voice is being grasped not just through its resistance to a particular conceptual framework, but as this resistance. As such, the framework itself remains intact. Secondly, Deguy isolates
one particular form of linguistic time at the expense of a broader
rhythmic dynamics – he too shows a bias towards the linguistic and
phonological unit. What is most striking about Augustine’s chapter,
by contrast, is its continual recourse to the vocative.\textsuperscript{48} The constant
questioning of God is both a means of bringing God into time, and
bringing ourselves out of time. But this takes place, perhaps para-
doxically, through a saturation of the present. Again: ‘You, lord and
father, are in eternity; but I am torn apart in time’. The very gesture
of naming both insists on its condition of being so torn apart, and
aspires through its deictics to extend beyond this condition.

Or perhaps not so paradoxically. In \textit{De Trinitate} Augustine writes:

\begin{quote}
The Apostle says that perfection in this life is nothing other than
“forgetting things left behind and \textit{tending} toward those that are
in advance” by \textit{intentio}. That is, \textit{intention} is the surest way for he
who seeks, until we lay hold of that toward which we tend and
\textit{extend by extraction}.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

\textit{Intentio} offers a means of reaching beyond the \textit{distentio} that char-
acterises everyday temporality – not by taking us out of time,
but as temporal intensification and concentration. Similarly, he
writes in the \textit{Confessions}, it is a question of directing one’s mind
towards its objects ‘not distractedly but intently… not according
to \textit{distentio} but \textit{intentio}’ (\textit{non secundum distentionem, sed secundum
intentionem}; XI. 29).\textsuperscript{50} On Jean-Luc Marion’s gloss, it is a question
of how ‘the \textit{intentio} can be liberated from (or renounce) the distrac-
tion of the \textit{distentio}, which dissipates in the passing stream, all the
while remaining in temporality’.\textsuperscript{51} That is, \textit{intentio} is not atemporal,
but in its attentiveness it nevertheless exceeds the anticipatory-
recollective structure that regulates our habitual experience of time,
permits a different temporal attitude. Whereas our experience of
presence is always distentive, shaped by recollection and anticipa-
tion, true eternity for Augustine is characterised by never leaving
the ‘present’. In this respect Augustine’s own deictics might serve
as a kind of linguistic attitude for \textit{intention} – saturation in the dis-
tentive present as aporia for this presence. Marion thus concludes:
‘Common \textit{intentio} can turn us from \textit{distentio} toward \textit{extensio} and
convert temporality from one mode to the other, without ever
betraying it or its finitude’ (ibid.).
Without betraying our finitude: the *intentio* of Augustinian deixis is embodied not simply by attention to non-worldly things, but also by its verbal intensity. The suppression and reassertion of figures of voice – the vocative address, the intoning of metre – becomes a means of gauging the ‘between’ of divine and human, but also of two incompatible temporalities.\(^{52}\) In Augustine’s terms, *intentio* is only intensive by being first radically attentive. Just as for Wilkinson just as for Hopkins, the multidimensional figuring of voice – be it as the tension between metric and the contours of speech, or in the rhetorics of deixis – becomes the vehicle for a decentring of the individual perspective; its intensity articulates ipseity as ecstasis, conditioned and constituted by its ‘between’.

The same interaction of ec-static measure and figures of ipseity galvanises another of Hopkins’s addresses to God, the late sonnet ‘Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend’:

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,  
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost  
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust  
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,  
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes  
Now, leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again  
With pretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes  
Them; birds build – but not I build; no, but strain,  
Time’s eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.  
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.\(^{53}\)

Again I will focus first not on the apostrophic ‘O’ but the interjecting ‘Oh’, which, just as in ‘The Windhover’, is both surrounded by caesurae, and elided by the demands of the metrical frame into which it irrupts.\(^{54}\) Once again, the contradictory demands both for and against emphasis create a prosodic aporia within the metre, with the deictic figuring of voice set against measure; once again, it serves both to signal and galvanise the shift from an anthropocentric perspective to the decentring of the human within the divine that the poem would achieve, which transposes from its questions of theodicy (‘Why do sinners’ ways prosper?’) into a plea for grace. The coincidence of self-effacement and self-assertion is theologically crucial, as well as prosodically electrifying.
'Mine, O thou lord of life'. In such exclamations, the notion of relative stress seems too blunt a tool to make sense of the rhythmic density – and urgency – the lines set in motion. Yet scansion's attempt to disentangle intonational cues can also enlighten us on the specific vectors of this entanglement. To stress 'Mine' in place of 'O' would emphasise ipsiety ahead of apostrophic directedness; the parallel of 'Mine' and 'thou' creates the possibility of what Hopkins called 'counterpoint', that is, two co-existing metres; the alliteration of 'Lord' and 'Life' itself demands prosodic emphasis. But 'Mine', coming after 'I' and anticipating 'my',\textsuperscript{55} is the source of much of the address's precariousness – is this too egocentric to be a genuine plea for grace?\textsuperscript{56} The entanglement of \textit{intentio} and \textit{distentio} works the conflict of human and divine justice, the establishment of both human ipseity and a decentred cosmos. And maybe here we can hear metre open on to \textit{measure} – gauging the 'between' of divine and human as the space within which, as he puts it in 'As Kingfishers catch fire':

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Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; \textit{myself} it speaks and spells,
Crying \textit{Whát I dó is me: for that I came}.\textsuperscript{57}
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Voice, figure of human utterance, is transmuted into a figure for the effacement and decentring of a singular subject – but does so through the demands it makes on our voicing. We finally start to see that the convergence around a single, finite and overwhelmed vocal articulation of different speakers, vocal attitudes, vocal lines, mutually excluding voicings – that all this means that voice in poetry becomes a work of animation, comes to work at the animations it channels, only as we grasp it as the locus for an experience of linguistic \textit{time}. Can we grasp this linguistic time, beyond noting its ecstases, its decentrings, its constitutive multi-directionality? Or are we as yet able to do nothing more than pose the question?
Notes

Introduction


5. Given what we know about the compositional practices of poets in oral cultures, it seems anachronistic even to imagine some putative ‘voice of the poet’.

6. Interestingly, Yopie Prins in ‘Voice Inverse’ asks why ‘we insist on reading literally what the Victorians understood to be a metaphor?’ (‘Voice Inverse’, *Victorian Poetry* 42:1 (2004), pp. 43–59. p. 44), but neglects to say either exactly what ‘literally’ means, or what ‘the Victorians’ took voice to be a metaphor of.

7. In fact, Peter Elbow has parsed five different metaphorical deployments of voice: ‘(1) audible voice (the sounds in a text); (2) dramatic voice (the character or implied author in a text); (3) recognizable or distinctive voice; (4) voice with authority; (5) resonant voice or presence.’ Even ‘literal’ voice, which he describes as ‘physical’, is then complicated by its existing both inside and outside the body. ‘What do we mean when we talk about Voice in Texts?,’ in K.B. Yancey (ed.), *Voices on voice: Perspectives, definitions, inquiry* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1994), pp. 1–35, p. 2.


12. Vanessa Place and Ron Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms* (New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2009), pp. 13–58, p. 47. Similarly, Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, in their introduction to *Against Expression*, tell us: ‘Instead of the rhetoric of natural expression, individual style, or voice, the anthology sought impersonal procedure.’ Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), p. xliii. Here the interpretation of ‘voice’ seems quite consistent with T.S. Eliot’s distinction between ‘three voices of poetry’: ‘The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character’ (The Three Voices of Poetry’ (1949), in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1957), p. 96). Eliot’s elision of voice and speech at this juncture is all the more disturbing given the polyphonic texture of works like *The Waste Land* decades earlier.

13. Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse’ trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, in *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 44–45. Of Pushkin’s verse masterpiece, the fact that characters speak in ‘poetic images’ is ‘of secondary importance for the novel’; these images, far from being the ‘primary means of representation’ have become ‘the object of representation’: they indicate the way the individual characters express themselves, and thus conform to ‘the greatest novelistic images’ (p. 45). This focus on ‘images’ shows how Bakhtin thematises ‘voice’ in general: what a character says.


published, by Leonard Lawlor, also by Northwestern University Press, entitled *Voice and Phenomenon*. All citations are to this second translation, even if there remains the sense of a stable door being somewhat belatedly closed.

18. See the many instances of this in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s translation of *De la grammatologie* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). When Derrida says that ‘[…] le phonologisme épistémologique érigéant une science en patron suppose le phonologisme linguistique et métaphysique élévant la voix au-dessus de l’écriture […]’ (*De la grammatologie*, p. 151), Spivak translates: ‘the epistemological phonologism establishing a science as a master-model presupposes a linguistic and metaphysical phonologism that raises speech above writing’ (*Of Grammatology*, p. 103) – despite the fact that ‘phonologism’ would, precisely, be making phone and logos equivalent. And when he plays on the double meaning of entendre ‘C’est à partir de ce schéma qu’il faut entendre la voix’ (*de la Grammatologie* p. 236), Spivak translates: ‘One must understand speech in terms of this diagram’ (*Of Grammatology*, p. 166). This takes place during the preamble to Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, where the voice-speech crucial to the architectonics of *Grammatology*, and where voix is most consistently rendered as ‘speech’ (*Dès lors que la non-présence vient à être ressentie dans la voix elle-même… l’écriture est en quelque sorte fissurée dans sa valeur* = From the moment that non-presence comes to be felt within speech itself… writing is somehow fissured in its value (237/166); *La voix se donne toujours comme la meilleur expression de la liberté* = speech always presents itself as the best expression of liberty (239/168); *L’Essai sur l’origine des langues oppose la voix à l’écriture comme la présence à l’absence et la liberté à la servitude* = The Essay on the Origin of Languages opposes speech to writing as presence to absence and liberty to servitude (239/168).) Given the significance of voice, and notably non-verbal interjections, for Rousseau’s speculative history of origins, this dissolving of the distinction is particularly troubling.


22. The term in fact comes out of a positivist strain of American structural linguistics, and is coined by the phonologists Trager and Bloch in George L. Trager and Bernard Bloch, ‘The syllabic phonemes of English’, *Language* 17:3 (1941), pp. 223–46, p. 224. An alternative term is ‘non-segmentals’, which is even less specific.

23. To take two examples, each from hugely influential works a generation apart: David Crystal notes that the terms ‘non-segmental’ and ‘suprasegmental’ are ‘unfortunately negative in character’ (*The English Tone of Voice*; London: Edward Arnold, 1975; p. vii), and Anthony Fox argues
that ‘a simple dichotomy “segmental” vs. “suprasegmental” does not do justice to the richness of the phonological structure “above” the segment’ (Prosodic Features and Prosodic Structure; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; p. 2).


26. Nancy, ‘Vox Clamans in Deserto’, p. 245. This is a fascinating text, not least because the two voices seem more or less interchangeable in terms of the ‘content’ of their claims about voice, implying that these are voices rather than persons – precisely the claim Nancy wishes to make about voice as anterior to the determinations of speech, subject, etc.


34. Steven Connor, Beyond Words, p. 29.

35. This term has a series of different valences within different contexts, and to my knowledge is most prevalent in communications theory, where it describes time as a socio-cultural phenomenon that shapes communication but can also become the vehicle through which to communicate. My use of the term owes its occasional employment in phonology and musicology. For instance, it has been used to describe vowel grouping into more than one phoneme, as in A.C. Gimson, ‘Implications of the phonemic/chronemic grouping of English vowels’ (Acta Linguistica 5:1 (1945), pp. 94–100), and has been proposed as a semiotic approach to ‘different functions of musical time as sign’. N. Gligo, ‘Die Zeit also ein beitragendes Element zur Werkdetermination in der Neuen Musik: Ansatz zu einem Aspekt der musikalischen Chronemik’, International Journal of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music 28:1 (1997), pp. 19–36, p. 35. To my knowledge the term has not been used in poetics or literary criticism before.


38. Fox, Prosodic Features and Prosodic Structure, p. 363.


41. It will become increasingly clear as this book progresses that I do not consider ‘metaphysics’ a derogatory term.

1 A Natural Scale

2. 24 September, 1863, in Humphry House (ed.), *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 5. In this entry Hopkins speculates on various etymologies that might find their source in onomatopoeia before following various stages of association: for instance, ‘grief’ is related to ‘gruff’, ‘with a sound as of two things rubbing together’ (ibid.).
3. Johann Gottfried von Herder, ‘Treatise on the Origin of Language’, in *Philosophical Writings* trans. and ed. Michael Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 65–164, p. 82. Forster translates Besonnenheit as ‘awareness’, which, as he explains, is the condition of Besinnung (‘taking-awareness’), even if their grammatical forms would suggest otherwise. For the purposes of this chapter, I will retain the German term, in order to stress its belonging to the cognates of Sinn, which, like the English ‘sense’, has both a physical and ideal dimension: ‘sensation’ and ‘meaning’, as it were.
4. To make this point all the more forcefully, Herder’s epigraph comes from Cicero: ‘all words are signs for things’ (p. 65).
8. As a matter of fact, the diacritical marks are only first included in the 1990 MacKenzie edition.

9. The term is Pierre Schaeffer’s, borrowed from Pythagorean philosophy to describe a voice coming from an unidentifiable body (Traité des objets musicaux: essais interdisciplinaires; Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).

10. In Beyond Words (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), Steven Connor argues that ‘The voice is always a dream voice’ (p. 17). As a result, ‘there is no disembodied voice – no voice that does not have somebody, something of somebody’s body, in it. Yet, all too often, the voice is experienced as the more-than-body, as the body projected, perfected’ (ibid.). On this account, the ‘dream’ would lie both in the anthropomorphism of the bird’s voice and on the construction of a substitute voice in the sprung accenting and the demands the poem makes on being voiced by its reader.


12. Although, somewhat ironically, they are physically produced ‘below’ the segments: in the larynx and glottis, rather than pharynx and mouth. See Fox, Prosodic Features and Prosodic Structure, pp. 3–4.


14. Indeed, this is only the most recent of several attempts to grasp vocal organs in terms of musical instruments: in Ancient Greece the voice was likened to a flute, whilst Galen likened it to the pipes of an organ: not receiving air and then making sound out of the impulse of air, but rather producing sound through the production of air. See Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, Instruments and the Imagination (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 178–220.

15. Rameau’s Treatise on Harmony (trans. Philip Gossett (New York: Dover, 1971)) was first published in 1722, although he continued to revise the theory for the next thirty years, to assimilate advances in the physical sciences.

16. Ibid., pp. 152–53. Rameau, it should be noted, is far from the first to understand musical consonance in terms of mathematic ratio (the tradition dates back to Pythagoras, with contributions from Kepler and Descartes in the century preceding Rameau’s own intervention); he is the first, however, to provide a system of harmony with an implied fundamental bass, and the first to argue that melody is derived from harmony. Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz would do something similar in On the Sensations of Tone (1863).


18. Herder was basing his remarks on the brief discussion of this problem in the 1754 Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes.


20. Rousseau, ‘Essay on the Origin of Languages, In Which Melody and Musical Imitation are Treated’, The Collected Writings of Rousseau vol. 7,
trans. and ed. John T. Scott (Hanover New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1998), pp. 289–332, p. 294. However, one cannot reproach Herder too much for having overlooked this detail, seeing as the *Essai*, although dating from c.1755, was only published posthumously in 1781, almost a decade after Herder’s *Abhandlung*.


28. William Blake, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’, W.H. Stevenson ed., *The Poems of Blake* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 68. Or, in a different register, we might think of the various verbalisations of that vocal response to stimuli, the sneeze, ‘a-choo’, ‘a-tissue’, where the sounds are taken up into a naming of the very act they themselves are. Aristotle might deny that such responses to stimuli contain ‘imagination’, and therefore constitute voice at all (*De anima* II.8, 421a), but their verbal content suggests that so hard-and-fast a distinction will not hold.

29. I am grateful to Anne Stillman for enlivening me to this point.


31. David Appelbaum, *Voice* (Albany New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 103. It is a commonplace in books on voice to mention the formative intellectual significance of observing one’s own children’s vocal experiments; I have no children, so must make do on less first-hand experience than most. Perhaps I will have reason to revise my opinions if I do eventually spawn.


35. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 79. At this juncture, Kristeva is speaking specifically about the song, dance, and poetry which accompany sacrifice rituals. She then distinguishes the two: ‘Whereas sacrifice assigns jouissance its productive limit in the social and symbolic order, art specifies the means – the only means that jouissance harbors for infiltrating that order’ (ibid.).

38. In *Rhythmic Phrasing in English Verse* (London: Longman, 1992), Richard Cureton, borrowing from generativist music theory, separates out four levels of such phrasing: metre, grouping, prolongation, and theme.
39. This is in stark contrast to the ‘Fragments on Recent German Literature’ (1767–68), for which: ‘In the language of the poet, whether he articulates sensations or images, the thought enlivens the language, as the soul enlivens the body’ (*Herder: Philosophical Writings*, p. 48).
40. With this comes the tantalising suggestion that each language will produce a different conception of music, inextricable from the prosody of the vernacular. Could this be fleshed out speculatively to provide a distinction between ictus-heavy Beethoven and Brahms and timbre colourists Debussy and Ravel? See ‘Letter on French Music’: ‘every National Music derives its principal character from the language to which it belongs, and I should add that it is principally the prosody of the language that constitutes this character’ (*Letter on French Music*, pp. 141–174 in Scott ed. *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* vol. 7, p. 145).

42. Henri Chopin, *Poésie Sonore Internationale* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1979), p. 48. I say ‘mysterious’, as I have found no other source for this poem, or indeed poet.
43. Although here one is drawn to wonder whether we would follow the French nasalisation of ‘tin’ on the final line…
46. As he will be accosted moments later by a ventriloquised voice: *Vous êtes fou Monsieur Artaud, et la messe?* p. 23.
51. This is already apparent in Hopkins’ youthful diary entries, already cited.
53. Interestingly, when Liliane Weissberg characterises Herder’s opposition between the cry of sensation and the language of Besonnenheit as between ‘unarticulated’ and ‘articulated’ languages, she introduces a
terminology Herder himself only rarely employs, and yet in so doing she, perhaps unwittingly, places him within this longer philosophical tradition. Weissberg, ‘Language’s Wound: Herder, Philoctetes, and the Origin of Speech’, p. 575. Was Herder consciously drawing on this tradition? I couldn’t say, but there are indications that he might have been. For instance: ‘What is less writable than the unarticulated sounds of nature?’ (p. 72, my italics).

54. See Leach, Sung Birds, pp. 27–33.

55. Here one might think of the extraordinary lengths to which Olivier Messiaen went in order to transcribe birdsong and subsequently incorporate these lines into his works, as documented by his Traité de rythme, de couleur et d’ornithologie (Paris: Leduc, 7 vols, 1994–2001).

56. W.F. Jackson Knight, St Augustine’s De Musica: A Synopsis (London: The Orthological Institute, 1949), VI.7, pp. 96ff. Leach notes that Augustine and scholastic thought more broadly adhered to the Pythagorean ‘music of the spheres’, where the music of audible sounds was the lowest form, by virtue of its earthly provenance. Hence Augustine will see the foundation of music to lie in ‘judicial numbers’, which can never sound in mortal ears.

57. See Jackson Knight, St Augustine’s De Musica: A Synopsis, I.4, pp. 12–13.

58. This is not restricted to the mediaeval imaginary. The tradition of the mechanical bird dates back to the wooden Dove created by Archytas (428–327 BC), by way of Hero of Alexandria’s Pneumatica (1st century CE), to the the Canard digérant [digesting duck] of Jacques de Vaucanson in the 1730s. Of this latter, Hankins and Silverman note that the projects of physiological simulacrum and anatomical analysis coincide (Instruments and the Imagination, pp. 182–84). See also Wendy Beth Hyman “Mathematical experiments of long silver pipes”: The Renaissance Trope of the Mechanical Bird’, in Hyman ed., The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 145, 161, esp. pp. 147–48.

59. Leach, Sung Birds p. 48.


61. Renan, De l’origine du langage (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1864), p. 11. ‘Primitive language, if we could have access to it, would be exuberance itself’.

62. Cited in Leach, Sung Birds, p. 73. In an Appendix on p. 301 Leach provides a detailed comparison of Pliny’s and Aegidius’ accounts.


66. Hyman, “‘Mathematical experiments of long silver pipes’: The Renaissance Trope of the Mechanical Bird”, pp. 149, 152. Hyman also notes that the counterfeit subjectivity of the mechanical bird subsequently comes to be associated with female archetypes as a means of eroding women’s claims to subjectivity (cf. pp. 156–57).

67. Indeed, despite the fact that the first act was written in 1908–09, and the second and third acts in 1914, and in the intervening years Stravinsky had produced *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*, and thereby developed a signature ‘style’, the harmonic contrasts between characters remain more or less intact. I would like to thank Johanna Groot van Bluemink for drawing my attention to the relevance of Stravinsky’s opera for these questions.


69. The reliance of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of music deterritorializing the refrain on late-romantic ideology of music is quite remarkable – it is not for nothing that the central points of reference in *A Thousand Plateaus* are Robert Schumann, and Alban Berg’s Wozzeck.

70. Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 121–22. It would be fascinating, in this regard, to compare the soprano vocal part in *The Nightingale* to that in *Les Noces* (1923), and indeed to compare this to the female voices of the *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Sequenza III*.


72. A selection of Blonk’s études can be found on his website: http://www.jaapblonk.com/Pages/oldscores.html (last accessed 13 August, 2014). His performances of these études are, as of August 2014, available both on his website and at Penn Sound: http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Blonk.php.


75. pp. 73–4.

76. One reason that these lines are unfinished, one would surmise, is that Hopkins was searching for a /k/ consonant to alliterate with ‘cry’ with which to start the line, and follow the alliterative pattern /k/--/w/; /k/--/w/.

2 Vibration and Difference

2. See Mladen Dolar’s impeccable overview of these figures, in A Voice and Nothing More, pp. 165–88.
4. This premise is behind recent developments in controversial Voice Risk Analysis software, widely used at the time of writing not just by insurance firms when assessing claims, but also by various British local authorities for dealing with calls from benefits claimants, which purport to be able to determine the truthfulness of a claim based on fluctuations in the frequencies of speech imperceptible to the naked ear. However, if Anders Eriksson and Francisco Lacerda are to be believed, this is based on faulty science, with grave consequences for those denied insurance or social security as a result. ‘Charlatanry in forensic speech science: A problem to be taken seriously’, International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law, 14:2 (2007), pp. 169–193.
5. This then makes one wonder as to whether the monologues of Kafka’s other animals would be comprehensible to their human listeners.
7. Steven Connor, Beyond Words, p. 120.
9. I can imagine that, far from dissolved, such embarrassment would be only intensified for a poet reading their own work – where the ambiguity of the cadences’ provenance is even more muddied. The institution of poetry readings is one this book does not treat at any length, being more interested in when the person voicing the poem is not the poet, where voicing and audience are not so easily separable; yet its understanding of the textual generation of voice has been greatly influenced by works that do treat poetry readings in detail, notably Lesley Wheeler, Voicing American Poetry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), and Peter Middleton, Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).
10. Interestingly, the only occasion on which Derrida shows the writer in question actually employing this figure is in ‘Qual Quelle’ (Margins of Philosophy trans. Alan Bass; University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 273–306) – he imputes it to Rousseau and Husserl but in neither case shows them use it (and I haven’t been able to find any instances of their doing so). Joshua Kates notes Husserl’s own insistence that when he speaks of soliloquy he has both speech and writing in mind. Essential History, p. 274, n. 33.
12. *Poésie sonore internationale*, p. 41. ‘Enters the mouth’ can be taken quite literally: Chopin was not averse to swallowing a microphone in the service of his art.


17. Proust further aligns this phantom with a ‘photograph’: another recording device which brings us face to face with that same absence, that same death, which it claims to forestall.


21. I am indebted to Will Rossiter and Tom Roebuck for how I understand Hardy’s poem.


23. Derrida, ‘Dialangues: entretien avec Anne Berger’, p. 150. Ironically, it is Berger rather than Derrida who introduces the term ‘differential vibration’ into the dialogue: it is a phrase Derrida had used two years before in his *D’un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1983). That this phrase should immediately be drawn into a logic of citation and counter-citation seems most apt for the *partage* of voices that this interview outlines.

24. The translators’ introductions to *Grammatology* and *Speech and Phenomena* in fact seem more attached to the term than is Derrida himself.


slippage – this is the only time that Beckett feels moved to specify a time setting for a play: ‘a late evening in the future’ (p. 215; see Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 7).


34. In this regard we might heed Kates’s contention that Derrida never wholly overthrows a Husserlian account of language as expressing, and referring to, subjective intention: ‘Even at this stage... Derrida continues to respect Husserl’s views on linguistic signification. Not only does he treat the phoneme and grapheme as *idealities*, but they are examined with an eye to their *constitution*, as well as their functioning, *within transcendental-phenomenological consciousness* – as pure phenomenological appearances, in which the issue is the reference to the world they bear “in appearance,” not any actually worldliness, any genuine mundaneness, as such. And on this ground, and only on this ground, will Derrida finally assert the privilege within phenomenology of the “vocal” signifer or medium, of the phoneme or *phone* as such’ (*Essential History*, pp. 151–52).

35. It is here also that we can broach the question of the auditory play taking place in Derrida’s own writing – as exemplified by the confluence of *phonème* and *phénomène* in the passage cited above, or his homophonic *différance*. Although it is worth noting that at each instance this remains at the level of the ‘vocable’, of individual phonemic or morphemic units: it is the focus on the *unit* which I ultimately wish to call into question, because in this a particular model of *phone* has already been adopted without question.


39. Early in the dialogue Socrates had remarked in the background a chorus of cicadas (230c; p. 7), one element of many ways in which the setting of the dialogue is described in detail – something which, as many commentators have noted, sets the *Phaedrus* apart from other dialogues.


41. Derrida, *D’un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie*, p. 70.

42. Derrida, ‘Dialangues’, p. 146.

43. The following pages bear the marks of Heidegger’s discussions of the ‘sounding word’ throughout *On the Way to Language* trans. Peter Hertz with Joan
Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). However, as I have already treated this account at length elsewhere (Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics, esp. pp. 88–92), I will leave the Heideggerian influence implicit.

44. Steve Goodman, Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2009), p. 82. Goodman is taking his cue from Deleuze and Guattari’s account of virtuality.


46. Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language, p. 28. Barthes overtly references Kristeva as well as Benveniste, extrapolating from her account of genotext and phenotext to distinguish between geno-song, its physical genesis, where ‘melody really works at the language’ (p. 182), and to the pheno-voice, its coded structure. For now I leave aside Kristeva’s crucially gendered depiction of the chora.


51. Hence his fascination in the figure of John the Baptist’s voice calling out in the wilderness, heralding the coming of the son of God but incomprehensible to contemporary ears which hear nothing but noise.


53. The term ‘vocal folds’ replaced ‘vocal cords’ within physiological accounts of phonation in the early twentieth century (the first reference to the term I have found dates from 1907), yet the jury is still out as regards terminology. Philip Lieberman and Sheila Blumstein, for instance, argue that the sound-producing organs might look as though they are infolding, but they function much more in the manner of cords, precisely as Antoine Ferrein had suggested in 1741. Speech Physiology, Speech Perception, and Acoustic Phonetics (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 11.


57. Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 277.

58. Here Heidegger is playing, as Nietzsche did before him in the Genealogy of Morals, on how Schuld as ‘guilt’ arises from Schuld as ‘debt’ and ‘lack’.

59. Derrida, ‘Dialangues’, p. 150. We will approach this from a different angle in chapter four, looking at Rachel Blau duPlessis’s discussions of the muse-figure.
60. By the end of the speech, these dithyrambs will have graduated into ‘epic verse’ (241e; p. 22).
61. Cavarero, *For more than one voice*, p. 102.
64. This is a classic double-bind in lyric apostrophe more generally, as Jonathan Culler has noted discussing Lamartine’s delicious address, *Objets inanimés, avez-vous donc une âme?*—where it is the *donc* which becomes focus of the irony (Culler, ‘Apostrophe’, in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 135-54, p. 141).

3 Turnings of the Breath

3. By way of context, the previous ‘when’ had (unlike the first two) been placed in a stressed position (‘And when’), gesturing at increased metrical prominence for these structuring adverbs as the poem progresses.
6. *Das Fremde*, the foreign: a painfully charged term for Celan, as a survivor of the Shoah, writing in German, addressing, as a non-German but Germanophone Jew, a German audience that has recognised him as a major German poet.
8. This provides much of the force to Johnson’s focus on abortion, where the address to a child dead before birth undermines both apostrophe’s claim to animate, and this infantile linguistic stage which the unborn child will never reach.
12. I call this post-romantic given that it seems quite difficult to square with, *inter alia*, Wordsworth’s long reflection on what it means to ‘recollect’ such overflow, and what such recollection exacts of verse technique, as well as
the large majority of poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*. In the introduction to *The Lyric Theory Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins outline a model of ‘lyric reading’ in which the present dominance of ‘lyric’ as the preferred mode of poetry is anachronistically ‘projected’ back on to a tradition to which such models of lyric are alien. Maybe something similar could be said for the straw-mannish ‘romantic lyric’: that it is not a feature of lyrics written during Romanticism, but an invention of contemporary literary criticism and polemic, anachronistically grafted on to these romantic lyrics in reading?


18. This is in accordance with his notorious ‘death of art’ thesis, where the sensuous particularity the artworks gives way to supersensuous spirit.


20. L’art moderne a une tendance essentiellement démoniaque... Mais Théodore de Banville refuse de se pencher sur ces marécages de sang, sur ces abîmes de boue. Comme l’art antique, il n’exprime que ce qui est beau, joyeux, noble, grand, rythmique. Aussi, dans ses œuvres, vous n’entendrez pas les dissonances, les discordances des musiques du sabbat, non plus que les glapissements de l’ironie, cette vengeance du vaincu.


22. The model of lyric as ‘event’ has been given its most concerted elaboration by Jonathan Culler, and the following analysis is deeply indebted to Culler’s account. See ‘Why Lyric?’, *PMLA* 123:1 (Jan 2008), pp. 201–6.

23. ‘say it, beautiful witch, if you know’.

24. ‘On your island, O Venus, I found standing nothing but a symbolic corpse where my image hung... —Ah! Lord! give me the force and the courage to contemplate my heart and my body without disgust!’


28. ‘O pain! O pain! time is eating up life’.


31. cf. Jonathan Culler, ‘Why Lyric?’: ‘stress on the reconstruction of the dramatic situation deprives rhythm and sound patterning of any constitutive role (at best they reinforce or undercut meaning); it devalues intertextual relations, except when they can be assimilated to allusions made by the consciousness dramatized; and it ignores the characteristic extravagance of lyric, which frequently engages in speech acts without a real-world counterpart’ (p. 202).


33. ‘O you, be witness that I have done my job like a perfect chemist and a saintly soul. For from every thing I have extracted the essence, you gave me your mud and I turned it into gold.’


35. ‘O beauty, hard plague of souls, you want to!’

36. Claude Pichois thinks it impossible to tell (*Œuvres complètes*, p. 301), Léon Bopp suggests Marie Daubrun (*Psychologie des Fleurs du mal IV* (vol. 1) (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p. 174), others have found a ‘Marguerite Bellegarde’ in Baudelaire’s journals – the consensus view according to Jean-Michel Adam and Ute Heidmann (‘Entre recueil et intertextes : le poème. Autour de l’insertion de « Sonnet d’automne » dans *Les Fleurs du Mal* de 1861’, in *SEMEN: Revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours* 24 (2007), pp. 123–44, p. 134). Barbara Johnson remarks a similar search for the ‘Agathe’ of ‘Moesta et Errabunda’: ‘a painfully stark example of the inevitable circularity of biographical criticism’, she concludes (‘Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion, p. 30). Adam and Heidmann conclude that it is an intertextual reference to Margarete, using as circumstantial evidence that Gounod’s opera was first performed in Paris in 1859, the year of the sonnet’s composition (p. 135). Indeed, they suggest that the ‘Crime, horreur et folie!’ that starts the final tercet is a reference to Mephistopholes’ driving Margarete/Gretchen to drown her newborn child, and so is dependent entirely on extratextual allusion – despite the fact we are told that Cupid, in his hiding place, has just pulled back his fatal bow’ [*L’amour, dans sa guérite / Ténébreux, embusqué, bande son arc fatal*], which provides a ready explanation for this outburst.


39. Hamburger’s translation runs: ‘You prayer-, you blasphemy-, you / prayer-sharp knives / of my silence. // You my words being crippled / together with me, you / my hale ones. // And you: / you, you, you / my later or roses / daily worn true and / more true -: / How much, O how much / world. How many / paths. // You crutch, you wing. We -- // We shall sing the nursery rhyme, that one, / do you hear, that one / with the hu, with the man, with the human being, the one / with the scrub and with / the pair of eyes that lay ready there as / tear-upon- / tear’ (p. 187).

42. Celan, ‘Psalm’, p. 178. Hamburger’s translation: ‘A nothing / we were, are, shall / remain, flowering: / the nothing-, the / no one’s rose’.
46. ‘Water, so when will you rain?’
47. ‘Accursed being to whom, from the profoundest abyss to the heights of the heavens, nothing, except me, replies.’
48. ‘O worms, black companions with neither ear nor eye, see come to you a free and joyous dead man; living philosophers, sons of decay, pass through my ruin without remorse, and tell me if there remains any torture for this old soulless body and dead among the dead!’
50. ‘A flash… then night! Fugitive beauty whose gaze made me suddenly reborn, will I not see you again but in eternity? Elsewhere, far from here! too late! never, perhaps! For I don’t know where you flee, you don’t know where I go, O you who I would have loved, O you who knew it!’
51. Ross Chambers argues that ‘Un éclair… puis la nuit’ does not ‘record the shock itself, which is identified in the ellipsis as having occurred in the sonnet’s turn’ but rather constitutes a ‘retrospective, aftermath narrative of that undescribed shock’, a ‘mise en abyme of the poem’s narrative inadequacy and incompleteness’. ‘Heightening the Lowly (Baudelaire: Je n’ai pas oublié and À une passante)’, 19th Century French Studies 37/1–2 (2008), pp. 43–51, p. 49.
52. ‘Let us love gently. Cupid in his hiding-place, shadowy, lying in wait, extends his fatal bow. I know the mechanisms of his old arsenal: Crime, horror, and madness! O pale daisy! Like me are you not an autumnal sun, O my so white, O my so cold Daisy?’
53. See David Evans, Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 43. This is not the only time Baudelaire uses anaphora in order to propel an alternative metrical set: in ‘Que diras-tu ce soir, pauvre âme solitaire’, he asks his soul what it would say ‘À la très-belle, à la très-bonne, à la très-chère’, a syncopation highlighted by the way the poem’s two opening lines are organized around the medial caesura.
54. See Ong, Orality and Literacy, esp. pp. 60–62. Ong cites from extensive ethnographic research, from Ruth Finnegan, Jack Goody, Jeffrey Opland, and others, which demonstrates the notion of ‘verbatim’ memorisation is a construction of literate cultures, which conceive of a source text as composed in advance of performance, its stability as an entity secured by being written. Opland notes that on word-for-word terms, each performance of South African oral epic (one of the few remaining purely oral epics which can be studied up close) has at best a 60% accuracy rate, although in Somali oral epic, as studied by John William Johnson, verbatim memorisation is much more prevalent.
55. Such is the argument given by Williams in the introduction to his translation of Carmina Liber 3: The Third Book of Horace’s Odes (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 6–7. He situates this moment in the fourth and third centuries BCE for Greek poetry. The imaginative structure applies not only to the poems’ addresses, but also, in Horace’s odes at least, to the depiction of poetic utterance. Says Williams: Horace ‘represents himself as singing his poetry, often to the accompaniment of the lyric; this is a pure fiction, derived from the fact that the early Greek lyric poets whom he most immediately used as his models, like Sappho and Alcaeus, wrote their poetry for musical performance’ (p. 8). One might also think of Gregory Nagy’s account of Panhellenisation, which also serves to distance the poet from the ritual of performance. Nagy’s focus also is less on ritual than on the establishment of the poet-figure: ‘Once the factor of performance slips out of the poet’s control, even if the performers have a tradition of what to say about the poet as a composer, nevertheless, the poet becomes a myth; more accurately, the poet becomes part of a myth, and the mythmaking structure appropriates his identity’ (Pindar’s Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990), p. 433).


4 ‘The Multitudinous Tongue’

2. In its registering a shift from the a political and legal system, but also ethics of honour and structures for social interaction, based around family to one based around the state, Coriolanus fits the description given by Hegel of Antigone in the Phenomenology of Spirit trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 284–94.
4. ‘Counting’ is in fact crucial to Rancière’s argument: ‘logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the account that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signalling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt’ (pp. 22–23). Here Rancière plays on the semantics of the French verb compter: not only in the sense of being able to give an account of oneself, but also in the sense of being something that counts, and is taken to count: ‘Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account’ (p. 27). This also retains the post-history of the Greek logos, as language and as a logic which ‘counts’ in terms of equivalences, such that each body is of equal value to any other.


9. ibid., p. 37. Although one can see the link being made in the following discussion of the ‘literariness’ of politics: ‘Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognise their images. They reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction, and submission. Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his ‘natural’ purpose by the power of words. This literarity is at once the condition and the effect of the circulation of ‘actual’ literary locutions.’ (p. 39).

10. I am grateful to Krzysztof Ziarek for formulating this distinction – albeit in relation to Heidegger rather than to Rancière.


12. Rancière is hardly alone in this. See Carla Kaplan’s description of a ‘feminist politics of voice’: ‘Recognizing the numerous mechanisms that either deny voice to women or render their discourse meaningless, a feminist politics of voice often aims to rescue what has been silenced or disregarded’ (Kaplan, The Erotics of Talk: Women’s Writing and Feminist Paradigms; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; p. 12). So voice is equated with ‘discourse’, but the auditory trope of being ‘silenced’ is apparently interchangeable with the visual one of being ‘disregarded’. Kaplan’s counterproposal is an ‘erotics of talk’ which now incorporates audition into the metonymy of voice as speech: ‘the search not for a
voice, but for a listener capable of hearing that voice and responding appropriately to it’ (p. 15).


15. Perhaps a reason for the divergence of Glissant’s account to that of Rancière lies in its historical moment – not simply given the fraught relation Glissant’s generation had with *négritude*, but also with his attempt to establish a myth of creolization as counter-colonialism in Martinique, an island which remains to this day a *département* of France and would never know decolonisation.


18. To a degree. Dante does not extend such magnanimity to the Romans, who are possessed not of a ‘Vulgar Tongue’ but rather a ‘hideous jargon, [...] the ugliest of all the Italian dialects’. He continues: ‘nor is this surprising, since they appear in their morals also, and in the depravity of their customs, to stink worse than all the rest’. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* trans. A.G. Ferrers Howell (London: Kegan Paul, 1890), p. 38.


20. James Kelman, *How Late it was, how late* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 160. The word ‘cunt’ drew particular attention, yet in Sammy’s idiolect, the word does not necessarily indicate the intention to offend, as when he says, during an interior monologue, ‘He had aye been a bit stupit. And there’s nay cunt to blame for that except yerself’ (p. 15).


25. Johnson, in fact, started recording and performing these poems with a reggae backing band in the late 1970s.

26. Cited in ‘In his own words: An interview with Theo Tait’, The Guardian Review, 12 April 2008, p. 12. hooks also speaks of being asked, during Creative Writing classes at university, to employ her ‘authentic voice’, something not asked of white students. ‘Such comments seemed to mask racial biases about what my authentic voice would or should be,’ she observes (Talking Back, p. 11).


33. There is a certain overlap here with Judith Butler’s worry that the fragmentation of selfhood that is identified with the critique of the subject conflicts with emancipatory politics, which not only posits ‘the normative model of an integrated and unified self’, but aspires to achieve such selfhood for those denied it by oppression. This, as Butler notes, is closely related to the problem of a female ‘identity’, and whether such an identity is required if only strategically. ‘Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse’, in Linda Nicholson (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 324–40, p. 328. Or as she puts it in Gender Trouble: ‘Apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject ... there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term women denotes a common identity’. Gender Trouble: Feminism: and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 6.

34. However, Blau duPlessis goes further to suggest that the feminisation of the Muse serves to neutralise a male poet’s effeminacy in being possessed, and dispossessed, by logos, as logos is regendered and domesticated within the poem’s figuring of its own inspiration: ‘Muses are vibrant, but mainly silent, or gnomic; unsophisticated, yet unconsciously creative or ethical; desirable, yet appropriated; givers, but not owners’ (p. 35).


37. Bonney provides a list of ‘Selected Resources’. The Commons, p. 79.


Notes

45. Whether ‘the Negro folk-song’ would have answered to Schiller’s own aesthetic taste is neither here nor there, nor the fact that each faculty for judging beauty is necessarily determined by historical circumstance and thus possessed of blindspots and complicit in subjugation of one group or another; what should give us far more pause is the fact that thinkers operating with divergent norms of what is beautiful could nevertheless conceptualise beauty itself in ways that cohere uncannily. That said, du Bois does tell of an African American brought to aesthetic rapture watching a performance of Wagner’s *Lohengrin* – before being ejected from the opera house on account of his race.
46. Kelman, *How Late it was, how late*, p. 285.
49. For Rancière’s discussion of this, see *The Politics of Literature*, pp. 10–1.
52. Again, the political economy of intellectual labour might have something to do with this – a soft Leftism comfortable with its privilege is not necessarily motivated to demand seriously that we think the world otherwise, with all this might entail. Far better to dismiss this attempt as ‘ideological’, using the conceptual vocabulary of Marxism against any radical emancipatory politics.

5 Getting the Measure of Voice

3. Indeed, in its unpredictability and opening up of plural directions at one time, it comes to resemble the dialectic as traced by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, something our habitual discussions of ‘dialectics’ neglect to mention.

4. It is possible to read the line beginnings ‘Then as th’earth’s inward…’, ‘And, by delighting many…’, and ‘Both are increased…’ as ‘trochaic inversions’, albeit with more ambiguity.


9. The belief that metre is an ‘abstraction’ is a central tenet of the New Criticism, reaching its dogmatic pinnacle with W.K. Wimsatt and A. Beardsley’s ‘The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction’ (PMLA 74 (1959), pp. 585–98). Paul Fussell notes the unquestioned Platonism of this position, relating the positing of an ideal, abstract metrical template to another ‘Platonic’ tendency which I imagine Prins would excoriate: poetry’s elevation of the commonplace through formal pattern (*Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, pp. 16–17).


14. Although, of course, if Edison had indeed been able to summon up the voices of the dead with his phonograph, or Marconi to tune into them on his wireless, then perhaps we would be able to re-create this tradition retroactively.


18. Although to my knowledge the methods of linguistics do not allow for this possibility (notably through the practice of getting participants in an experiment to read target sentences aloud).
19. Hopkins, Letter to Robert Bridges, 21 August 1877, in *Selected Letters* pp. 89–91, p. 91. Immediately before this, Hopkins had emphasised the relation of sprung rhythm to prose speech: ‘Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all natural rhythms’.


27. For instance, in the subordination of ‘level’ to relative unstress, alongside its divergence from prose pronunciation, is the suppression of the assonant /ε/ phonemes that reaches its culmination in ‘ecstasy!’ (level, steady, air, there… and after ‘ecstasy’: then, bend – again, unstressed).


35. As I understand it, this has no overt link to ‘generative’ in the Chomskyan sense, and indeed in its refusal to abstract away a ‘competence’ from the particularities of performance, would be resistant to Chomsky’s
own approach and its applications to metre by Halle, Keyser, Kiparsky, Hanson, etc.

36. Etherington here is following Gordon Rohlehr’s account of a ‘continuum’ between creole and standard speech forms (p. 190).

37. It is not for nothing that Andrea Brady, in a recent essay, has treated the collection as a single poem (‘The Subject of Sacrifice in John Wilkinson’s Down to Earth’, Textual Practice 28:1 (2014), pp. 57–78).


39. Scott, The Poetics of French Verse, p. 127. Indeed, Scott does not seem to this nightmarish at all.


44. In this regard, Augustine anticipates the metrical theory of, amongst others, Coventry Patmore and Reuven Tsur.


46. In this regard, Augustine anticipates the metrical theory of, amongst others, Coventry Patmore and Reuven Tsur.


48. A few examples, each from the opening to paragraphs: ‘Why is this so, O Lord my God?’ (XI.8; p. 259); ‘He is the Beginning, O God, in which you made heaven and earth’ (XI.9; p. 260); ‘These are tentative theories, Father, not downright assertions. O God, be my Judge and my Guide’
(XI.17; p. 266); ‘O Lord, my Hope, allow me to explore further. Do not let me grow confused and lose track of my purpose’ (XI.18; p. 267); ‘My mind is burning to solve this intricate puzzle. O Lord my God, good Father, it is a problem at once so familiar and so mysterious’ (XI.22; p. 270); ‘Be resolute, my soul. Onward with all your endeavour’ (XI.27; p. 275). ‘O Lord my God, how deep are your mysteries!’ (XI.31; p. 279).

49. I employ this highly literal and somewhat mannered translation, as proposed by Jean-Luc Marion and his translator Jeffrey L. Kosky, in place of the Stephen McKenna translation, because it retains the specific Latin terms that Augustine is working with. McKenna’s rendering of this passage can be found in On the Trinity ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 24. The reference is to Philemon 3:13–15.

50. For Pine-Coffin: ‘I am intent upon this one purpose, not distracted by other aims’ (p. 278).


52. And two different experiences of motion: as J.W. Carter has noted, Augustine makes a distinction between ‘the formal motion which is a necessary condition of time’ and ‘physical motion’. (Carter, ‘St. Augustine on Time, Time Numbers, and Enduring Objects’, p. 313). He returns to this point later: ‘In the first respect, time is the ordo of change that takes place in fallen creation. However, in a second respect, time will for Augustine become the ordo of endurance in redeemed creation, when it allows for substantial possession without accidental loss or gain, as well as motion without change into otherness’ (p. 323).


54. We might note a metrical echo two lines later in the imperative ‘See’, another deictic marker which the iambic metre would also deprive of stress.

55. Such play with pronouns is also clear in another of Hopkins’s late poems, ‘Spelt from Sybil’s Leaves’ (p. 191): ‘Our tale, O our oracle! Let life, waned, ah let life wind / Off her once skined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools’ (ll. 10–11). Again the exclamations are unstressed but juxtaposed with stressed personal pronouns: of us and of life. Here, however, the vocative ‘let’ is pointedly stressed.

56. One could imagine a similar series of questions being asked of the line ‘Defeat, thwart me? Oh the sots and thralls of lust’, regarding the stresses or denial of stress to both ‘me’ and ‘Oh’, the internal echoes between ‘thwart’ and ‘thrall’, etc.


190


Chambers, Ross, ‘Heightening the Lowly (Baudelaire: *Je n’ai pas oublié* and *À une passante*)’, *19th Century French Studies* 37 nos. 1–2 (2008), pp. 43–51.


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Author Index

Note: ‘n’ after a page reference denotes a note on that page.

Abraham, Nicolas, 17, 27–9, 47, 83
Abramovic, Marina, 42
Acquisto, Joseph, 188n
Adam, Jean-Michel, 179n
Adorno, Theodor, 132, 134–5, 185n
Agamben, Giorgio, 16–17, 25–6, 31–4, 36–8, 144, 159
Allison, David B., 5
Andersen, Hans Christian, 40, 132
Appelbaum, David, 29
Arnold, Oliver, 183n
Artaud, Antonin, 10, 35–6, 127, 147, 170n
Auden, W.H., 132
St Augustine, 37, 157–61, 171n
Azérad, Hugues, 182n
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 5, 75, 128, 164n
Ball, Hugo, 35
Banville, Théodore de, 87–9, 91
Barthes, Roland, 63–4, 66–7, 76, 176n
Bataille, Georges, 114, 131
Baudelaire, Charles, 87–101, 122, 155, 158, 179n, 180n, 188n
Beardsley, Monroe, 150
Beckett, Samuel, 57–8, 174–5n
Benjamin, Walter, 113
Benveniste, Émile, 11–12, 63, 66, 144, 176n
Berio, Luciano, 10, 33
Bernstein, Charles, 5
Blake, William, 28
Blasing, Mutlu Konuk, 79, 82
Blau duPlessis, Rachel, 123–7, 130, 184n
Bloch, Bernard, 165n
Blonk, Jaap, 42, 142–3, 147
Blumstein, Sheila, 176n
Bonney, Sean, 7, 116, 127–31, 135, 184n
Brady, Andrea, 188n
Brathwaite, Edward, 153
Browning, Robert, 140
Butler, Judith, 184n
Carter, Jason W., 188n
Catullus, 85
Cavarero, Adriana, 7, 9, 10, 56, 71
Celan, Paul, 1, 81–2, 91, 94–7, 102, 155, 177n, 179n, 180n
Certeau, Michel de, 9, 10, 28, 29
Chambers, Ross, 180n
Chomsky, Noam, 187–8n
Chopin, Henri, 1, 34–6, 51, 57–8, 140, 143, 147, 174n
Condillac, Étienne Bonnot de, 17, 21, 24–5, 27, 29, 47, 100
Connor, Steven, 10–11, 27–8, 47, 49, 51, 141, 168n, 174n
Crashaw, Richard, 39–41
Crystal, David, 165n
Culler, Jonathan, 90, 97–100, 103–4, 116, 177n, 178n, 179n
Dante Alighieri, 117, 119, 183n
Daubrun, Marie, 179n
Davis, Betty, 129
de Bolla, Peter, 6–7, 163n
de Man, Paul, 5
deguy, Michel, 158–9, 188n
Deleuze, Gilles, 39, 41, 42, 172n, 176n
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descartes, René</td>
<td>50, 85</td>
<td>168n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolar, Mladen</td>
<td>56, 59</td>
<td>68, 173n, 174n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donatus</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donne, John</td>
<td>7, 138-40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dostoevsky, Fyodor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du Bois, W.E.B.</td>
<td>132, 185n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dworkin, Craig</td>
<td>164n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edison, Thomas</td>
<td>52, 186n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elbow, Peter</td>
<td>163n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliot, T.S.</td>
<td>164n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eriksson, Anders</td>
<td>173n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskin, Michael</td>
<td>164n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etherington, Ben</td>
<td>153-4, 187n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans, David</td>
<td>180n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferrein, Antoine</td>
<td>22, 176n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitterman, Ron</td>
<td>164n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flaubert, Gustave</td>
<td>135, 185n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox, Anthony</td>
<td>11, 165-6n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fussell, Paul</td>
<td>186n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fynsk, Christopher</td>
<td>179n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galás, Diamanda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galen</td>
<td>168n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert, Geoff</td>
<td>183n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gimson, A.C.</td>
<td>166n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glissant, Édouard</td>
<td>110-12, 114-17, 121, 127, 135, 182n, 183n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmith, Kenneth</td>
<td>164n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goode, Chris</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodman, Steve</td>
<td>62, 176n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffiths, Eric</td>
<td>77, 177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross, Charlotte</td>
<td>188n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grossman, Allen</td>
<td>85-7, 103, 123, 125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guattari, Félix</td>
<td>39, 41, 42, 172n, 176n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton, Beatrice</td>
<td>171n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy, Thomas</td>
<td>53-4, 73-7, 80-1, 89, 100, 155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayles, N. Katherine</td>
<td>175n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich</td>
<td>85-6, 103, 181n, 186n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidegger, Martin</td>
<td>8-9, 58, 68-70, 73, 91, 95, 137-8, 163n, 175-6n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidmann, Ute</td>
<td>179n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hejinian, Lyn</td>
<td>7, 63-4, 67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmholtz, Hermann Ludwig</td>
<td>168n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herder, Johann Gottfried von, 16-17, 21-5, 27, 29-32, 43-4, 47, 64, 88, 91, 97, 100, 155, 167n, 168-9n, 170n, 171n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hölderlin, Friedrich</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hooks, bell, 109, 112, 115-16, 122, 133-4, 184n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 1, 15-23, 28, 45-7, 50, 95, 139, 142, 145-50, 156-7, 161-2, 187n, 189n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horace, 85, 103, 180-1n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyman, Wendy Beth</td>
<td>40, 172n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Virginia</td>
<td>4, 178</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakobson, Roman</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamet, Cédric</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarvis, Simon</td>
<td>152</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Simon</td>
<td>118, 183n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Barbara</td>
<td>82, 84, 91, 177n, 179n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, John William</td>
<td>180n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Linton Kwesi</td>
<td>120-2, 135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, W.R.</td>
<td>85, 87, 89, 178n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph, Anthony</td>
<td>121-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kafka, Franz</td>
<td>48-50, 52-3, 173n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kant, Immanuel</td>
<td>24, 150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplan, Carla</td>
<td>182n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kates, Joshua</td>
<td>167n, 173n, 175n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keats, John</td>
<td>78-81, 85, 89, 97, 100, 102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelman, James</td>
<td>118-21, 133, 183n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khlebnikov, Velimir</td>
<td>35-36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Joshua</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosky, Jeffrey L.</td>
<td>189n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristeva, Julia</td>
<td>27, 29, 31-2, 47, 63, 66, 84, 169n, 176n, 177n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacan, Jacques</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacerda, Francesco</td>
<td>173n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagaay, Alice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawlor, Leonard</td>
<td>164-5n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page Numbers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leach, Elizabeth Eva</td>
<td>37, 171n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz, Gottfried</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieberman, Philip</td>
<td>176n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipking, Lawrence</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livy</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacKenzie, Norman</td>
<td>148, 157, 168n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallarmé, Stéphane</td>
<td>85, 135, 182n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malle de la, Durand</td>
<td>34, 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marconi, Guglielmo</td>
<td>53, 186n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion, Jean-Luc</td>
<td>160, 189n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin, Meredith</td>
<td>147, 187n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCaffery, Steve</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messiäen, Olivier</td>
<td>171n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton, Peter</td>
<td>173n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>175n</td>
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<td>181n</td>
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<td>176n</td>
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<td>64, 67, 75–6, 81, 102, 176n</td>
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<td>141–3, 155</td>
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<td>183n</td>
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<td>Place, Vanessa</td>
<td>164n</td>
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<td>Plato, 60, 68–73, 85, 140, 175n</td>
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<td>Pliny, 39–40, 171n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plutarch, 107</td>
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<td>41, 172n</td>
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<td>2, 163</td>
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<td>4, 140–1, 143, 150, 178n, 186n</td>
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<td>52–3, 174n</td>
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<td>Pushkin, Alexander 5</td>
<td>164n</td>
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<td>93, 96–7</td>
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<td>165n</td>
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<td>172n</td>
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<td>183n</td>
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<td>165n</td>
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<td>168n, 170–1n</td>
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<td>173n</td>
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<td>150–6, 161</td>
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