

Let me begin with the first of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," the most notorious and widely commented upon passage of the last text he completed before his death in 1940:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a winning countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the service of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.¹

One is almost embarrassed to revisit this notorious spot, this universally beleaguered shrine, but allow me to attempt to use it as a prolegomena to a theory of the voice.² Admittedly, the connection is all but evident.

Benjamin treats the story as something familiar, and indeed the story has been popular since the time of Edgar Allan Poe's curious piece "Maelzel's Chess-Player," written in 1836. Poe's story is in fact a piece of research journalism. When Johann Nepomuk Mälzel toured America with the alleged chess automaton in the 1830s, Poe took the trouble of attending many presentations, meticulously noting all of its peculiarities and inconsistencies. The purpose of his piece is to show that this cannot be a thinking machine, as it pretends to be, but is clearly a hoax. There must be a ghost in this machine, a ghost in the shape of a human dwarf chess player.

There have been many speculations about what Benjamin exactly meant with this strange parable or metaphor (if it is one). Provisionally leaving aside historical materialism and theology, there remains the following mystery: how can a puppet enlist the services of the one who is operating it, and literally pulling its strings? The puppet appears to be controlled by the hunchback, but if in the second stage it is endowed with its own intentionality then it should itself pull the strings of its master. The metaphor, like the automaton, seems to be endowed with duplicity. Let us first look, however, at its very literal doubling.

The chess automaton was constructed in 1769 by one Wolfgang von Kempelen, an Austrian court official.³ Consisting of a Turkish puppet, holding a hookah in one hand and making moves with the other, and a box containing a complicated system of mirrors and contraptions that permitted the human player to move around and remain invisible while the inside of the machine was displayed to the audience. The automaton achieved great notoriety. It beat many famous opponents, including Napoleon, in a famous game which was recorded. (Napoleon had a reputation as very strong chess player, but this game does not do him credit: solo escapades with the queen, neglect of the defense—no wonder he was heading for Waterloo.) After Kempelen's death, the automaton was taken over by Mälzel, who eventually took it on a long tour of America.⁴

But for Kempelen, the constructor made famous by his invention, the chess automaton was not the center of his interest. He had another, far more ambitious obsession: to construct a speaking machine. This would literally be a machine which could imitate the human voice and human speech. This was a task which had already aroused considerable curiosity in the eighteenth century. In 1748, La Mettrie had proposed that Vaucanson, the great constructor of automata, should try to build *un parleur*. Euler, the greatest mathematician of the century, drew attention to the serious problem in physics: how to construct a machine which could imitate the acoustic productions of the human mouth.⁵ The mouth, the tongue, the vocal chords, the teeth—how is it that this simple panoply can produce so wide a variety of specific sounds of such complexity and distinctiveness that no acoustic machine could imitate them? The Royal Academy of sciences in St. Petersburg issued a prize assignment in 1780: to construct a machine which could reproduce the vowels and to explain their physical properties. Many people tried their hand at this strenuous task, among them Kempelen who constructed *die Sprech-Maschine* (which can still be seen today in the Deutsche Museum in Munich). It was a machine composed of a wooden box which was connected on one side to a bellows (a sort of bagpipe), serving as the lungs, and on the other to a rubber funnel serving as a mouth that had to be modified by hand while “speaking.” In the box there was a series of valves and ventricles which had to be operated with the other hand. With some practice one could produce astounding effects. As one witness put it in 1784: “You cannot believe, my dear friend, how we were all seized by a magic feeling when we first heard a human voice and human speech which apparently didn't come from a human mouth. We looked at each other in silence and consternation and in the first moments we all had goose-flesh produced by horror.”⁶ In 1791 Kempelen meticulously described his invention in a book, *Mechanismus der menschlichen Sprache nebst Beschreibung einer sprechenden Maschine* (The Mechanism of Human Speech with the Description of a Speaking Machine). This book laid down the theoretical principles and guidelines for its practical realization. Yet, no matter how much the thing was described for everyone to study, the machine nevertheless kept producing the effects which can only be described by the Freudian notion of the uncanny. There is an uncanniness in the gap

which makes it possible that a machine, by purely mechanical means, can produce something so uniquely human as the voice and speech. It is as if the effect would emancipate itself from its mechanical origin and start functioning as a surplus, as the ghost in the machine; as if there were an effect without a proper cause, an effect surpassing its explicable cause. This is one of the most striking properties of the voice: it presents a breach of causality, a gap in the causal nexus, as if it was to occupy the place of a missing link.

The machine's powers of imitation were quite limited. It could not "speak" German; apparently French, Italian, and Latin were much easier. We have some examples of its vocabulary: "*Vous êtes mon ami—je vous aime de tout mon Cœur—Leopoldus Secundus— Romanorum Imperator—Semper Augustus—papa, maman, ma femme, mon mari, le roi, allons à Paris,*" and so on. If we were presented with this as a list of free associations, what would we make of the machine's unconscious? There are, to be sure, two basic functions of speech: the declaration of love and praise for the ruler, both of which are all the more compelling given that the anonymous speaking device mechanically produces affection, implied in the form of address. The minimal vocabulary has the purpose of displaying the posture of devotion. The machine's voice is used to declare its submission, and its devotion, be it to the abstract beloved or to the actual ruler. It is as if the voice would subjectify the machine, as if there was an exposure in this—something becomes exposed, an unfathomable interiority of the machine irreducible to its mechanical functioning. The first use of subjectivity would be to throw itself at the mercy of the Other, something one can best do only with the voice, or that one can only do in one's own voice. This immediately turns the voice into a pivotal point—the voice as a pledge, a declaration, a gift, an appeal, but here brought about mechanically, impersonally, thus causing perplexity. This brings into question the intimate link between voice and subjectivity.

Here we come to the point of this story. Kempelen made a tour of major European cities in the 1780s, presenting a double attraction, a double bill: on the one hand the speaking machine, on the other the chess automaton. The sequence of the two is crucial. The speaking machine was used as the introduction of the other wonder, presenting its counterpart and its foretaste, as it were. It is as if we had to deal with a double device, a double creature composed of the speaking and the thinking machine as the two Platonic halves of the same being. The difference between the two was ostentatious and didactic. First, the chess automaton was constructed in such a way as to appear as human-like as possible—giving the impression of being engrossed in deep thought, rolling its eyes, and so on. The speaking machine, meanwhile, was as mechanical as possible. It did not try to hide its machine nature; on the contrary, it exhibited it conspicuously. Its attraction was the enigma of how something so utterly non-human could produce human effects. The anthropomorphic thinking machine was counterbalanced by the non-anthropomorphic speaking machine.

Second, Kempelen ultimately admitted that the chess automaton was based on a trick that he did not want to disclose (and he carried this secret to his grave). The speaking machine, on the other hand, was no hoax. It was a mechanism that everybody was free to inspect and whose principles were carefully explained in a book, so that anybody could make one. The Turkish chess player was unique and shrouded in mystery, while the speaking machine was intended for replication, imitation, and mass production on the basis of universal scientific principles.⁷

Third, there was a teleology in the link between the two machines. Teleology in the weak sense that the speaking machine was presented as the introduction to the thinking machine, thus the former made the latter plausible, acceptable, endowing it with an air of credibility. If the first one was demonstrated as actual, then the second one was presented as a possibility, although admittedly based on a trick. But there was also teleology in a stronger sense: the second machine appeared as the fulfillment of the promise made by the first. This opened the perspective in which the thinking machine was but an extension of the speaking machine, so that the speaking machine, presented first, would reach its telos in the thinking machine. Furthermore, there was a quasi-Hegelian transition from “in itself” to “for itself”: what the speaking machine was “in itself” had to be made “for itself” in the thinking machine. The point of this sequence could be read in such a way that speech and voice present the hidden mechanism of thought. They have to precede thought as something mechanical, which thinking has to conceal under the disguise of anthropomorphism. Thinking is like that anthropomorphic puppet concealing the real puppet, the speaking puppet. The secret to be disguised by the Turkish puppet, hookah and all, was not the supposed human dwarf in its bosom, its homunculus mastermind, but, rather, the speaking machine, the voice machine which preceded the automaton and which was displayed for all to see. That was the true homunculus which was pulling the strings of the thinking machine. The first machine was the secret of the second one, and the second one, the anthropomorphic puppet, had to enlist the services of the first one if it was to win.

There is a paradox: the dwarf within the puppet himself turns out to be another puppet, the mechanical puppet within the anthropomorphic one, and the secret of the thinking machine is something which appears to be itself thoughtless. It is a mechanism which produces voice, the most human of effects, an effect of “interiority.” It is not simply that the machine is the true secret of thought, for there is already a certain split in the voice machine: it endeavors to produce speech, some meaningful words and minimal sentences, but at the same time it actually produces the voice in excess of speech and meaning, the voice as an excess. This was the true point of fascination: the meaning was hard to decipher, given the poor quality of reproduction, but the voice was what immediately seized everybody and inspired universal awe, precisely with the impression it made of quintessential humanity. This voice-effect was produced not by a seamless mechanical causality but by a mysterious jump in causality, a breach, an excess of the

voice-effect over its cause, where the voice came to occupy the space of that breach. “There is a cause only in something that doesn’t work” (*Il n’y a de cause que de ce qui cloche*—literally, there is a cause only of what limps).⁸ The cause appears only at a hitch in causality, a troubled causality—and this is where Lacan situated the object, the object-cause. But this is also the lever of thought, as opposed to the anthropomorphic masquerade of thinking. There is a good line from Giorgio Agamben: “the search for the voice in language, this is what is called thought”—that is, the search for what exceeds language and meaning.⁹

For our present purpose we could bend or transform Benjamin’s thesis: if the puppet called historical materialism is to win, it should enlist the services of the voice. Hence the need for a theory of the voice, the object voice, the voice as one of the paramount “embodiments” of what Lacan called *object a*.

I

What singles out the voice against the vast ocean of sounds and noises, what defines the voice as special among the infinite array of acoustic phenomena, is its inner relationship with meaning. The voice is something which points toward meaning, as if there were an arrow in it which raises the expectation of meaning. It is an opening towards meaning. No doubt one can ascribe meaning to all kinds of sounds, however, they seem to be deprived of it “in themselves,” while the voice has an intimate connection with meaning, it is a sound which appears to be endowed in itself with the will to “say something,” with an inner intentionality, opening the supposition of an interiority which “expresses itself.” One can make various other sounds with the intention of signifying, but there the intention is external to the sounds themselves which are used as its mere instruments, or as stand-ins, metaphoric substitutes for the voice. Only the voice implies a subjectivity which itself inhabits the means of expression, the intention which is one with its instrument.¹⁰ The moment the voice is heard, in the midst of the tumult of sounds, it instantly makes all other sounds appear as a background, reducing them to the scenery which highlights the main hero.

This link with meaning produces a spontaneous inner teleology in the voice: it is a means for ascending toward meaning, but, like Wittgenstein’s ladder, it is to be discarded once we get there. The voice is but a vehicle and the meaning is the goal. This entails a spontaneous opposition between the voice as materiality, opposed to meaning as ideality. The materiality is a mere instrument for approaching ideality, a means to be obliterated.

This implicit teleology of the voice can be put to use by an entire theology. In our use of Benjamin’s parable the production of voice was put in the place of the theological hunchback, but the voice can quite literally be used as the hidden springboard of theology. St. Augustine, in one of

his famous sermons (no. 288), makes the following claim: John the Baptist is the voice and Christ is the word, *logos*. Indeed, this seems to follow textually from the beginning of St. John's Gospel: in the beginning there was the Word, but in order for the Word to manifest itself, there had to be a mediator, a precursor in the shape of John the Baptist. He identifies himself precisely as *vox clamantis in deserto*, the voice crying in the desert, while Christ is identified with the Word.

The voice precedes the Word and it makes possible its intelligence....What is the voice, what is the word? Examine what happens in you and form your own questions and answers. This voice which merely resonates and offers no sense, this sound which comes from the mouth of someone screaming, not speaking, we call it the voice, not the word....But the word, if it is to earn its name, has to be endowed with sense and that, by offering the sound to the ear it offers at the same time something else to the intellect....Now look closely at the meaning of this sentence: 'He has to increase, I have to diminish' [John 3, 30]. How, for what reason, with what intent, why the voice, i. e. John the Baptist, could say, given the difference that we just established, 'He has to increase, I have to diminish?' Why? Because the voices are being effaced as the Word grows. The voice gradually loses its function as the soul progresses to Christ. So Christ has to increase and John the Baptist has to be obliterated.¹¹

If we are to isolate the voice as an object, as an entity on its own, then we have to disentangle it from this spontaneous teleology which goes hand in hand with a spontaneous theology of the voice, as the revelation of the Word. There is a linguistic theology, as it were, which precedes and conditions theology proper. We have to make our way in the opposite direction, to make a descent from the height of meaning back to what appeared to be mere means; to catch the voice as a blind spot of making sense—to make the voice in language as the break in the field of meaning.

II

There are various ways to look at this excess of voice, the first of which would be to turn this excess of voice into an aesthetic object. There are sound effects that language makes apart from producing meaning, and can serve as the basis for an aesthetics of the voice. The easiest and most spectacular demonstration of this is perhaps the title of the series of lectures that Roman Jakobson delivered in New York in 1942. Jakobson was offered a chair in general linguistics and began by giving "six lectures on sound and sense," in order to explain some basic tenets of structural linguistics on the whole and of phonology in particular. Lévi-Strauss was part of the enthusiastic audience, later testifying that he was a changed man after hearing this revelation, and that the encounter with Jakobson's phonology was at the core of his own project.¹²

These six lectures were not published until 1976 under the title *Six leçons sur le son et le sens*, prefaced by Lévi-Strauss. The title, in its deceptive simplicity, seems to epitomize the very fate of structuralism. The English version, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*, of course ruins it all in its very accuracy.¹³ The title goes straight to core of the problem: how does one make sense with

sounds? How does one make sounds make sense? The connection between sound and sense is what defines language and phonology was a revolutionary tool for explaining its mechanism and its operation. Sounds were to be put into the mold of a differential matrix in order to produce phonemes, the discrete units which are themselves deprived of any substance. As mere bundles of differential oppositions they are indifferent to sonority. This is how sounds make sense, and one is still baffled by the elegant simplicity of this explanation, by the rigor of its demonstration. Indeed, this deductive rigor is what Lévi-Strauss had in mind when he spoke about phonology as the lever which could endow the human sciences with the same strictness which until then seemed to be the privilege of the natural sciences.

But listen to it again—listen, not read: *six leçons sur le son et le sens*. Jakobson spent half of his illustrious linguistic career reflecting not only on the standard matters of linguistics, but on his pet subject of poetics. The question, “How do sounds make sense?” must be supplemented by another question, “How does language produce poetic effects?” Language is never simply about making sense, because on the way to making sense it always produces more than sense bargained for. Its sounds exceed its sense. The most elementary proof of this is the wording of the title: with Jakobson it is certainly no coincidence that we find the alliteration of “s” repeated four times (at the beginning of words, once in the middle and once at the end); and that there is a pun on *leçons* and *le son*—it all gets lost in the English translation. The title was made with “alliteration’s artful aid” (to quote a phrase coined by Churchill). Certainly sounds make sense, but the title at the same time demonstrates that there is an excess of sounds over sense, there is a sound-surplus which does not make sense. It is there just like that, for the fun of it, for the beauty of it, for the pleasure of it. After all, what does alliteration mean? Is there a meaning that could be assigned to it? It is as if the title contained a hidden message, not beyond the straightforward one but in the very same place. The title announces six lessons, but there is a seventh lesson to be drawn from the title itself. But what is this lesson?

The title points in two different directions. On the one hand, on the level of meaning, it paves the way for phonology, that is, a treatment of linguistic sounds which deprives them of their phonic substance and reduces them to purely differential entities. But on the other hand, on the level of phonic substance, sounds are not to be reduced, but maintained, elaborated; their music can be heard, they can make sound-echoes, they can reverberate, they can be the material of an art of sounds apart from their sense-making properties. The sounds of the title are not the phonologically relevant sounds; they produce an irrelevant surplus in the currency of sense. They are like frivolous additions, supplementing the primary function of language, or better, they are like parasites of the phonemes—strange parasites, for phonemes are supposed to be fleshless, bloodless, and boneless (in Jakobson’s own words), whereas the sounds of the title are endowed with sonorous flesh and blood. They are bodily parasites on a bodiless creature.

I suppose the alliteration, the pun, the poetry of the title is the reason for its technical inaccuracy. The two terms, sound and sense, are not quite adequate for Jakobson's strict purpose; surely what is at stake in language are the particular kind of sounds made by the human voice. What it produces is, technically, better termed "meaning."¹⁴ But "voice and meaning" would have spoiled the effect. There would have been too much sense and not enough sound.

Perhaps I am reading too much into this, but I suppose that Jakobson, an admirer of Lewis Carroll, could not have been unaware of the famous slogan from *Alice*: "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves."¹⁵ The line is put into the mouth of the Duchess who, when she says it in the book, demonstrates the very opposite, for she most glaringly disregards the sense of what has gone before, displaying the senseless part of making sense; surely letting sounds take care of themselves was not the line Lewis Carroll ever followed himself, fortunately for us. But there is a glaring contradiction in the line itself, for it is coined on the English proverb "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves." The line is made possible not by the sense it is supposed to convey, but by following the sound pattern of a mold and the strangely coercive quasi-automatism that is presented by proverbs (I suppose, on the whole, proverbs make more sound than sense). What makes this line effective is not its sense (which could just as well, and more appropriately, be the opposite), but the excess of sounds over the sense. The line is most apposite for Jakobson's title: take care of the sense—that is, reduce the voice to the phonemes, the discrete differential units, if you want to make sense—and the sounds will take care of themselves, that is, there will be an unexpected surplus. You will utter more than you intended, the sounds will exceed your meaning, as uninvited intruders which seem to mysteriously carry a sense of their own, independently of what you wanted to say.

One could here make a provisional distinction between hearing and listening, and between meaning and sense. In short, hearing pursues meaning, the signification of which can be linguistically spelled out; listening is, rather, on the lookout for sense, something that announces itself in the voice beyond meaning. We could say that hearing is entwined with understanding—hence the French double-meaning of *entendre*, *entendement*, being both hearing and understanding or intellect—that is, it reduces the heard to the meaningful, and the audible to the intelligible. Listening implies an opening towards a sense which is undecidable, precarious, elusive, and which sticks to the voice. Sense, apart from resonating with Deleuze's use of the word in *The Logic of Sense*, alludes to the other use of sense, that of the five senses, of the sensual (to say nothing of the sensitive and the sensible). The equivocation of sense and sense (the sense of hearing) is structural; it is already encapsulated in the "sound and sense" formula, which could also be read as "sense and sense."

The voice does not quite go up in smoke in the meaning which is produced with its aid. From here, one could make the simplest provisional definition of the voice: it is that part in the signifying operation which does not contribute to meaning, "everything in the signifier that does not take

part in the effect of signification.”¹⁶ There is an antinomy between the signifier and the voice: the signifier is that part of the voice which participates in meaning, while the voice is precisely that which “doesn’t mean anything” (although, like the alliteration of “s” in Jakobson’s title, it can make a lot of sense).

For Jakobson, what does not contribute to meaning is then taken as the material for poetic effects. It functions as the source for repetitions, rhythms, rhymes, sound-echoes, metric patterns—the entire complex panoply that produces the enchantment of poetry. The voice is the source of an aesthetic effect which stands apart from the referential or informational function of language; it is its side-effect, which can then present the problem of establishing a kind of codification other than the linguistic one. Poetics turns into the search for another set of codes which would bear not on the necessary, as do the linguistic codes, but on the contingent. Inevitably, the sounds start to make sense themselves, another kind of sense than words make, an additional sense, a surplus-sense. This is the bonus of poetry—as if first the sound-echoes were the bonus of “taking care of the sense,” and then another meaning emerges as the bonus of “taking care of the sounds.” It is most difficult not to see sense even in pure nonsense poetry—the best proof is no doubt the immense host of interpretations and commentaries surrounding what is probably the most famous nonsense poem of all, “Jabberwocky,” proving that nonsense makes more sense than normal sense; sense is not absent, rather there is too much of it.

I can only briefly mention that if poetry makes the voice a counterpart to meaning, then this logic is brought to its extreme when the voice is singled out for itself.¹⁷ This happens with singing: it brings the voice energetically to the forefront at the expense of meaning, it takes the distraction of the voice seriously and turns the tables on the signifier—letting the voice take the upper hand as the bearer of what cannot be expressed merely by the signifier. *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber kann man singen* [Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must sing]. Expression versus meaning, expression beyond meaning, expression which is more than meaning, yet expression which functions only in tension with meaning, for it needs the signifier as the limit to transcend and to reveal its beyond.

Singing, however, in its intense concentration on the voice, runs the risk of losing the voice that it tries to worship and revere by turning it into a fetish object, which is, in a way, the highest rampart against the voice. The immediate attention and aesthetic appreciation are, paradoxically, ways of turning a deaf ear to the voice.¹⁸ Bringing the voice from the background to the foreground entails a structural illusion: it endows the voice with profundity, making it appear to be the locus of true expression. By not meaning anything, it appears to mean more than mere words. It becomes the bearer of an unfathomable originary meaning that, supposedly, was lost with language. It seems to still maintain the link with nature, the nature of a paradise lost, while transcending language in the opposite direction: it promises an ascent towards divinity, an elevation above

the empirical, the mediated, the limited, the mundane. The voice becomes the locus of a revelation beyond information. Hence the highly acclaimed role of music as an ambiguous link with both nature and divinity. When Orpheus sings, as the emblematic and archetypal singer, it is in order to tame wild beasts and manipulate gods. We can see here that the theological vocation of language is accomplished when it reaches the voice again. There is a movement like a double *Aufhebung*: first it surpasses the voice into meaning, then it reduces the linguistic meaning to the background of an ineffable meaning beyond meanings, the *Aufhebung* of word in the Voice. The Word as such can be no particular word, it can only be the Voice, the voice as the ultimate word, the suture of the field of meaning.

This link can be clearly demonstrated by shofar, something which ties the most elementary form of music to the very foundation of the signifying law, an instance where voice appears as such in a presence which is deprived of meaning and thus functions as the pure source of authority. This is the way that Lacan himself chose to introduce the object voice.¹⁹ Shofar, a primitive form of horn used in Jewish religious rituals, is one of the most ancient wind instruments. Blown in long continuous sounds, it is reputed to fill the soul with an irresistibly profound emotion. There is no melody, just prolonged sounds reminiscent of a bull roaring. Where does its astounding force come from? Lacan relies on Theodore Reik, who saw the key to its secret in the Freudian myth of *Totem and Taboo*: one has to recognize, in the sound of shofar, the voice of the Father, the cry of the dying primal father of the primitive horde, the leftover which comes both to seal the foundation of his Law and to haunt it. By hearing his voice, the community of believers establishes its covenant, its alliance with God. They assert their submission and obedience to the law while the law itself, in its pure form, before commanding anything specific, is epitomized by the voice—the voice that, although completely senseless in itself, commands total compliance. The letter of the law can acquire its authority only through this remnant of the dead father, through that part of him which is not quite dead, the undead remainder, that is, his voice: it testifies to his presence, but at the same time to his absence. It stands in for an impossible presence, the point of the impossible origin of the law, covering up its lack of origin. The sound of shofar has textual support in the Bible, the most significant instance being the foundational moment when Moses receives the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai. The sound, at that moment testified to the presence of God for the people, for they could hear only this terrible and commanding sound, and only Moses could speak to God and make out what He said. Shofar is the voice without content that sticks to the Law, underpinning its letter. There is, in this inaugural moment, a division between the voice and the signifier and its law. But there is no law without the voice. It seems that the voice is what endows the letter with authority, making it not just a signifier, but an act.

Thus after poetics and music we encounter the third use, the voice as the senseless commanding presence, isolated from the word, but at the same time founding, in that very separation, the

word, *logos*, the law. The senseless foundation of sense, which once again functions as a theological device—the voice is the theological hunchback of the Law, not really hidden, but rather very much on display, just like Kempelen's voice-machine. For Lacan it is precisely this inaugural division which presents the object in all its ambiguity, as the condition of sense and as the break, the halt, the interruption of sense. The voice as an opening and a closure.

III

Poetics and music constitute one way of looking at the surplus of voice; they both treat it in a variety of complex and fascinating ways to produce aesthetic effects. There is, however, another way of looking at the same surplus within language, one which produces a very different consequence: the sound-echoes, the repetitions, the contamination of sounds, all this is also the very material of the unconscious processes. Jakobson points out that metaphor and metonymy are also the mechanisms which Freud describes, unwittingly, under the heading of dream work. Dreams, slips of the tongue, and jokes, all function on the basis of the elementary mechanisms which Freud distinguishes as condensation and displacement. If we look at it more closely, it is easy to see that these mechanisms are based not simply on the signifier, on what produces meaning, but on sound similarities. Words are not treated as signifiers, but precisely as the excess of voice, which makes the meaning slip. *Familiär* happens to have an echo in *Millionär*, so it can produce the famous joke of *famillionär*. *Geist* happens to sound like *Geiz*, so it offers itself to the slip of the tongue that connects spirit to avarice.²⁰ The signifier is the creature of difference, making it either different, and therefore distinct, or indistinct and therefore indifferent. Reverberations, the contagion of sounds, treating words as sound objects: these are all based on similarities, on sounding alike, echoes, resemblances, correspondences, all of which stand at the opposite end of differential logic. There are degrees and shades of similarity, moments of the undecidable, as opposed to differentiability which is always clear-cut; differentiability produces necessity, while sounds are contingent, erratic, and unpredictable. Material realization is indifferent to the signifier but not at all indifferent to the voice value. The features of this value are hard to distinguish, one can never tell how much similarity is enough. To take the classic example, in which things first were blurred, are anagrams really there or are they a figment of Saussure's imagination?²¹ Is there an unconscious chain inscribed in the texts that Saussure is inspecting during his sleepless nights, or is he just hearing voices? The trouble is that anagrams are always there once one starts looking, there are too many of them, just as there are a host of floating or wandering words as sound objects, drifting and fluttering around present speech, waiting for their opportunity to suddenly come to light.

There is a beautiful spot in one of Freud's dreams that he reports in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

In a confused dream of my own of some length, whose central point seemed to be a sea voyage, it appeared that the next stopping place was called 'Hearsing' [...] 'Hearsing' was a compound. One part of it was derived from the names of places on the suburban railway near Vienna, which so often end in 'ing': Hietzing, Liesing, Mödling [...] The other part was derived from the English word 'hearsay'.²²

Hearsing, as opposed to hearsay, hearsing along with hearsay, inserted into hearsay, this is perhaps the most economical description of the way the signifier works in the unconscious. The element of voice in the word, that which does not contribute to signification, enables the flash of the appearance of the unconscious. Analysis endeavors to give hearsing a hearing, but not in a pursuit of some aesthetic effect. Anecdotally, Freud always maintained that he had no talent or ear for music, something which perhaps put him in an excellent position to listen to the voice. For what is at stake is the question of knowledge, which arises precisely at the point where the left-over of signification invades the very process of signification. There is a thought, an unconscious thought, which pertains to the search for voice in language, to use Agamben's formula. Unconscious knowledge and desire only have a foothold in the most precarious instances of sound contaminations and echoes, precisely in that which in the signifier does not contribute to making sense. The formations of the unconscious can be read as an excess of the voice over meaning: they are always interruptions of meaning, literally slips of meaning, and interpretation in psychoanalysis (opposed to the vulgar notion of interpretation), is ultimately not the endeavor to unearth the hidden meaning in that excess. This is only its preliminary step; but endeavors further to maintain the very excess and disentangle its logic. For the unconscious, as Freud points out, does not reside in the latent thoughts disclosed by interpretation. It is not another meaning (deeper, hidden, and so on), it resides only in the form, and this form is nothing else but the excess of distortion which sticks to "the voice in the signifier." As Lacan put it:

...interpretation is not limited to providing us with the significations of the way taken by the psyche that we have before us. This implication is no more than a prelude. It is directed not so much at the meaning as towards reducing the non-meaning of the signifiers, so that we may rediscover the determinants of the subject's entire behavior...precisely in its irreducible and senseless character...²³

But if there are, schematically, two logics, the word as a signifier and the word as a sound object, how can we think them together? Do we have differentiability on the one hand and similarity, echoes, and sound-contagion on the other? Necessity versus contingency? Lacan's concept of *lalangue* addresses this. *Lalangue* is not language taken as the signifier, but it also does not take language simply under the auspices of sound-echoes and contagions or its poetic effects. It is rather the concept of their difference, or better, their split and their union in that very divergence—a difference which is not the difference of differentiability, but of their very incommensurability. They are not outside each other, but they are also not reducible to each other. They are like two series, the series of signifiers and the series of sounds, and the two series differ precisely on the basis of

their points of convergence, crosscuts, and intersections; where the conflation of sounds function as breaks of signification, their amalgamation serves as the point of their divergence. The notion of *lalangue* is precisely a way to deal with both the signifier and that in the signifier which does not concur with signification (its voice) under the same heading. It treats them as an internal division, related in their incommensurability. It is most significant that Lacan, in *Seminar XX*, proceeds in two correlative moves, introducing two concepts whose correlation he never quite explains, *lalangue* and *matheme*. They are both based on that in the signifier which does not concur with making sense. The object in the signifier, as it were, the object within the signifier, once under the auspices of the surplus voice (*lalangue*) and once under the auspices of the senseless letter (*matheme*). One is almost tempted to make use of the Hegelian infinite judgment here, to claim the speculative identity of the two seemingly opposite extremes, so that the pure voice can ultimately only be epitomized by the letter, the matheme. Both are the extreme consequences drawn from the basic axiom of all early Lacan, namely, that the unconscious is structured as a language—consequences which, I think, eventually turn this premise upside down.

IV

Let us now pursue another thread. Alain Badiou begins his *Logiques des mondes* with an assertion which exemplifies the basic tenet of what he calls “democratic materialism”: there are only bodies and languages. This is indeed the doxa which can be seen as a modern—postmodern—avatar of more illustrious predecessors, like Descartes’ division into *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, in which both parts have undergone modification. (The body has evolved from Cartesian machines covered by clothes and hats, to a virtual body, a body of multiple enjoyments, a multiply-sexed body, a cyberbody, a body without organs, a body as life-force and production, a nomadic body, and so on. Thought has evolved from the soul and ideas to the multiplicity of signs and languages, reduced to the materiality of semiotics. In the end, instead of body and soul we have the multiple pleasures and semiotics.) Both parts remain, however, as firm evidence, the dual substance of what there is. But in this double world—and this is Badiou’s major point—there are also truths, which are neither bodies nor languages nor a mixture of the two, neither are they somewhere else, in some special Platonic realm. They are “incorporeal bodies, languages devoid of sense, generic infinities, unconditioned supplements. They become and remain suspended ‘between nothing and the pure event.’”²⁴ Truths, which emerge as consequences of events, are a break in the world of what exists, that is, a break in the continuities of bodies and languages.

The voice as object, the paradoxical creature that we are after, is also a break. It has, of course, an inherent link to presence, to what there is, to the point of endorsing the very notion of presence. Yet at the same time it presents a certain break in presence. It is not simply to be counted among existing things, because its topology dislocates it in relation to presence. What

is of greatest importance in this context is that it is precisely the voice that holds together bodies and languages. It is their missing link, what they have in common. Language is attached to the body through the voice, as if the voice were to fulfill the function of the pineal gland in the new Cartesian division of substances.

If materiality is irrelevant to the signifier, it is not irrelevant to the voice: apart from the fact that voices produce sound while phonemes are soundless, there is the fact that the signifier, however purely logical and differential, must have a point of origin and emission in the body. There must be a body to support it and assume it, its disembodied network must be pinned to a body. Even if the link is the most tenuous imaginable, it takes the most intangible and “sublimated” form of the mere oscillation of air which keeps vanishing the moment it is produced.²⁵ It is materiality at its most intangible and hence its most tenacious form. Still, this almost disembodied body is enough to be cumbersome and embarrassing; it does not fit the body at all. Hence all the troubles with what Michel Chion (following Pierre Schaeffer) has called the *acousmatic* voice, the voice whose source remains unidentified.²⁶ When the acousmatic voice finds its body, it turns out that the voice does not stick to it, that it is an excrescence which does not match the body at all. The most notorious example is Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which revolves entirely around the questions: Where does the mother's voice come from? To which body can it be assigned? This case is no doubt paradigmatic, for “the mother of all acousmatic voices,” the acousmatic voice par excellence, is precisely the mother's voice, the voice whose source the infant cannot see—his tie with the world, his umbilical cord, his nest, his cage, his prison, his light. From which body does it emanate from? We find an answer in *Psycho*.

The word “acousmatic” stems from Pythagoras, whose pupils, according to Diogenes Laertius and Iamblichos, were initiated by merely listening to the Master for five years while the Master was hidden behind a screen where he proffered his teaching without being seen. The advantage of this mechanism was that the disciples were not distracted by his looks, by the spectacle of presentation, but had to concentrate merely on the voice and the meaning emanating from it. The master, by this simple mechanism, “by the very cunning of the scene,” as it were, turned into a spirit without a body; suddenly endowed with aura and charisma, his body was reduced to the spectrality of mere voice as object. The voice, whose source cannot be seen, appears as all-powerful; precisely because it cannot be located it seems to emanate from anywhere and everywhere and gains a sudden omnipotence.

Let us take *The Wizard of Oz*, a very Freudian tale about the nature of transference.²⁷ The master can be the master as long as the source of the voice is hidden. All of his wizardry consists in an acousmatic voice and, once the veil is lifted, he necessarily turns into a ludicrous and powerless old man who is no source of rescue, but is himself in great need of help. One may well wonder if Pythagoras' pupils were not victims of the same disillusionment as Dorothy and her

companions when they finally saw the mysterious wizard behind the screen. At the end of this gallery of disembodied voices that assume positions of power and create transference, there is the obvious example of the analyst, the structurally invisible voice behind the screen, who is obviously the paramount case in the matter, though with a new twist. If the function of the analyst can essentially be performed by remaining silent, then we have here a new wonder: acousmatic silence, the silence whose source one cannot see.

With the advent of radio, the gramophone, the tape-recorder, and the telephone, the acousmatic property of the voice became universal and hence trivial. All of these are acousmatic media par excellence, but have lost any uncanny acousmatic quality. One cannot see the source of the voices, all one sees is some technical device from which the voices emanate, but in a quid pro quo the gadget takes the place of the invisible source itself, disguising it and beginning to act as its stand-in. The days of the uncanny effects of these gadgets are over, the only reminder being the logo “His Master’s Voice” on which the dog intently inspects the interior of the cylinder of a phonograph. The logo is striking, presenting something like a modern version of the parable of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, for “in the age of technical reproductibility” the dog taken in by the reproduction is no doubt going for the real thing, for his master’s voice, just as the birds were going after the painted grapes.²⁸ At the same time, however, the gramophone functions as the veil, the screen which hides the source of the voice. The master is hidden behind the horn, which makes his voice all the more the master’s. One can see that the voice confronts us with the structure of the veil, which is the structural supposition of the voice behind the veil, and the veil which can never quite be lifted.

The real problem with the acousmatic voice is whether one can ever actually pin it down to a source? Chion calls this process “desacousmatisation”: when the voice gets attached to the body, it loses its omnipotent charismatic character, it turns out to be banal, as in *The Wizard of Oz*, and the transference crumbles. Once the voice is located it loses its power; it has something like a castrating effect on its bearer, who could wield and brandish his phonic phallus as long as its attachment to the body remained hidden. Chion compares the desacousmatisation to a striptease: it can be a process of several stages, in which one sees the bearer of the voice first from a distance, or from the back, or in a number of ambiguous situations (as in *Psycho*). The ultimate stage is finally reached when one actually sees the orifice, the bodily aperture, from which the voice emanates: the mouth. That is, when one sees the gap, the crack, the hole, the cavity, the void, the very absence of the phallus, as in Freud’s famous formulation, one can stop at the next to last stage, just before the void would become apparent, and turn this penultimate stage into a fetish, erect it as a dam against castration, a rampart against the void.²⁹ The fetishism of the voice resides precisely in fixing the object just before one is confronted with the impossible fissure, the slit from which it allegedly originates, before one is engulfed by it.³⁰

Ultimately there is no such thing as desacousmatisation because the source of the voice can never be seen. One can see the mouth, but the voice comes from some undisclosed and structurally concealed interior. It cannot possibly match up with the visible. Even in the most banal everyday experience there is always something incongruous in the relation between the appearance of a person and his or her voice before one adapts to it. Every emission of the voice is essentially ventriloquism. Žižek has a good line on this:

An unbridgeable gap separates forever a human body from ‘its’ voice. The voice displays a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person talking, there is always a minimum of ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker’s own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks ‘by itself’, through him.”³¹

The voice as object appears precisely with the impossibility of desacousmatisation. It is not simply that the haunting voice is impossible to pin down to a source, but rather that it appears in its discrepancy with the source from which it is supposed to stem, and which necessarily recedes.

Fundamentally, the voice ties the signifier to the body, but does not belong to either. It is not a part of linguistics, but precisely the remainder in language that linguistics cannot tackle with its means. Like all objects of the drive, it is not part of the body either—it detaches itself from the body; it does not fit the body, it is a bodily missile separated from its source; it is like a spectral body beyond the body. Thus it stands at a paradoxical and ambiguous point, the intersection of language and body, belonging to neither and yet constituting the point they have in common. The voice stems from the body, but does not belong to it. It upholds language without belonging to it either. In this paradoxical topology, however, this is the only point where they overlap. This is where one could put one of Lacan’s favorite schemas to use: the circle of the body and the circle of language overlap in the voice, which is extimate to both.

The voice is the most obvious candidate for this role, since it literally links the signifier and the body, but the same topological structure is also true of other objects of the drive. They are all “organs without bodies,” spectral extensions of the body which do not belong to the body but to an area which is critical for the division between inside and outside, incorporation and expulsion. They are, at the same time, inside and outside the Other, non-parts of the symbolic grid, although they only emerge as the effects of the inscription of the Other on the body, the effects of the signifying cut.

V

Another way of treating the problem of the voice is to approach it under the heading of exposure, or as an excess of exposure. Who or what is exposed, and to whom or what is it exposed? On the one hand, one is exposed to the voice, which inherently places the listener in the position of obedience. Listening is already an incipient form of obedience (there is an etymological link

in many languages—obey, *obéir*, *obaudire*, *gehörchen*). This is the part which is epitomized by the logo of “His Master’s Voice.” Listening presents subjection in miniature. The moment the voice is heard, it appears as the source of authority, something which imposes itself, spellbinds, hypnotizes, seduces, enthralls. One can see this property most powerfully enacted in the link between voice and divinity. In most religions, divinity appears as the source of a commanding voice, most often acousmatic and divorced from meaning, an imposing presence which commands before commanding anything in particular, (as one can see with shofar). Hence the cult of the King’s voice as divine emanation on earth³² and the “totalitarian” use of the voice, the return of the quasi-archaic into the heart of modernity. In fascism, the voice is the source of authority which can invalidate the law and thus coextensive with the state of emergency. The voice in the commanding position can suspend and supplant the law; it is the constitutive exception.³³

This power of the voice stems from the fact that it is very difficult to keep at bay. It hits us from the inside, pouring directly into the interior without protection. The ears have no lids, as Lacan never tires of repeating; they cannot be closed, one is constantly exposed, no distance can be maintained from sound. There is a stark opposition between the visible and the audible. While the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance, the audible presents fluidity, flux, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance. Voice is elusive, always changing, becoming, elapsing, with unclear contours, as opposed to the permanence, solidity, and durability of the visible. By its very nature it is on the side of the event, not of being. It deprives us of distance and autonomy. If we want to localize it, to establish a safe distance from it, we need to use the visible as a reference. The visible can establish the distance, the nature, the source of the voice, and thus neutralize it. This is why the acousmatic voice is so powerful, for it cannot be neutralized by the framework of the visible. This immediate connection between the exterior and the interior is the source of innumerable mythical stories of the magic force of the voice, something that makes us lose our reason and leads to disaster, to a lethal enjoyment. In psychosis, for instance, the hallucinatory nature of the voice itself emerges in the phenomenon of “hearing voices.”

If the visible seems to be on the side of distance and stability, then Lacan’s theory of the gaze as an object aims at collapsing this distance of the eye from what is seen. “The scission of the eye and the gaze,” as one section of *Seminar XI* is entitled, means precisely that the gaze is the point where this distance collapses, where the gaze is itself inscribed into the picture, as the point where the image “regards” us. The illusion of distance has to be unmasked as an illusion, while it seems that with the voice the problem tends to be the opposite: how can we establish a distance at all.

All of this is but one side of the ambivalence: the voice as authority. On the other hand it is also true that the sender of the voice, the bearer of vocal emission, is someone who exposes himself and thus becomes exposed to the effects of power which lie not only in the privilege of emitting

the voice, but pertain to the listener. The subject is exposed to the power of the Other by giving to it his or her own voice, so that power or domination can not only take the form of the voice, but also that of the ear. The voice comes from some unfathomable invisible interior and brings it out, lays it bare, discloses, uncovers, reveals the interior. In so doing it produces an effect which has both an obscene side (disclosing something hidden, intimate, structurally revealing too much) and an uncanny side (this is one of the ways Freud described the uncanny, as something that should have remained hidden but has come to light). One could indeed say that there is an affect of shame that accompanies voice; one is ashamed of using one's voice because it exposes some hidden intimacy to the Other.³⁴ What is exposed is of course not some interior nature, an interior treasure too precious to be disclosed, some true self or primordial inner life. Rather, it is an interior which is itself the result of the signifying cut, its product, its cumbersome remainder. By using one's voice one is also yielding power to the Other. The silent listener has the power to decide the fate of the voice and its sender; the listener can rule over its meaning, or turn a deaf ear. The trembling voice is a plea for mercy, for sympathy, for understanding, and it is in the power of the listener to grant it or not. The voice cuts both ways, as an authority over the other and as an exposure to the Other. It is an appeal, a plea, an attempt to bend the Other. It cuts directly into the interior, to the point that the very status of the exterior becomes uncertain, and it directly discloses the interior, to the point that the very supposition of an interior depends on the voice. Both hearing and emitting a voice present an excess, a surplus of authority on the one hand and a surplus of exposure on the other. There is too much of the voice in the exterior because of the direct transition into the interior, without defenses; and there is too much of the voice stemming from the inside, because it brings out more, and other things, than one would intend. One is too exposed to the voice and the voice exposes too much; one incorporates and expels too much.

There is a constitutive asymmetry between the voice stemming from the Other and one's own voice. Incorporating the voice of the Other is essential if one is to learn to speak; but this depends not simply on emulating the signifiers, but on incorporating the voice. The voice is the affect of the signifier, its driving force, the excess of the demand of the Other, the demand beyond any particular demands. The voice is demand as such. It most clearly presents the mechanism of the object of the drive, its topology, its topological paradox. For all the objects of the drive function precisely through the excessive mechanism of incorporation and expulsion (hence the opposition between the breast and the faeces). They are both extra-corporeal, non-corporeal "supplements" of the body (hence the myth of the lamella) and the very operators of the division into an exterior and an interior, while belonging to neither. They are placed in the zone of overlap, crossing, the extimacy—which is why jouissance is always irreducible to bodily pleasure.

VI

We have been considering the voice first as an excess of language, where it appeared under the auspices of the poetics of language, or of the musicality of the voice beyond language, which finds its most extreme form in shofar. We have also considered it under the auspices of the very texture of the unconscious, as the moments when the formations of the unconscious break with the horizon of meaning and demand a listening other than hearing. We then considered it as an excess of the body, and as an operator which binds two excesses, the linguistic and the bodily, where we could see its placement as the double excess of imposing exteriority and exposing interiority. But there is still a further step, which places the voice under the auspices of resonance and presents a certain guideline, or a certain consequence to draw from Lacan's way of treating the voice. On a number of occasions Lacan insists that the object voice has to be divorced from sonority. It is as if the sonorous voice—be it as the surplus remainder in language itself, the presence of the singing voice, shofar, or bodily emission—were always a stand-in for the object voice, or that the object voice is something that is attached like an inaudible appendage to vocal sonority, precluding its insertion into acoustics, although it inhabits the acoustic phenomena. What is the nature of this appendage, how can one isolate it?

In one of his rare reflections on the voice in the seminar on anxiety, Lacan elaborates on this tenet. He makes a curious excursion into the physiology of the ear, and speaks of the cavity of the ear—its snail-like shape, the tube, *le tuyau*—and claims that its importance is merely topological. It consists in the formation of a void, a cavity, an empty space, “the most elementary form of a constituted and a constituting void [*le vide*],” like the empty space in the middle of a tube, or any wind instrument: the space of mere resonance, pure volume, volume as opposed to loudness, silent volume. This is but a metaphor, he says, and continues with the following rather mysterious passage:

If the voice, in our sense, has an importance, then it doesn't reside in it resonating in some spatial void; rather it resides in the fact that the simplest emission...resonates in the void which is the void of the Other as such, *ex nihilo*, so to speak. The voice responds to what is said, but it cannot be responsible for it [*La voix répond à ce qui se dit, mais elle ne peut pas en répondre*]. In other words: in order to respond we have to incorporate the voice as the alterity of what is said.³⁵

What are we to make of this? The voice needs an empty space in order to resonate. There is no voice without resonance, but this is not to be taken as a need for a resonating body. Rather, the empty space in which the voice resonates is only the void of the Other, the Other as a void. One speaks, and there is a response, a voice that comes back to us, the voice as the answer to what was said, but a response of mere resonance in the Other. The voice comes back to us through the loop of the Other. We say something, some minimal emission, and what comes back to us from

the Other is the pure alterity of what is said, that is, the voice. This also means that there is no voice without the Other, and that voice is no way to make a shortcut to an immediate presence, or simply to presence. This is perhaps the original form of the famous dictum that the subject always receives his or her own message in an inverted form: the message one gets back in response is the voice. Our speech resonates in the Other and is returned as the voice, something we did not expect, a pure alterity, as opposed to meaning: the inverted form of our message is its voice. This voice was created from a pure void, *ex nihilo* (the moment of “let there be voice,” the creation *ex nihilo* of a voice). It is the minimal form of the echo, not the sound-echo that one can hear, but the inaudible echo of pure resonance, and this non-sonorous resonance endows what is said with alterity. The pure void produces something out of nothing; there is a resonating nothing, although this resonance has no sonority. One expects a response from the Other, one addresses it in the hope of receiving a response. This address is the minimal function of speech but all one gets back is the voice; not one’s own voice, but the voice as the echo of the Other. It is a response to our words, but not responsible for them; the subject is the one who is responsible for the emission. The voice is what is said turned into its own alterity, but the responsibility is the subject’s, not the Other’s, which means that the subject is responsible not only for what he said, but must at the same time respond for and to the alterity of his own speech. He said something more than he intended, and this surplus is the voice produced by merely passing through the loop of the Other. This is the elementary form of the analytic situation, the lever of its minimal efficacy: one says something in the presence of the analyst, that is, against the backdrop of the silence of the analyst, the analyst reduced to silence, to the pure Other without any content. Strikingly, in this simple apparatus there is the dispossession of one’s voice in the presence of the silence of the analyst: whatever one says is immediately countered by its own alterity, by the voice resounding in the resonance of the void of the Other, which comes back to the subject as the answer the moment one has spoken. This resonance dispossesses one’s own voice and makes it sound hollow. The speech is the subject’s own, but the voice pertains to the Other and is created in the loop of its void. This is what one has to learn to respond for and to.³⁶ The very notion of responsibility is coined from the acoustic metaphor, on the assumption of the response of the Other as the voice and on the subject responding to it.

Resonance would thus be the locus of voice. Voice is not a primary given which would then be squeezed into the mold of the signifier, the natural growth which would have to undergo cultural trimming; it is rather the product of the signifier itself, its own other, its own echo, the resonance of its intervention. Resonance of the voice has to be opposed to *s’entendre parler*, to hearing oneself speak, the formula which Derrida proposes as the model of consciousness. To hear oneself speak constitutes the acoustic mirror of self-presence, the pledge of self-transparency, the loop where one seems to be the sender and the receiver of the voice in one’s own interiority,

thus forming the closed circle of self and presence, precisely avoiding the loop of the Other and the alterity of its resonance. Indeed the criticism that Derrida directs against this notion (in his view the central tenet of metaphysics), and against the complicity it maintains with the notion of presence, is entirely justified. However, it disposes of the problem of the voice too easily and reduces it to the pledge of presence. Here is the great difference between the Derridean and the Lacanian approach, although both see the voice as the central point. For Derrida, voice is the key to self-presence, self-transparency and self-possession, and hence a key to the phonocentrism and logocentrism of metaphysics. For Lacan, voice functions as a disturbance, a factor of dispossession, which troubles self-presence and refers it to a break. The voice as resonance is the opposite of self-presence: it is a reflexivity, a return. But this does not imply an identity or a self-presence, and in that very dislocation it is the opening of subjectivity. It is a self-reflexivity without a self, which is perhaps a good name for the subject. At the same time, this is the opening which produces sense as opposed to meaning, where one would have to endorse the duplicity of both senses of sense: sense as embedded in the resonance of the two senses of sense, the sensual and the intelligible. We have seen the spontaneous opposition of the materiality of the voice to the ideality of meaning—here we could perhaps say that sense is but the wrinkle, the fold of the voice, its resonance; sense is but the fold of sense.

The object, as we have seen, is the excessive entity with no properties. It presents a break in the horizon of meaning, in the existing world of bodies and languages. It is a crack, a site, a locus, an opening, which circumscribes the site of both subjectivation and jouissance. One should here recall that psychoanalysis, at the most elementary level, is a practice of the voice. It can only be carried out *viva voce*, in the living presence of the analysand and the analyst. Their tie is a vocal tie, a tie reduced to a vocal tie, since in the very simple Freudian situation the visible tie has to be suspended. The analysand is the one who has to present anything that comes to his or her mind, in the presence of the invisible analyst. The analysand is the principal or, at the limit, the sole speaker; the dubious privilege of the emission of the voice belongs to him or her. The analyst has to keep silent, at least in principle, for the great majority of the time. The point of this simple device is to reduce everything else and work only through the voice, by the voice, on the voice. But here a curious reversal takes place: it is the analyst, with his silence, who is ultimately the embodiment of the voice, the agent of the voice as the object, or more precisely, the agent of that Other in which the voice resonates and “takes place.” The analyst is the support of the alterity of the voice, the place where the voice takes the value of an event, of a break in the field of meaning, a break in the existing situation of the continuity of bodies and languages. In this way, the emergence of that “incorporeal body suspended between nothing and the pure event” is the emergence of truth.

1. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 253.
2. To acknowledge a personal debt I must, in the host of literature, single out Slavoj Žižek, who has used it recurrently, from *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) to *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2003), where it provided the very title.
3. One can find an extensive and most entertaining history of this chess-playing machine in Tom Standage, *The Turk* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), from which I draw some information here. In his remarkable work, with its vast amount of references, Standage curiously never mentions Benjamin.
4. Mälzel was, by the way, the man who constructed the first metronome, in 1816—the first one to use the metronome tempo indication was Beethoven in his Eighth symphony (1817), a connection which was no coincidence since Mälzel also constructed the hearing aid for Beethoven—so there is an immediate voice connection.
5. Euler had the fantasy of constructing a piano or an organ where each key would represent one of the sounds of speech. So that one could speak by pressing the succession of keys, like playing the piano.
6. Quoted in Brigitte Felderer, “Stimm-Maschinen. Zur Konstruktion und Sichtbarmachung menschlicher Sprache im 18. Jahrhundert,” in *Zwischen Rauschen und Offenbarung. Zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Stimme*, eds. Friedrich Kittler, Thomas Macho, and Sigrid Weigel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 269.
7. It so happened that in 1838 a Charles Wheatstone constructed a version of it, following Kempelen’s instructions, and this machine made such a deep impression on the young Alexander Graham Bell that his pursuit of it eventually led him to nothing less than the invention of telephone. One should also add that Charles Babbage saw the chess automaton in 1819 and was so impressed by it that the pursuit of its enigma led him to the construction of the first computing machine. See Standage, 138-45.
8. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 22.
9. Giorgio Agamben, “The End of Thinking,” trans. Peter Caravatta, *Differentia* 1 (Autumn 1986): 57-58.
10. The French can use a handy pun with the expression *vouloir dire*: the voice “wants to say”; there is a *vouloir-dire* inherent to the voice. Derrida has made a great case of this in one of his earliest and best books, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), where, to put it briefly, the voice functions as the *vouloir-dire* of the phenomenon.
11. Quoted in Michel Poizat, *Vox populi, vox Dei* (Paris: Métailié, 2001), 130. Could one go so far as to say that John the Baptist plays the same structural role, in relation to Christ, as the vocal machine does in relation to the thinking machine? Is John the Baptist Christ’s hidden theological puppet, the voice-dwarf of the Word?
12. “Structural linguistics will certainly play the same renovating role with respect to the social sciences that nuclear physics, for example, has played for the physical sciences.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), 33.
13. Roman Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1978).
14. There is a certain amount of confusion here, since sense and meaning are used in different ways by different authors, mostly against the backdrop of Gottlob Frege’s seminal paper “On Sense and Meaning,” in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic and Philosophy*, trans. M. Black, V. Dudman, P. Geach, H. Kaal, E.-H. W. Kluge, B. McGuinness and R. H. Stoothoff (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 157-177.
15. Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 121.

16. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Jacques Lacan and the Voice," trans. Vincent Dachy, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* 6 (2001): 98.
17. Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York: Routledge, 2002) explores this direction further.
18. "If we make music and listen to it...it is in order to silence what deserves to be called the voice as object *a*." Miller, "Jacques Lacan and the Voice," 104. One should hasten to add that this gesture is always ambiguous: music evokes the voice and conceals it, fetishizing it while simultaneously opening the gap that cannot quite be filled.
19. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre X. L'angoisse (1962-1963)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 281.
20. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter *S.E.*), ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), 8: 18.
21. Does *Ananas* sound like *Hammerschlag*, to take Freud's example from Irma's injection (The Pelican Freud Library 3, p. 192)? How much similarity does it take?
22. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *S.E.* 5: 115.
23. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 212.
24. Alain Badiou, "Democratic Materialism and the Materialist Dialectic," trans. Alberto Toscano, *Radical Philosophy* 130 (March/April 2005): 22.
25. *Verba volant, scripta manent*, the proverb that Lacan reversed, since it is only the voice which remains there, on the spot where it was emitted and which it cannot leave, while the letters fly around and, by flying, form the whirlwind of history.
26. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
27. Lyman Frank Baum was born in May 1856, just like Freud, and his *Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900, just like *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There is a story waiting to be written, "Freud avec Baum."
28. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 103, 111-2.
29. Freud, "Fetishism," *S.E.*, 21: 155.
30. One of the emblematic images of modernism was Munch's picture *The Scream*. It was subjected to famous analyses, from Adorno to Jameson and Žižek, and I can only add a footnote in this particular context: one sees the void, the orifice, the abyss, but with no fetish to protect one or to hold on to. The scream is stuck in the throat, its resonance is all the louder the more one is transfixed by the black hole of the mouth. (On top of that, the homunculus, the strange screaming creature, the alien, has no ears—it is not only that he/she/it cannot reach anybody by the scream, he/she/it cannot be reached as well.) A whole program of modernism follows from this emblem: it hinges on the maxim that there has to be an object other than the fetish.
31. Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 58.
32. See Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Le culte de la voix au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Champion, 1995).
33. As Eichmann repeatedly said in Jerusalem, "Führerworte haben Gesetzeskraft" ["What Führer says has the force of law"]. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 184.
34. This is where one could speak of "ontological shame," an idea magisterially developed by Joan Copjec.
35. *Ibid.*, 318.
36. Bernard Baas puts it very well: "The voice is never my own voice, but the response is my own response." *De la chose à l'objet* (Leuven: Vrin, 1998), 205. [My translation.]