The sound of meaning: theories of voice in twentieth-century thought and performance

Andrew McComb Kimbrough
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, akimbr1@lsu.edu

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THE SOUND OF MEANING: THEORIES OF VOICE
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY THOUGHT AND PERFORMANCE

A Dissertation

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The Department of Theatre

by
Andrew McComb Kimbrough
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To Liu Zhiguang
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the problem of the denigration of the voice in poststructural theory and contemporary performance criticism. The problem has antecedents in twentieth-century language philosophy. Saussure defines language as a compendium of arbitrary words recognized according to the degrees of phonetic difference between them. Since for Saussure the arbitrary words of language also designate arbitrary concepts, he concludes that the sounds of words cannot be thought constituent of their sense. After Saussure, structuralism dislodges the voice from its privileged position in the phonologic discourses of Western thought. Poststructuralism views meaning as a product of socially constructed language systems, and it argues that neither the voice nor the speaking subject can be afforded linguistic agency. A strain of contemporary theatre criticism, premised upon poststructuralism, interprets the postmodern stage as a site in which the voice, language, and the speaking subject come under critique and suspicion, stripped of agency and communicative efficacy.

This dissertation investigates twentieth-century theories of voice, language, and speech in order to define the status of the voice in various disciplines ranging from paleoanthropology, phenomenology, structuralism, speech act theory, theatre semiotics, the philosophies of technology, and media studies. By comparing the status of the voice in other disciplines, this dissertation argues for a recuperation of the voice against the denigration evident in poststructural theory and performance criticism. Relying on Heidegger’s phenomenal view of language, the autonomy of the voice in speech act theory and theatre semiotics, the centrality of vocalized language in human evolution, and the resurgence of orality in electronic media, this dissertation argues that the voice continues to act as an important and primary signifying agent on the postmodern stage, regardless of poststructural arguments to the contrary.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines theories of voice in circulation across multiple disciplines and relates those theories to the contemporary study and practice of performance on live stages and in various technological media. The justification for this study stems from the observation that scholars in theatre and performance--who might be thought to have some investment in the voice--have been virtually silent on the subject in the past several decades, whereas studies of voice have held the interest of scholars working in such disparate fields as anthropology, paleontology, linguistics, media studies, and the philosophies. Traditionally understood, the voice maintained a secure position in theatre studies first because of the pedagogical concern with rhetoric and elocution, but also because of the close association of the voice with the phono-logocentric cast of Western thought, which granted it a privileged locus of meaning in the signification of truth. But much of the recent interest in the voice in other disciplines springs from the linguistic turn in twentieth-century Western thought, which questions the epistemological nature of language and problematizes the role of speech in interpersonal and cultural contexts. Significantly, Derrida’s critique of the voice as an essential though faulty element in the phonologic tradition serves as a keystone for deconstructive and poststructural theory, which contests the efficacious role of speech and effaces the traditional sense of agency afforded the speaking subject. In light of theoretical developments in the past century, a reevaluation of the stage voice seems long overdue. Yet in the vast majority of contemporary theatre studies, admittedly indebted to deconstruction and poststructuralism, the voice earns nary a mention.

Compounding the disappearance of the voice in poststructural theory and criticism, the twentieth century also introduces two further problems for a hearing of the voice, namely
technology and the critical regard of postmodernity. The aural technologies of radio, TV, film, and video have proven problematic for two reasons, one being the absence of live performers without electronic mediation, another being the relation of technology with the perceived decay of human society under the capitalist pressures of mass media and the hegemony of the simulacra. Within the hyper-commodified nature of postmodernity, wherein all objectivity has been said to be lost given the unmooring of meaning from any foundational base, the voice has been ranked among all other signifying systems, equally revealed as groundless. Because of the relative and contested nature of discourse in postmodernity and the stultifying effects of technologized media, neither the voice nor the speaking subject can be thought to articulate objective realities and meanings. Yet the voice still functions as a primary signifying agent in contemporary theatre and performance.

Theatre studies could be interpreted as practicing a silencing of the voice already staged in poststructural theory. Even a brief review of recent publications illustrates that theatre critics overwhelmingly concentrate on presentations of the human body and interpretations of dramatic text. Given the confrontation of the voice with poststructuralism, technology, and postmodernity, the oversight in theatre criticism raises questions. What does the voice signify in contemporary performance? How does the use of the voice in postmodern performance differ from the use of the voice in the traditional, modernist, and avant-garde theatres of the twentieth century? Does the use of the voice in postmodern performance reflect the critique of the voice in poststructural thought? In their negligence of the voice, do theatre critics conscientiously duplicate the silencing of the voice conducted in deconstructive theory, or does their oversight reflect a symptom of another influence on the discipline? At stake in such questions lies the reevaluation
of the critical notion of human vocal and linguistic agency in an age in which agency has fallen under interrogation.

Since theatre and performance studies avoid addressing the voice, answers have to be sought elsewhere. In order to begin an investigation of theories of voice for the contemporary stage, this study visits the scholarship already undertaken in various disciplines across the humanities and sciences. Two reasons support the approach. First, much fruitful work has already been accomplished in other disciplines, and instead of ignoring or duplicating the work of others, theatre scholarship would benefit by a review and critique of the research in order to gauge its relevance to theatrical models. Second, recent research on the voice across the disciplines began in conjunction with the turn to language as a first philosophy in the past century, which has had its own momentous impact for theatre study and practice. Far from being unrelated, the critical thinking about the voice in various academic fields directly intersects with the preoccupations of the contemporary stage.

In its methodology, therefore, this dissertation addresses the human voice by exploring its position within both the humanities and the sciences, and by comparing theoretical views of the voice with the use of the voice in twentieth-century performance, both live and mediated. By comparing the theoretical regard of the voice with the voice in performance, this study advances three goals. First, it aims to ascertain the degree to which the use-value of the voice corroborates or refutes the linguistic turn in twentieth-century thought, specifically the poststructural critique of the voice. Second, it attempts to reveal to what extent the voice can be thought to communicate meaning and present the human speaking subject, regardless of both the opposition provided by poststructuralism and the perceived fracture of technology and postmodernity. Third, it offers an explanation for the apparent negligence of the voice in contemporary theatre
criticism, despite the primary position of the voice in performance and its importance for contemporary thought. This dissertation argues that rather than fall victim to the impotence accorded it by both poststructural theory and the disregard of contemporary performance criticism, the voice continues to offer agency and intentionality to the speaking subject through its persistence as a primary signifying agent.

This introductory chapter provides a frame for an investigation of the voice in contemporary theory and practice by surveying the tenets of the traditional views of the voice and vocal production against which twentieth-century critics and theorists work. The overview begins with a section that offers a definition of the voice that provides a basis of the investigation, including a distinction between the voice and two closely related and oftentimes confused terms, speech and language. The second section briefly traces the roots of modernist voice pedagogy, from the rhetorical tradition of the ancients down to the twentieth-century concerns with elocution, vocal “energy,” and psychological realism. The third discusses the turn to language as a first philosophy in the twentieth century, introducing the focus on the voice in several, but not all, of the different disciplines that will be taken up in this study, specifically phenomenology, structuralism, speech act theory, and deconstruction. These three sections provide the necessary background information from which a discussion of twentieth-century views of the voice may depart. These sections also serve to identify and clarify the problematic issues that will be taken up in detail in the chapters that follow. Accordingly, this chapter closes with criteria of inclusion and an outline of subsequent chapters.

**Defining the Voice**

The voice as it shall be referred to in this study consists of the anatomical and neurological properties employed in phonation and articulation, and used by *Homo sapiens*
sapiens to convey verbal and nonverbal expressions and significations. The physiological ability to create vocalized speech and the cognitive processes involved in language use appear to be unique traits of human beings. Anatomically speaking, when the vocal cords (also called “folds”) of the human larynx contract and impede the flow of air expelled by the lungs, they begin to vibrate, producing an audible sound known as phonation, from the Greek phonē, meaning “voice” or “sound.” The articulatory action of the oral cavity, including tongue, teeth, lips, and throat, interrupts phonation and fashions a variety of sounds, including vowels and consonants. The sounds take on linguistic qualities when they are used for communication, that is, when they symbolize shared and mutually understood meanings between speakers and auditors. Although many species, including reptiles, birds, and mammals, create vocal sounds by impeding the breath and thereby communicate with each other, only human beings are capable of producing what Descartes called “propositional language,” or variable sequences of syllables that convey original and creative thoughts according to syntactical rules. (The arguments concerning the ability of chimps to create propositional language will be addressed in the following chapter.)

How vocal sounds take on linguistic properties raises a problematic issue in the philosophy of language. In nominalist language theories, words serve as signifiers for identifiable things and concepts. As such, the theories go, when we learn a language we learn to equate the verbal and aural character of words with specific concepts and objects. The belief has an antecedent in one of the oldest texts to treat language, Aristotle’s De interpretatione 16a 3-8:

Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experience are the images. (Edghill’s translation)
Aristotle expresses the assumption that all peoples around the world experience and define the world in the same way, even though their languages may employ different spoken terms and types of written script. Wittgenstein and speech act theorists address the nominalist, Aristotelian belief by proposing that the words and grammar of a language are insufficient for complete comprehension of expression without taking into consideration the relationship of speakers, their intentions, and their behavior. Saussure argues that not only are the words of different languages variable, but also the ideas and things they are meant to signify. Saussure stimulates the structural and poststructural view of language as preceding and constituting thought, and not thought constituting language. Chomsky refutes nominalism with the argument that language is an incredibly complex phenomenon that cannot be learned by mere association, but through a creative process of invention he calls the transformational generative grammar. Although the issue will be discussed in depth in the following chapters, the philosophies of language combine to put into disrepute the notion that language effects a perspicuous presentation of a natural, objective reality. With that notion goes the phonologic tradition, or the belief that vocal expression serves as a privileged conduit for a truthful, rather than contingent, assessment of reality.

The close association of the voice with language and speech raises the issue of terms and the scope of this dissertation. As a reading in the philosophy of language proves, the three terms are oftentimes used interchangeably, and no doubt to some degree to avoid the overburdened use of only one term. But a perusal of English dictionaries testifies that the three terms are referred to as practically synonymous, despite having specific distinctions. Deriving from Latin, “language” stems from *lingua*, referring both to language and to the tongue muscle, which further demonstrates the etymological link between language and voice. In contemporary use, however,
language refers to the verbal system of communication (based on words and not gesture) held in common by a community. “Voice” descends from the Latin vox and vocare, meaning to call, and refers both to the sounds produced by the larynx as well as to any distinctive form of expression, as exemplified in the phrases “give voice to,” “they spoke with one voice,” and “the author’s voice.” “Speech” descends from the Greek sphasis, meaning “to crackle,” where in the Old High German it took on the division of spreche, language, and sprehan, speech. In English today, speech refers to the spoken or written articulation of a language. Finally, then, in order to distinguish the three terms, this dissertation considers language as a verbal system of communication, separate from voice or speech. But whereas the voice, when it creates sounds, does not have to express a language, speech, when spoken or written, does.

In addition to their close association, the three terms become further problematized in light of, first, the differing shades of association words take on in foreign languages, and, second, the problem such differences present for translation and study. For example, not all readers of Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) are familiar with the distinction of *la langue* and *le langage*, the first designating the fixed, synchronous nature of language, the second denoting the changing and diachronic nature of language in everyday speech (which should not be confused with *la parole*, meaning speech, or the *use* of language). English does not differentiate between *la langue* and *le langage*; they are both rendered *language*. As Roy Harris points out in his translation, Saussure presents enough problems for the reader in French without a misrepresentation of his terms, and therefore translation at times becomes an exercise in interpretation (xv). Even more troublesome, the English edition of one of Derrida’s infamous texts of 1967, *La Voix et la Phénomène*, which a literal translation should read *Voice and Phenomena*, has been translated *Speech and Phenomena*. Since elsewhere in the text both *la voix*
and *la parole* have been translated as *speech*, already the English reader has been thrown off the scent Derrida lays down in reference to the voice. Barring a comparison with the original—a recourse translation aims to prevent—how is one to correctly understand Derrida?¹

This dissertation primarily concerns the sounds and uses of the human voice as they are considered in theory and employed in performance. By necessity, given the close association of the voice with language and speech, those subjects will also be addressed. But when discussions of language and speech arise, they are not meant to indulge and critique the philosophies of language so much as point out the relevance and impact of the linguistic turn on an understanding of the voice. At times the task is not easy, especially in terms of the philosophies of language and technology, which tend to ignore the voice in favor of a discussion of the linguistic medium in general. The discussion of the criteria of inclusion below addresses this issue a bit further. For now, this past section having defined the voice, the following section takes up the relation of traditional voice pedagogy and its collusion with what Derrida called *phono-logocentrism*, or the association of the voice with the Western doctrine of the *logos* as a revelation of truth.

**Voice Pedagogy and the Phono-logocentric Tradition**

Georges Gusdorf and Roland Barthes point out that the Greek word *mythos* means “speaking,” revealing that in early Greek thought, stories, knowledge, language, and the voice were closely related (110; *IMT* 4). The belief is not altogether far-fetched, given that language is shared and meaning communicated primarily through speaking and hearing, which long

¹ In a personal correspondence, the translator, David B. Allison, informed me that the choice, one that he resisted, was motivated by the editor’s desire to accommodate an Anglo-American audience already predisposed, from the vantage of 1973, towards the language of analytic and speech act philosophies. Allison agrees that something of the sensual and phenomenal nature of *la voix*, an element central to Derrida’s argument, is lost when replaced with *speech*. 
preceded writing by at least 200,000 years.\textsuperscript{2} Following hard upon the epic tradition, classical Greek philosophy considered the voice integral to knowledge and being. Plato adopted Heraclitus’s conception of a primordial \textit{logos}, defined as divine and universal reason, which serves as the rational principle of which the human soul has a share. As expressed in oft-cited passages from \textit{Sophist}, \textit{Phaedrus}, and the \textit{Seventh Letter}, Plato believed that speech flowed directly from the soul, and that the outer, spoken form of \textit{logos} was a reflection of the inner \textit{logos} of the soul (O’Neill 34). But whereas Plato believed that language was a natural endowment, Aristotle believed it conventional. Aristotle therefore shifted the emphasis of \textit{logos} as a \textit{revelation} of meaning to \textit{logos} as logic, or as a \textit{reference} to reality (Borgmann 30).

Nonetheless, in \textit{The Generation of Animals} and \textit{On the Soul}, Aristotle advances a notion about the causation of speech that still finds currency in voice pedagogy today: one inhales inspiration down to the heart, which then creates the impetus for speech. According to Ynez O’Neill, for Aristotle, “the heart is the efficient, the voice the material cause of speech” (37). Like Plato, then, Aristotle still reflects the pre-Socratic belief that a hierarchy of physical and spiritual elements exists, and the voice ranks as an intermediary between the two.

Very early on in the West, therefore, authority became closely identified with the power of the voice. Much of Walter Ong’s work in rhetoric considers the difference between what he and Marshall McLuhan characterized as the visual or typographic cultures we inhabit today and those cultures that must have been overwhelmingly oral in the days before writing, or when

\textsuperscript{2} The scientific community roughly concurs that modern speech came into maturity about 125,000 years ago, having begun at least 400,000 years ago, with the possibility that it had its remote origins between 2 and 4 million years ago. Alphabetic writing, on the other hand, began about 6,000 years ago. For a detailed discussion see chapter 2, “The Voice in Paleoanthropology.” Chapter 2 also discusses why gesture has not assumed a place of communicative dominance like vocalized speech.
writing was in its infancy, as was ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome. For Ong, the importance lies in the assumption that all knowledge was shared through speech and hearing, and that prescriptural cultures had greater acoustic sensibilities rather than visual. The experience of the voice, especially in ritual and poetry, was more penetrating and impressive. The voice was perceived more as a *gestalt* than as a single and separate sensory experience, as revealed by the Hebrew word *dabar*, which means both “word” and “event” (*OL* 32). More transpires in speaking than mere words or text, and more finds expression in the utterance than the ideas or frame of mind of the orator. According to the doctrine of the *logos*, the metaphysical becomes manifest and finds utterance in the voice. In this we recognize the beginning of the phonologic and logocentric traditions that would be inherited down through the ages by such thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Berkeley, Hegel, and Husserl, who in some form or other accepted that the human being has received the gift of reason, and, through rational discourse, that is, speech, is able to penetrate the mysteries of being, thereby arriving at a revelation and formulation of truth.

For over two thousand years logocentric thought dominated Western philosophic discourse and found its direct practical equivalent in the rhetorical tradition. The natural extension of cultures indebted to the centrality of the power of the word and the voice has been the development and practice of rhetoric as the primary means of human expression in such diverse disciplines as politics, law, education and the theatre (*Ong, OL* 9). Since the voice gives access to truth and authority, then the possessors of well-trained speaking voices should by rights be the only ones worthy of attention. Beginning in the ancient Greek courts of law and finding its codification in the writing of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, the rhetorical tradition became the basis for education and public discourse for men through the Middle Ages up to the nineteenth
century, and carried with it the constant reiteration of phonologism. (The one notable exception wherein women were permitted to practice the rhetorical arts in public, despite their exclusion from philosophic discourse and their restricted access to educational institutions prior to the twentieth century, remained the stage, except, of course, in England prior to the Restoration.)

Although much scholarly attention has already been given to rhetoric, most notably in the voluminous research of George Kennedy, the concern here is the close relationship that rhetoric and the theatre have maintained throughout the ages, particularly as it affected the use of the voice and the training of actors. Classical rhetoric was born in Greece during the fifth century B.C., at the same time that the form of tragedy recognized in Aeschylus matured (Barilli 3; Bizzell and Herzberg 1-2). Theatre scholars hold as axiomatic that the Homeric tradition of epic recitation and the art of rhetoric supplied the first models for the forms of oratory practiced on the ancient Greek stage, and they see in the speeches of the tragedies reflections of both dithyrambic arias and juridical debate. Cicero advanced the belief, owing to his admiration for the actor Roscius, who was also his teacher of elocution, that orators should consider stage players as appropriate models for the practice of rhetoric (Do I 34). The theme would be reiterated throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as selected writings of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian would come to comprise the authoritative texts upon which rhetoric and acting were based. B. L. Joseph premised his study Elizabethan Acting (1951) on the observation that sixteenth and seventeenth-century writings intimate that stage-playing and rhetorical delivery were so alike, that an understanding of Renaissance oratory reveals the practice of speech in the theatre (1). Thus he concludes that, in the Renaissance, young men trained for the law were just as prepared to enter the stage.
The most enduring notion to be derived from the ancient texts may be Quintilian’s characterizing rhetorical delivery as *action*, which is a combination of *voice* and *gesture* (IO XI.3). Joseph interprets Quintilian’s division as transforming in the Renaissance to *vox, vultus*, and *vita*—voice, countenance, and life. In this schema, the voice is distinguished from countenance and life, which refer to emotional and physical gesture (34). The idea elaborates a theme of Cicero’s, that nature had endowed every word spoken with an appropriate hand and facial gesture as well as tone of voice. Cicero introduced the dictum, central to the theatre, that the text of every speech be delivered with attendant physical movement and fullness of emotion (*Do I* 29-34, 45). Complementing the arguments of contemporary speech act theory, Cicero knew that the force of a speech resides not in the text alone, but in the animation of text that only trained speakers, fully in command of their vocal and physical attributes, provide.

In the Renaissance, the distinction of separate hand and facial gestures resulted in the publication of manuals that provided students of acting with instructional diagrams, thereby codifying an audible and visible grammar of speech and behavior for actor and audience alike, with little room for improvisation or departure (Joseph 34-59). Such a form of stage speech came to be known as the “declamatory” or “oratorical” style of delivery for its close relation to the rhythms found in rhetorical exercises, and should not be mistaken for being totally devoid of feeling. Crucial to an appreciation of the discussion of the relative merits of sincere versus indicated emotion in Denis Diderot’s *The Paradox of Acting* (1778) is an understanding of the strict parameters of the neoclassic stage within which an actor could express feeling, something

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3 The practice of visually representing in print the various components of stage behavior should not be thought indicative of the age, since theatre semiotics in the twentieth century resumes the task. See as an example Schechner, MP. See also the discussion of such visual attempts to codify the stage in chapter 6.
quite foreign to players today. In fairness, however, Joseph concludes that the original performances of Shakespeare on the Elizabethan stage would strike us today as incredibly clichéd, mannered, and melodramatic, and the speech would hardly resemble what was spoken in the street of the day (35, 38). By extension, twentieth-century interpretations of Shakespeare, from Olivier and Geilgud to the newly recreated Globe Theatre in London to the Hollywood production *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), are a far cry from early seventeenth-century productions.

Rhetoric also brought with it the affirmation of the rational faculty as the means by which the human being came to know God, and reinterpreted Greek philosophy through the filter of Roman Catholicism. The neoclassic age embraced decorum as the proof of an individual’s development of reason. Decorum revealed itself in proper deportment, grace of movement, and, most important, eloquence of speech (Joseph 19), and found its dramatic expression in the plays of Marlowe and Jonson, Calderón, Corneille and Racine. Given the shift away from decorum in the Romantic era, however, the Romantic stage contested the tenets of the rhetorical tradition. As evidenced by the reforms instituted by Macklin and Garrick in England, Goethe and Schiller in Germany, and Voltaire and Hugo in France, theatre practitioners attempted to wrest from oratory a sense that language was better served by passion and natural expression than by strict codes of conduct and speaking. The body began to replace the voice as the site in which character and meaning were read, and theatre edged towards realism, expressionism, and symbolism. Still, the changes in vocal delivery met with resistance, as witnessed by the popularity of the Shakespearean revivals at Sadler’s Wells in London between 1844 and 1862, mounted by Samuel Phelps who was noted for his elocution, and of the Comédie-Française tragedienne,
Rachel, who revived the admiration of the declamatory style between 1838 and 1855 through her traditional interpretations of the neoclassic dramatists.¹  

Beginning with the nineteenth century, then, a strict adherence to classical rhetoric had begun to wane. Although departments of speech and speech communication in North American universities today include Cicero and Quintilian in their curricula, critics concur that the emphasis on the practical use of rhetoric has altered. Elocution took precedence in the nineteenth century, composition in the early twentieth century, and advertising and media in the present day. Of the five Ciceronian canons--invention, arrangement, style, memorization, and delivery--voice training for public speaking and the theatre concentrates primarily on the last, delivery, since composition (or speechwriting) has usurped the other four.² Furthermore, as language and speech fell under the scrutiny of empiricists and psychologists, the voice became the target of purportedly scientific research, most notably in the multi-edition *The Philosophy of the Human Voice* by the American James Rush, first published in 1827, which outlines in detail the precise movements of the articulators of the mouth and throat as they are engaged in speech. Late in the century Rush’s approach was to influence such writer-teachers as Charles Wesley Emerson and Samuel Silas Curry, who opened their own schools of oratory in the United States, and Alexander Melville Bell, who became instrumental in teaching the deaf how to speak.³ From this tradition has grown the discipline of speech pathology, which addresses various speech disabilities.

⁴ See Allen, and Brownstein.  

⁵ Borgmann 37, and Martin 13. See also Mulholland for an outline of the narrowing of speech training to delivery.  

⁶ See the texts and manuals by Emerson, Curry, A. M. Bell, and A. G. Bell.
In the twentieth century, the training of the stage voice in the United States and England did not evolve significantly beyond the parameters laid down in the nineteenth century. Rather, three trends evident in the nineteenth century came into sharper focus, and none of them completely escapes the influence of the rhetorical tradition. In one, the confluence of interest in science and the voice produced a proliferation of voice manuals such as Edith Skinner’s *Speak with Distinction* (1942). Skinner’s book contains elaborate word lists and pronunciation guides which resemble linguistic taxonomies more than aids to expressiveness. Yet the work finds currency in university actor training programs in the United States because it aids the development of delivery. The other two approaches, however, surpass Skinner with their noted debt to the phono-logocentric.

The first betrays the influence of Romanticism, which sought a closer connection with nature in the theatrical arts. Influenced by the nineteenth-century interest in esoterism, Francois Delsarte in France extracted a quasi-mystical interpretation of the Renaissance tri-part division of rhetoric, equating *vox, vultus, and vita* with *vital, moral, and mental energies* (Stebbins 189). The triumvirate of cosmic energies located in the actor found its way, through Delsarte disciple Steele MacKay, onto the American continent where it was propagated in voice and speech classes. The concept of vocal energies with its metaphysical overtones finally ended up in the contemporary voice manuals of Arthur Lessac, who advocates the actor’s harnessing of *body, mind, and spirit energies* in his publications *The Use and Training of the Human Voice* (1960) and *Body Wisdom: The Use and Training of the Human Body* (1978), still in use in North American college theatre departments.\(^7\) Concurrently, esoterism on stage found expression in the Austrian Rudolf Steiner, who outlined his division of *epic, lyric, and dramatic* forms of speech.

\(^7\) See also Wren.
in a series of 1924 lectures, later published by his wife in a volume entitled *Speech and Drama* (1960). Steiner reiterated a logocentric view of speech with his belief that speech should be thought of as an organ in its own right, and, if treated properly, can come to flow through the actor and acquire a life of its own (112, 398). Steiner’s principles influenced contemporary British actor-director-teacher Peter Bridgmont, who has recently served as Master of Voice for the Globe Theatre in London, and who has written his own text, *Liberation of the Actor* (1992), which reiterates and contemporizes many of Steiner’s themes. Steiner also directly influenced the young Russian émigré Mikhail Chekhov, whose own spiritualist acting techniques are taught in the United States today, as handed down by his former students and drawn from his texts, *To the Actor* (1953), *Lessons for the Professional Actor* (1985), and *On the Technique of Acting* (1991).  

Lastly, the most well known strain of voice training likewise draws from the sciences, particularly the emergent psychologism of the nineteenth century. As Joseph Roach argues in *The Player’s Passion* (1985), at the turn of the century Stanislavski employed current psychological principles in his systematic study of the actor’s craft (195-217). If *Building a Character* (1936, first published 1949) accurately reflects Stanislavski’s work in actor training, a component of the curriculum at the Moscow Art Theatre schools and studios were routine classes in diction and elocution, similar to those that followed in the rhetorical tradition and that were taught at the French academies available to the Russian gentry at the turn of the century (103). But rather than redundantly emphasize technical proficiency, Stanislavski focused on making the voice as expressive and full of life as possible. He aimed to create a system of acting

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8 On Chekhov’s relationship with Steiner, see Black, and Gordon’s introductions to Chekhov, *LPA* and *OTA.*
through which a tangible sense of theatrical presence manifested itself on stage and revealed a sense of spiritual truth and connection. As he puts it in a phrase reflective of phono-logocentrism,

As soon as people, either actors or musicians, breathe the life of their own sentiment into the subtext of a piece of writing to be conveyed to an audience, the spiritual well springs, the inner essence is released--the real things which inspired the writing of the play, the poem, the score of music. (109)

But Stanislavski’s adherence to traditional voice pedagogy was lost in the United States, because of the twelve-year delay in the publication of *Building a Character* after the release in 1936 of the companion piece *An Actor Prepares*, which emphasizes the interior and emotional preparation of the actor and textual analysis.⁹ Lee Strasberg’s reading of *An Actor Prepares* through the lens of Freudian psychology produced the Method, the American version of the Stanislavski System. Negligent of voice pedagogy, however, the voices of Method actors have acquired the reputation for being fraught with tension and incomprehensibility, given the perceived penchant for mumbling, stuttering, and the use of thick dialects. Such voices supposedly reflect the voice in “real life,” and may certainly serve the extremely popular realist stage of the twentieth century, but, ironically, they run counter to Stanislavski’s aspirations for training in vocal clarity. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis as an approach to actor training, coupled with the emphasis on technique in the British tradition, would later influence three renowned British voice teachers, Cicely Berry, Krisitin Linklater, and Patsy Rodenburg, whose popular and widely used voice manuals aim to “blissfully liberate” actors from bad vocal habits and eliminate “tensions and limitations” that result from a lack of trust in the self (Rodenberg 23; Berry 12). In an indirect nod to Stanislavski, these approaches also promise a more truthful and powerful revelation of text and character on stage, and aim to aid the manifestation of theatrical presence.

Regardless of approach, be it the enunciation of Skinner, the esoterism of Lessac, Chekhov and Bridgmont, or the psychology of Berry, Linklater, and Rodenberg, voice pedagogy has not altogether abandoned its rhetorical roots. Maybe more surprising might be the degree to which contemporary pedagogies implicitly support a phonocentric view of speech, despite the linguistic turn in Western philosophy and the contested nature of speech and language in contemporary stage criticism. Even with the rise of performance art and postmodern theatre since the 1960s, a review of college curricula in the United States reveals that voice training and actor preparation has not significantly departed from modernist approaches indebted to Stanislavski and traditional rhetorical delivery.\textsuperscript{10} Unsurprisingly, however, in light of the premise of this study, one emergent acting pedagogy geared for the postmodern stage, Ann Bogart’s “Viewpoints,” which addresses the spatial and pictorial concerns of the contemporary theatre, does not list the voice as one of its concerns.\textsuperscript{11}

Nonetheless, the training of the stage voice remains of prime concern to theatre academies in the United States and England, as attested by the establishment of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) in the United States, formed in 1987 in conjunction with American Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) to advocate standards, training, and accreditation of qualified voice teachers in North American theatre academies and universities.\textsuperscript{12} For the inescapable fact remains that the voice persists as a primary means of expression on the contemporary stage, even if contemporary theory no longer permits it a privileged status in the

\textsuperscript{10} See Hanson for a critique of the inadequacies of contemporary voice pedagogy in light of current research in speech physiology.

\textsuperscript{11} See Dixon and Smith.

\textsuperscript{12} Martin 170-71; see also Hampton and Acker.
phono-logocentric tradition. Still, despite the ongoing interest in vocal training, the voice drops from the critical purview of theatre academics. The next section therefore briefly introduces the impact of the linguistic turn on critical views of the voice both in theory and in practice.

The Voice under Critique in the Twentieth Century

Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s phenomenological assessment of the voice, which reiterates the tenets of phono-logocentrism, stands as a turning point in the philosophy of language. Elaborating upon Saussure’s view of the sounds of the voice distinguishing themselves from one another based on their degrees of phonetic difference, Derrida instituted the critical approach of deconstruction. Given the differential gaps in the sounds of words, deconstruction views the manufacture of discourse as ungrounded from the origin of any foundational meaning. Since words exist as products of difference, they defer elsewhere--and ultimately nowhere--for the signification of meaning. Derrida’s critique dislodges the voice from its position in the phonologic tradition, for it no longer may be identified as a locus of foundational meaning nor as a conduit to reality.

Yet Derrida’s theorizing did not emerge in a vacuum. In the first decades of the twentieth century, as Husserl struggled to foreground consciousness against the incursion of materialism and empiricism, Saussure and Wittgenstein were at the same time grappling with issues of linguistic signification and their ramifications for human epistemology. Saussure’s linguistics gave birth to structuralism, which interprets all human forms of linguistic expression as founded upon the relative linguistic and cultural constructs of a given community. In the United States, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, extending Saussure’s suppositions, were postulating the possibility that the thought of individual human beings was conditioned and constrained by their spoken languages. Even the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, primarily influenced by Husserl,
recognized the totalizing influence of language on systems of thought. But, like Wittgenstein and the speech act theorists Austin and Searle, Merleau-Ponty attempted to recuperate a sense of creative language and grant a sense of freedom, agency, and invention to the speaking subject. Later the thinking of these various theorists would confront the formidable challenges posed by the poststructuralism of such figures as Lacan, Foucault, and Lyotard, which posits that language actually imposes a totalizing structure over all forms of human knowledge and discourse. Throughout the century, the critical regard of the agency of the speaking subject fell steadily into decline, with Derrida effecting a final silencing through his critique of the voice.

In the theatre, the preoccupation with language in the philosophies found early reflection in the experiments of Meyerhold, Dada, the Futurists, and the Bauhaus, who sought novel ways of approaching expression on stage by rejecting the conventional and nominal use of language reflected in the melodrama and realism. Artaud’s theorizing of a theater of cruelty proposed bypassing language altogether in favor of a transmission of direct physical shock that impressed upon the consciousness of the spectator. In another vein, influenced by Saussurian linguistics and Russian Formalism, Brecht desired to expose the manipulation of sentiment in the traditional theatre, and aimed to create a theatre of critical spectators who are aware of the signifying variability of the stage properties. In possibly the closest reflection of the philosophy of language, however, the absurdists, Beckett, and Handke created dramas that questioned the communicative nature of language, representing it as fallible and variable in human discourse. Soon after them emerged the postmodern theatre, which some critics argue as denying human agency in the face of linguistic constraint.

Furthermore, the proliferation of electronic telecommunications such as the telephone, radio, television, video, and computer in the twentieth century introduced a sense of the fracture
of the speaking subject. On one hand, as expressed in the theories of Benjamin, Heidegger, and McLuhan, new technologies have been touted as the modernist harbingers of an increased understanding and intimacy between individuals and social groups. On the other, however, as expressed by Sartre and Baudrillard, technologized media have been viewed as facilitating a type of postmodern non-communication, having long ago become the agents of a depersonalized economy of consumption. In an uncanny ontological shift, technology has come to define both the modern and postmodern age, placing the speaking human being in an ontological limbo. The key to why communication technologies have been greeted inconsistently might possibly be found in the long tradition of phonologism that maintains that the unmediated live voice remains the only conduit of truth and presence. Given the confluence of technology with postmodernity, therefore, the speaking subject seems to have become inescapably distanced from a tangible sense of agency and foundational meaning.

As many critics have pointed out, twentieth-century thought and performance supplied the antecedents to poststructural thought and postmodern performance. Lately, as expressed in various publications by Philip Auslander, Michel Benamou, Hal Foster, Elinor Fuchs, and Janelle Reinelt, Derrida’s deconstruction of the voice in phono-logocentrism undergirds the contemporary regard of speech, language, and presence on the live and mediated postmodern stage. First, owing to the operation of différance, or the play of difference and deferral between linguistic signifiers, the notion of theatrical presence has been stripped of meaning and shown to be a hollow artifice linked to metaphysical assumptions (Fuchs 42). Second, theatre practitioners can no longer think of themselves as grounding their work in a logocentric text or concept, since, as deconstruction illustrates, there are no solid foundations behind their work (Auslander FAP 28). Third, in the absence of foundational discourses, another teleology of the stage presents
itself, one that examines and unmask the culturally and politically constructed texts that exert hegemonic pressure upon an audience, social group, or individual. Therefore one no longer seeks “authority and mastery” in the theatre, but “the play of signification” (Reinelt and Roach 112).

Of course other poststructuralists such as Lacan, Foucault, Kristeva, and Irigary offer further tenets for contemporary performance criticism, and critics agree that what has come to be known as postmodern theatre are those performances that engage the tools of deconstructive and/or poststructural analysis in some fashion, even if those performances are attempting to express or achieve opposing ends. Over the last three decades a group of artists has been consistently recognized in academia as having created prototypical postmodern theatre, such as the “theatre of images” of Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman (Marranca ix); the deconstructive approaches to traditional texts found in Peter Sellars, Joanne Akalaitis, and Elizabeth LeCompte; the politically resistant solo performances of Karen Finley, Vito Acconci, and Tim Miller; and the exploration of technology in the work of David Antin and Laurie Anderson, to name only a few. But to the extent that theorists recognize Derrida in their analyses of postmodern performance, they unwittingly rely upon his critique of the voice, whether or not they acknowledge the voice in their address of the postmodern stage. Tellingly, in the only recent full-length critique of the voice, Jacqueline Martin in Voice in Modern Theatre (1991) supports the denigration of the voice found in poststructural theory and criticism when she states, “In the postmodern theatre, speech has no function except to show its failure as a medium of communication” (31).

In light of the dearth of criticism on the voice, this dissertation investigates whether Martin’s pronouncement can be accepted as valid. Given the numerous types of postmodern theatre and their novel forms of expression, can the role of speech, and by inference the voice, be
summed up as failing to communicate? Does poststructuralism actually lead to the nullification of vocal agency expressed in Martin’s statement? This study accepts as a premise that contemporary performers do not approach their work with the idea that they have no agency and likewise have nothing to say. Rather, this study begins with the supposition that the voice continues to be employed as a primary signifier on the postmodern stage and that performers use vocal sounds, speech, and language in order to express their thematic concerns and present their art. This dissertation therefore explores theories of voice evident in other disciplines and compares those theories to the use of the voice in modern and postmodern performances of the twentieth century. It proposes to identify and engage those theories and performances that restore vocal agency in the midst of postmodernity, where the voice has undergone attack. This dissertation demonstrates that a comparison of live and technologized postmodern performance with the modernist performances that precede it reveal strikingly similar assumptions, premises, and goals of the practitioners, more in keeping with the modernist teleologies of humanist progress than the fracture and disenfranchisement of postmodernity. Accordingly, this dissertation argues that the presentation of the voice on the postmodern stage restores vocal agency to the speaking subject.

**Criteria of Inclusion**

This study concerns the human voice as it has been theorized and performed in the twentieth century, acknowledging that by inference the subjects of language and speech must also be addressed. The overwhelming volume of publications on language, speech, and communication in the past century alone raises the serious issue of the inclusion of primary source material. In response this study follows three criteria. The first admits those works that directly treat the voice, which turn out to be a limited number of publications in the humanities,
but a greater number in the sciences. The second proves more difficult, since it accepts those publications on language, speech, technology, and communication that either express inferences to the voice, or implicate the voice in some fashion. Although the second criterion could allow a rather large amount of material for discussion, the third criterion aids in the imposition of further limits. For as the material fell together in the research, five general subject headings started to suggest themselves, which became the subjects of the five chapters that comprise the body of the dissertation. Therefore the third criterion for inclusion allows certain publications that aid the argument of a specific chapter, and excludes others if their absence does not raise significant problems.

The voice certainly garners attention from Husserl and Derrida, who offer two arguments that form the poles of this study, the phenomenological and poststructural views of the voice. From a poststructural perspective, Guy Rosolato offers several essays on the voice after the order of Lacanian psychoanalysis, while Roland Barthes and Régis Durand supply two oft-cited essays on the voice in performance. In the humanities, however, the most thorough critique of the voice in performance stems from the feminist film criticism of Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, and Amy Lawrence. Several other authors likewise treat the voice in film, such as Pascal Bonitzer, Charles Affron, and J. P. Tolette. Additionally, in a unique gesture, the journal *Yale French Studies* dedicated one issue, edited by Rick Altman, to film sound alone, which includes some attention to the voice (no. 60, 1980).

In a related vein, media studies offer critiques of the voice in technology, a sample of which may be found in the collections of essays edited by Adelaide Morris and Douglas Kahn. Of course the disciplines of theatre and speech offer a host of publications on some form of vocal production, but as discussed in the section on rhetoric above, none of them completely breaks
free of the constraints already established in the nineteenth century. In terms of theatre pedagogy, this study considers the work of Grotowski and Schechner, who offer limited comments that reflect phenomenological influences. In terms of contemporary theatre criticism, besides Jacqueline’s Martin’s text, only the theatre semiotics of Keir Elam and Erica Fischer-Lichte attend to the voice. Certainly nothing after the order of a postmodern vocal pedagogy has been attempted.

Dwarfing the limited concern for the voice in the humanities, however, and too numerous to even begin to list here, the sciences in their quest to uncover the empirical evidence of human origins have undertaken the most sustained critique of the voice and its role in the development of language and culture. Accordingly, the research on the voice found in the disciplines that comprise the study of human origins, known as paleoanthropology, earns its own chapter here.

In terms of the second criterion, those figures in the humanities who hold some interest in the voice find inclusion, despite their avoiding a direct address of it. Besides Grotowski and Schechner, several noted theatre theorists and practitioners broach the use-value of the voice, such as Artaud, Brecht, and Brook, as well as, more recently, Foreman, Finley, and Anderson. Surprisingly, the one recognized twentieth-century philosopher-playwright, Sartre, discusses stage speech only to a limited degree, and his existentialism and theatre essays generally neglect the voice altogether. From the philosophies, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Lacan touch on the voice as it applies to their linguistic theories, but they should not be thought to address the voice to quite the same degree as Husserl and Derrida. Likewise, in speech act theory, the voice finds some mention in Austin and Searle, given their concern with the embodied nature of speech. In a related vein, Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, in their treatment of orality and the oral cast of communication technologies, do much to revive a hearing of the voice in literature and
technology. On the other hand, nominalists like Russell and Frege, the linguist Chomsky, and the language philosophers Strawson, Quine, and Grice, present a more difficult choice. In one respect, their theories tend not to consider the role of the voice in language, even though their work leaves open the possibility for inferences to be drawn to the voice or the speaking subject. They do not earn inclusion here, however, since the absence of their work does not hinder the argument of chapter four regarding the status of the voice in structuralism and speech act theory.

Besides a critique of the primary source texts, however, this study proposes to discuss the voice as it has been used in modernist and postmodern performance. By necessity, secondary criticism must be consulted. Since performance criticism does not treat the voice in all of the performers to be discussed, the choice of secondary criticism becomes difficult, since critiques of dramatic text or semiotics generally serve the subject of the voice very little, and performance theory touches on the voice only indirectly. Nonetheless, in discussions of Beckett’s dramas and the theaters of Schechner, Robert Wilson, and the Wooster Group, for example, this study consults and contests some of the perspectives offered by several noteworthy contemporary critics whose work lends itself to the parameters of the dissertation, including Philip Auslander, Elinor Fuchs, Josette Féral, Patrice Pavis, and Michael Vanden Heuvel, to name only a few.

Finally, then, in keeping with the publications on the voice in twentieth-century theory and performance, five subjects make up the body of this dissertation: paleoanthropological views of the voice and the empirical interpretation of culture and performance; the phenomenological voice and its relation to what I call the “theatres of presence” of Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook; the voice in structuralism and speech act theory, and their reflection in theatre semiotics and the work of the absurdists, Brecht, Beckett, and Handke; the voice in poststructuralism and the postmodern performances of Wilson, Foreman, LeCompte, Finley, and Anderson; and finally,
media theory and the philosophies of technology, and their impact on a hearing of the mediated voice.

Chapter Outline

The quest for language origins revived in the Enlightenment with the work of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), becoming a prime concern for linguists in the nineteenth century (Stam 9). With the growth of empirical methods, specifically within archeology, paleontology, and biology, the search for origins in the twentieth century has taken a decided turn towards specialization and quantification. In the past four decades, the development of advanced carbon dating and genetic analysis, coupled with recent skeletal and archeological finds, has forced scientists to reevaluate long held assumptions about the source and origins of *Homo sapiens sapiens* as a thinking, speaking, and tool-making species, distinct from every other living organism on the planet. The chapter entitled “The Voice in Paleoanthropology” examines the recent research into the possible origins of vocal anatomy, speech, and language, as well as the theories that archeologists, paleontologists, anthropologists, biologists, and sociologists use to justify their conclusions. The inclusion of this chapter is essential for one important reason: the question of linguistic and cultural origins shapes to a degree the critical outlook of many influential theorists of the past century, including Whorf in linguistics, Levi-Strauss in structural anthropology, and Derrida in deconstructive philosophy, not to mention theatre critics and practitioners like Schechner, Grotowski, and Brook. As yet no consensus exists in the scientific community as to the date of language origin or the selective traits that made it possible, but the value of this chapter lies not in the strength of empirical deductions. Rather, this chapter argues that empirical views attest to the central role of the voice in the construction of language and in the constitution of intentional speaking subjects in the human life-world.
The following chapter, “The Phenomenological Voice,” reveals the extent to which many
of the ageless associations of the voice with metaphysics and the phono-logocentric tradition still
permeate recent theoretical work on speech and language in the twentieth century. The chapter
begins with a critique of phenomenological views of voice and language in Husserl, Heidegger,
and Merleau-Ponty, then expands its perspective in order to investigate theories of the
phenomenal qualities of the voice as considered by Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook. At stake in a
discussion of foundational views of the voice lies the possible reaffirmation of the voice in the
face of the poststructural critique of theatrical presence, especially in light of the debt many
postmodern performers have been said to owe Artaud. This chapter argues that Heidegger’s view
of the voice and language as a possible revelation of non-linguistic meaning and states of being
refutes the poststructural critique of language as a totalizing structure, and offers theoretical
ballast, via Artaud, for the creative use of the voice on the postmodern stage.

The chapter “The Mutable Voice in The Linguistic Turn” introduces the changes in the
consideration of language that were to lead to poststructural thought. Fittingly, it falls in the
middle of the study, since it represents the transition from a quest for origins and foundations to
a study of the significative and contested nature of language. The chapter compares the
structuralist conception of language as a fixed noetic field to speech act theory’s recuperation of
the intentionality of the speaking subject, and relates each perspective to dramatic theory and
practice. By investigating the distinction posed by Saussure between the synchronous nature of
la langue against the variability of la parole, this chapter proposes that the speech act theory of
Austin and Searle, with its restoration of vocal agency, contests the implications of linguistic
hegemony found in the structuralism of Saussure, Whorf, and Levi-Strauss. It argues that despite
both the structural denigration of the voice as constituent of sense and the disenfranchisement of
the speaking subject, the voice continues to act as a significative property and grants autonomy to the speaking subject, even in those theatres that place the voice and speech under suspicion. The argument finds validation in the work of theatre semioticians, who provide analytical criteria for the voice based on both structuralism and speech act theory, and who offer a theoretical basis for vocal agency within postmodern practice.

The chapter “The Voice in Postmodernity” analyzes the position of the voice in the poststructural theories of Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and Lyotard, and compares them to the use-value of the voice in the postmodern performances of Wilson, Foreman, LeCompte, Finley, and Anderson. Completing a line of argument begun in the chapter on phenomenology, this chapter finds poststructuralism insufficient to account for the various uses of the voice in postmodern performance, and therefore considers the degree to which phenomenology and speech act theory provides justification for vocal agency in postmodernity. Contesting the critical view of postmodern theatre as practicing a silencing of the voice, this chapter argues that postmodern performers deliberately seek out agency and intentionality for an identifiable speaking subject, corroborating both the utopian ideal of modernist practice as well as the Heideggerian endeavor to reveal non-linguistic realms of meaning and being.

The last chapter, “The Voice in Media and Secondary Orality,” investigates the theories of voice in media theory and the philosophy of technology in order to clarify the various means by which the voice and the speaking subject may be considered in relation to electronic mediation. Through a comparison of the theories of Benjamin, Heidegger, Sartre, McLuhan, Ong, and Baudrillard with the mediated performances found in literature, video, film, TV, and computer, this chapter argues that technology does not warrant the interpretation of the interior fracture and disconnection from community of the human subject. Drawing upon McLuhan and
Ong’s theorizing on acoustic space and secondary orality, this chapter argues that the postmodern age witnesses a regeneration of the voice within communication technologies, which counters the visual and scriptural cast of the Western thought of the past two thousand years. Furthermore, this chapter argues that the silencing of the voice in poststructural theory and contemporary theatre criticism reflects the final effort of the scripturalist enterprise to deny the voice and orality a role in human epistemology. Revisiting once again Heidegger’s theorizing on language, this chapter offers that the fragmenting of the human subject thought to exist in postmodernity and technology actually announces a return to oral systems of knowledge and the growing awareness of a non-linguistic mode of perception.

In summary, this dissertation examines theories of voice in a variety of contemporary schools of thought, ranging from the sciences of paleontology and archeology, to the philosophies of technology and deconstruction, to linguistics and the humanities. This study argues against the silencing of the voice in contemporary thought and performance criticism with evidence that the voice remains an important and primary means of signification on the postmodern stage and within mass media, and thereby restores to the human speaking subject a sense of vocal agency and presence, even within the adverse conditions of postmodernity.
CHAPTER 2
THE VOICE IN PALEOANTHROPOLOGY

This chapter investigates theories of voice currently offered by the discipline of paleoanthropology—the study of human origins, embracing anthropology, archeology, biology, linguistics, neurology, paleontology, and sociology— in order to evaluate how scientific approaches shed light on the subject of vocalized language and its position in human cognition, communication, and culture. Such a task confronts several timely concerns. First, despite the twentieth-century philosophies contesting the material view of language expressed in nineteenth century positivism, the natural sciences have continued to theorize upon the concrete implications that might be drawn from the empirical studies of our linguistic origins. To open the conversation on language within the humanities to theorizing in the sciences therefore risks putting under interrogation the premises of contemporary linguistic philosophies, including those that place the voice and language under suspicion. Second, countering empiricism altogether, poststructuralism no longer holds tenable the scientific evaluation of such a touchstone issue as origins, since its pursuit, the theory argues, unwittingly conspires to privilege one relative position to the detriment of other interests. Therefore a consideration of paleoanthropological theories of voice and language also contends with the political mandate of poststructural theory.

In terms of performance, how the subject of the origins of voice and language may be conceived directly applies to long-held interpretations of the mythical, religious, communal, and critical roles of drama in both early and contemporary societies. The subject touches on issues

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1 Of these disciplines, only two are solely concerned with the human fossil record: paleontology with fossilized human skeletons, and archeology with fossilized tools and artwork. The other disciplines are involved on a comparative basis, between present biological, cultural, linguistic, neurological, and social structures and those indicated or inferred by the fossil record.
that continue to be raised at the end of the twentieth century as essentialist notions of language and culture come under scrutiny. How might the paleoanthropological sciences contribute to a more informed discussion in theatre studies concerning the origins of performance and its role in individual expression and communal organization? In light of contemporary theoretical problems, if the voice and the speaking subject have indeed come under critique, how might the view from evolutionary theory restore a sense of its agency, presence, and value? At stake in a consideration of the issues surrounding origins for theatre critics and practitioners are the very ontic principles that allow performance to take place in the first place.

In his concern with theatre and “ethology,” which he defines as “the application of evolutionary theory to behavior and culture” (PT 248), Richard Schechner may be the only critic who has broached paleoanthropology as a source of insight for theatre studies. Schechner does not specifically comment upon voice and language origins, since his interest in evolutionary theory focuses on the apparent performative continuum that seems to exist between the observations of primatologists and the anthropological studies of native tribal cultures, as expressed in his collection of essays Performance Theory (1988). Nonetheless, Schechner offers theatre scholarship a toehold into the relevance of paleoanthropological theory, particularly his suggestion of the study of a “bio-aesthetic web,” one that has roots in the consideration of genetics, neurology, and anatomy as somehow contributing to the ways that we can and do express ourselves (PT 249). What might we stand to gain, or lose, were we to allow the sciences to inform our discussions of knowledge, culture, and performance? Given the contemporary preoccupation with the contested nature of discourse, can we actually speak of the human subject as epistemologically bound to instinct, nature, and biology?
Schechner’s interest in the evolutionary history of performance touches on the concern with language origins expressed throughout the twentieth century in linguistics and the philosophies of language. In the first half of the century, linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf could justifiably assert that “the story of evolution in man is the story of man’s linguistic development” (84), since language, through the studies of Pierce, Russell, and Frege, was coming to be accepted at the time as the one tool by which we conceive knowledge and construct culture. Whorf posed the same questions of concern to linguists dating back to Vico, Condillac, Rousseau and Herder. What did the first languages sound like? For what were languages conceived and used? What is the relationship between language, thought, and reality? Yet without quantifiable tools of measurement, how were answers to be found? Even Merleau-Ponty, who recognized the relative nature of language while desiring to situate it within a phenomenology of perception, could only reiterate Vico and Condillac by interpreting language as erupting from gesture and onomatopoeia. More recently, from within the humanities Michael Taussig in *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993) argues for a view of language as springing from the need to account for the world through mimesis, and, in a similar vein, Jerry Gill in such works as *Mediated Transcendence: A Postmodern Reflection* (1989) and *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor* (1991) views the metaphoric and mediational aspects of language as “primordial.” Such thinking, however, while serving to restore to language a sense of communicative traction in the face of deconstruction, does not radically depart from observations Aristotle offers in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* in reference to nominalist and metaphorical uses of language in the interpretation of reality.

Twentieth-century theatre practitioners share the concern with origins. Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski staked their careers on the assurance of the existence of primordial forms of
expression, and the radical theatres of the United States bolstered revolutionary thinking with the essentialist theories of Artaud. Critics of various ethnic and cross-cultural theatre forms, such as Schechner, Phillip Zarilli, and Dwight Conquergood, may view their research with one eye on the caution afforded by poststructuralism, but their arguments also restore to their subjects an autonomy based on the exigencies of nature and tradition. For as theorists and dramatists like Brecht and Yeats attest, the incredibly rich and tradition-steeped performances of India, Indonesia, China, and Japan do not simply spring from one individual’s creative imagination, but flow from the confluence of a particular culture’s mythology, religious sentiment, language, taboo, art, physical and emotional discipline, aesthetics, history, and communal subconscious, which cannot be duplicated elsewhere. How do we unravel the cultural tapestry to be found in performance? And in the face of deconstruction, can all of the signifying elements of such complex performative traditions really be reduced to a system of signs that have no referent? Much theatre theory implies that a view towards our collective origins somehow grants the human species an organic privilege previously afforded by theology and logocentric thought. But the problem remains: how to prove it?

Both contemporary philosophers of language and theatre scholars betray a surprising lack of reference to the empirical investigations into the roots and origins of language and speech as presented in paleontology, archeology, and related disciplines. From the hindsight of the turn of a new century, most twentieth-century thinkers suffered the disadvantage of a lack of substantive empirical evidence that could have enhanced or modified their views. Admittedly, the scientific literature on the origin of language only recently broke free of the constraints of nineteenth-

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2 Merleau-Ponty and Derrida at least refer to the theoretical work of Mauss and Levi-Strauss on the structures of non-industrialized societies, and Derrida in *Of Grammatology* acknowledges the then current (from the vantage of the early 1960s) paleoanthropology of Andre Leroi-Gourhan.
century methods, aided in the past few decades by new fossil discoveries and advanced systems of quantification. But in the past thirty to forty years that paleoanthropology has flourished, the humanities have yet to cross the disciplinary divide that separates them.3

In all fairness, philosophers, scientists, and lay people alike recognize that the origin of language in the human ancestry will never be known with assurance, since the first spoken languages and the soft tissues used in voice production do not survive in the fossil record. Despite their technological advances, scientists must still approach the fossil record with a great deal of interpretive imagination. For their part, linguists can only speculate as to the forms and sounds of the “proto-languages” that preceded the transcriptions of ancient languages only six thousand years ago. Challenging questions persist. How might researchers credibly reconstruct language as it may have existed one or two million years ago? How might they distinguish the development of the anatomical properties of the voice from the cognitive mechanisms that make language possible, and their eventual combination in speech? Given the scant fossil evidence, how to justifiably conceive of human life-worlds in which spoken language took place prior to any historical record? Finally, were those tasks accomplished, would the conclusions then corroborate the theories embraced by theatre scholars and practitioners?

Given the problems empiricists face when confronting the fossil record in the quest for human origins, a strain of contemporary theory argues to the contrary. In this view, the endeavor

3 This is not to say that the humanities, and theatre in particular, have not looked to the sciences to aid its research. Archeology, anthropology, and linguistics have certainly aided in the reconstruction of ancient performances and in the study of various cultural performances. Chaos theory has lately gained credence in literary studies, particularly in the dramatic criticism of William Demastes and Michael Vanden Heuvel. This chapter distinguishes itself for the concentration on the discipline of paleoanthropology and its attempt to account for the first instance of vocalized speech, and possibly performance, in the evolutionary record. In one instance, however, Graddol and Swann, in Gender Voices, use linguistic theory in their critique of the andro-centric cast of language (see the discussion below).
is not only impossible, but its valorization ultimately hinders the supposedly modernist task of revealing truths concerning the human condition. Derrida rejects the notion of an autonomous speaking subject based upon his belief that speakers are incapable of original speech, and that the operation of *différance* obscures the location of a foundational origin of language. Speakers, in his view, can only reiterate previous utterances, just as in Artaud’s view the Western theatre can only regurgitate secondhand dramatic texts. Foucault’s archeology of language, specifically the employment of language in institutionalized discourse, offers a sustained critique of the foundational ideologies that find their validation in the presumed revelation of an originary *episteme* made manifest by reason. Under Foucaultian terms, the foregrounding of any academic discourse as an assumed source of objective insight confronts the problematic issues of authority, coercion, and the politics of competing discursive paradigms. Could a contemporary empirical study of origins escape the same faulty assumptions and prejudices concerning science and objectivity that have handicapped Western thinking from Socrates to Nietzsche? In light of the poststructural arguments inspired by Derrida and Foucault, the quest for origins through both empirical and rationalist pursuits has fallen into disrepute, exposed as yet another relative language game attempting to claim a monopoly on truth in service to oppressive hegemonic forces. Were we to indulge a discussion of origins, we might unwittingly promote essentialist notions of the sovereignty of man, a hierarchy of the races and sexes, and the superiority of Western thought and sciences over those of the East, thereby inflicting some form of injustice on peoples either excluded from the conversation or unwilling to take part.

Nonetheless, the paleoanthropological research into human origins continues under the modernist faith that scientific fact holds universal value, despite the theoretical misgivings. For poststructuralists to consider the empirical pursuits of the natural sciences as somehow
promoting unjust doctrinal impositions, they place undue emphasis on potential misapplications while ignoring the viability of the subjects under investigation. Christopher Norris argues that poststructuralists err when they conflate the relative truth claims of religious and secular belief systems, seemingly bestowed by divine or privileged authority, and a singular truth “arrived at through reasoned enquiry in the public sphere of open participant debate” (TEC 11-12). It is one thing, for example, for a Christian Scientist to refuse antibiotics for a viral infection on religious grounds, but it is another to take the Christian Scientist position as proof that antibiotics simply represent a differing interest position and therefore do not work. Christian Scientism may be relative, but pharmaceutical research in virology is not. Only were the patient forced to take medication against his or her will could the treatment be construed to violate civil liberties, which is another matter altogether. As Norris points out, echoing Habermas, poststructuralists inadvertently embrace the same oppressive strategies as the hegemonic forces they decry when they ignore reason and revert to “a pre-enlightenment ethos when faith was the arbiter of right thinking” (TEC 12). Rather, the same reason that gave birth to empiricism should be considered as the same reason that lifted rationalist discourse out of the quagmire of superstition and opinion, and even made poststructural thinking possible. The sciences do allow us to speak of empirical fact with objectivity, and paleoanthropologists, despite the formidable challenge presented by the fossil record, can successfully chip away at the monolith of our pre-historic past.

Two examples illustrate such a reasoned enquiry in the public sphere mentioned by Norris. In the first example, paleoanthropology has grown into a noisy and crowded field, and not all of the theorists considering the issue of language concur on a single interpretation of the data. The immense sweep of time to be accounted for and the relatively few fossils discovered to
date prohibit a unanimous consensus. As though verifying Foucault and Lyotard, theorists recognize the degree to which they greet the evidence with guesswork and wishful thinking, thereby moving the discussion from the supposed detachment of empiricism to the subjective realm of supposition. But rather than allow the difficulties of the discipline to suggest an inherent and invalidating relativism, the differing perspectives offered by paleoanthropology nonetheless converge upon a “single truth.” For, as this chapter argues, paleoanthropologists agree, despite their differences, that the empirical evidence attests to the central role of vocal language in the evolutionary maturity of modern human being. In the second example, David Graddol and Joan Swann in Gender Voices (1989) use linguistic theory to contest the assumptions Dale Spender makes in reference to the andro-centric cast of the English language in Man Made Language (1980). Whereas Spender echoes Foucault in her subjective view of the English language silencing women in its reflection of male bias, Graddol and Swan argue that empirical studies of language do not corroborate her conclusions. In an ironic twist, linguistic “fact” argues that the English language more than adequately serves to formulate feminist arguments, and that through reasoned inquiry, the andro-centrism of gendered nouns and pronouns can be changed.

Therefore, rather than privileging the recent vogue for Foucault and the silencing of the sciences before they have had a chance to speak, this study prefers to consider the many voices that have begun to weigh in on some aspect of voice production, and not only from the perspective of the humanities. Given the overwhelming concern with language in the past century, and the identification of a keystone issue such as origins, the conversation itself begs the input and commentary of competing disciplines. The value of this chapter resides in its embrace of paleoanthropology and in the attempt to illumine the conversation about the origins of speech and language within the humanities with an all too often overlooked view from the sciences. The
inclusion of this chapter within a larger work pertaining to the status of the voice in theory and performance stems from the observation that paleoanthropology at this moment offers the most sustained, rigorous, and lively debate concerning the origin of the voice and language in the human ancestry.

This chapter posits that the conclusions drawn from the empirical evidence of the pre-history of human being offers theatre scholarship fresh insight into the use-value of the voice, touching on questions of relevance such as the subjects of the first speech, the reasons for vocal discourse, the role of orality in human cognition and communication, the representational aspects of language and its uses in mapping and defining reality, and the ability of language to present the speaking subject. Were such insights given serious consideration, they could aid a renewed interest in several subjects of interest to theatre scholars and practitioners, such as voice pedagogy and the role of vocal training from both anatomical and behavioral perspectives, acoustical considerations of theatre design, a semiotics of sound and voice, the recuperation of the speaking subject despite the arguments of poststructuralism, and a deeper investigation into the subject of orality already pioneered in the research of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong (see chapter six). Although an empirical exploration of the “bio-aesthetic web” could open theatre scholarship to further research into the evolutionary tenets of ritual and play, physical discipline, and aesthetic expression, the concern here shall be limited to a consideration of the role of the voice in human discourse. Particularly in terms of the scope of this study, this chapter argues that paleoanthropology counters the poststructural silencing of the voice by restoring to the speaking subject autonomy and a sense of agency that allows it to engage proactively and navigate successfully its social and physical environments.
This chapter investigates the methods scientists adopt when approaching the voice and language in the fossil record, and the issues such methods raise for the speaking subject. The chapter questions the degree to which the differing theories of the evolutionary history of voice and language resolve the problem of intentionality and agency in human discourse. Graham Richards in *Human Evolution: An Introduction for the Behavioural Sciences* (1987) suggests that the inquiry into linguistic origins falls within three parameters: first, whether some form of language occurred very early or rather late in the record, second, whether our present vocal languages evolved from a vocal or gestural base, and third, whether the selective pressures towards vocalized language stemmed from primarily cognitive or social challenges (272). All three areas hold significance for a consideration of the voice since they foreground and promote different aspects of voice use, and, by extension, emphasize different aspects of human cognition, communication, and life.

In terms of this study, the evaluation of the agency afforded the speaking subject through the differing views of vocal evolution offers relevant insight into the problems of presence and subjectivity in contemporary theory and performance. If the voice developed early, then it indeed accounts for the unique quality of human being as cognitively and socially constituted. If it developed late, humans should be thought of as more functionally and technically predisposed to respond to and interact with the environment according to the dictates of instinct and biology. If gesture preceded speech, then communication and the evaluation of the life-experience relate more to embodiment. On the other hand, if the voice and speech quickly supplanted gesture, then humanity expresses and understands itself by intellectually and linguistically extending into the environment and the unknown. If language and voice are by-products of cognitive mechanisms, then language arose as a means for the individual to respond to the environment. But if voice and
language accompanied socialization, then language arose to aid the individual in its interactions with others. As we shall see, every view holds implications for a consideration of the agency of the speaking subject.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in two parts. The first presents a brief summary of human evolution, noting the major anatomical and cultural changes of the human species, and particularly pointing out areas in which voice and language might have been a factor. Admittedly, this section is unnecessary for readers with more than a passing familiarity with human evolution, and it does not advance the argument of this chapter. Nonetheless, its inclusion is valuable for two reasons. First, the review of human evolution presented here identifies and lists the issues of concern to paleoanthropologists in their attempts to formulate theories of voice and language. As such, it provides the necessary background information and frame for the discussion of the various theories that follows. The second part addresses paleoanthropological theories of voice and language, following by number the three areas designated by Richards. Taking them in turn, the discussion explores how the differing views of vocal evolution address issues of relevance to theatre study and practice, and how they address the problems of agency and subjectivity of the speaking subject.

Human Evolution and Vocal Language: An Overview

Whereas paleoanthropologists disagree about many observations and conclusions that might be drawn from the human fossil record, all agree that vocalized language and the development of the cognitive and anatomical features that make it possible comprise the one trait that most distinguishes the human from the rest of the animal kingdom, giving rise to the proposed classification of *Homo sapiens loquans*. Unfortunately, the record does not provide a clear and irrefutable view into the past. Neither does it isolate the selective pressures that
contributed towards vocal language or clarify why and for what purposes language was used. Using the theory of evolution and, specifically, Darwin’s theory of natural selection, scientists have developed various models that propose to make sense of the record, attempting to identify the selective traits that would have made speech and language possible. Darwin’s theory of natural selection posits that all living organisms will keep and maintain those traits, anatomical and behavioral, that aid in its survival, passing on those traits to their offspring. Furthermore, natural selection always occurs for a purpose, with no developments being gratuitous, although traits that were once adapted for one purpose may also benefit secondary purposes (Lewin, HE 4-6; Richards 23-8; Lieberman, OOL 173, UH 4-8). Theorists therefore share one premise: that the voice and spoken language evolved as traits designed to aid the survival of the human species.

Although Darwin’s publications sparked a controversy concerning human origins that continues into the present day, DNA testing confirms that humans are closest in their anatomical structures to the four species of modern apes--the chimpanzee, gorilla, orangutan, and gibbon--than to any other species. Humans are actually closer to the chimpanzee than the gorilla (1.2% as opposed to 1.4% genetic difference) and humans, chimps, and gorillas are of equal difference to the orangutan (2.2%) (Lewin, HE 20). A comparison of human and chimp genes reveals that both species shared a common ancestor, possibly Ramapithecus, about 5 million years before

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4 The brief summary of the human evolutionary record presented here is taken primarily from Roger Lewin’s condensed yet very informative Human Evolution: An Illustrated Introduction. Though the book was published in 1984, new data pertaining to the overall sweep of human evolution has not substantially altered or invalidated the basic frame presented here, though minor points are always subject to debate and revision. Nonetheless, Lewin’s work has been referenced here with his 1993 publication, The Origin of Modern Humans, Richards’s Human Evolution: An Introduction for the Behavioural Sciences (1987), as well as the more recent works cited in this chapter.
present (hereafter “bp”\(^5\)). But the four living ape species do not share a vocal language on par
with that of modern humans. Rather, as humans evolved from their primate ancestors,
somewhere along the five million year trajectory vocalized language was introduced. Therefore,
given the evolutionary association between apes and humans, theorists adopt as a second premise
that vocalized language probably evolved from neurological, anatomical, and cultural systems of
communication evident in the apes, with greater emphasis placed on the chimpanzee.

Geological research indicates that the earth formed about 4.66 billion bp and cooled to
the degree that it could support life about 4 billion bp. Life forms gradually evolved until our
earliest ancestor, common to both humans and the living great apes, appeared in Africa some
time between 10 and 14 million bp, having descended from one or more of the twenty Asian ape
species of the Miocene period (5 to 24 million bp).\(^6\) At that time in Africa, the climate was
cooling and vast forests and jungles were receding, changing into savannah plains and
grasslands. Because of the changes, larger forest dwelling animals were under competition for a
shrinking food supply, and many of the Miocene apes became extinct. Primates were forced to
leave the safety of the trees for the ground and the plains, where different food sources may have
been more plentiful, but the dangers from predation greater. To aid their survival, over 5 million
years ago some form of higher primate found it more advantageous to become bipedal,
eventually evolving into what became the earliest distinctly human ancestor, known as \textit{hominids}.
As a third premise, therefore, theorists concur that the adaptations for vocalized speech evolved

\(^5\) Lowercase letters designate dating based on measurements of radioactive decay of elements
such as carbon, uranium, and potassium, as opposed to upper case letters, which refer to
measurements of solar years. See Richards 66-74.

\(^6\) Hominids developed in the Pliocene, 1.6 to 5 million bp, which directly succeeds the Miocene.
concurrently with a change in hominid lifestyle, specifically one of migratory hunting and
gathering as opposed to the more stationary and arboreal lifestyle of the apes.

In the trajectory towards the modern human, the first class of hominids distinct from the
apes has been classified *Australopithecus*, which appeared in eastern Africa in roughly three
stages. Fossil remains of the first, *Australopithecus afarensis*, have been dated between 3.75 and
4 million bp, the most famous representative being Lucy, a 40 percent complete female skeleton
found in 1978 and dated to 3.6 million bp. The remains of this species reveal that *A. afarensis*
stood about 1 to 1.7 meters high, weighed from 25 to 40 kg, and had a brain size of about 400 cc,
roughly equivalent to the brain of a modern chimpanzee. *A. afarensis* earns its own classification
because of the proof of bipedalism; skeletal features indicate that it stood and habitually walked
upright. Bipedalism as a means of travel is faster and more economical, since the greater
distances of the open plains can be covered better on two feet as opposed to four.7

Paleontologists agree that this trait signals the onset of selection towards human being, but here
they begin to contend whether the change in lifestyle also signals a change in communication so
early in the hominid ancestry.

*Australopithecus africanus* followed *A. afarensis*, skeletal remains being dated between 2
and 3 million bp, and it did not differ greatly from its predecessor except for a slightly larger
brain, measuring 480 cc, which paleontologists take as evidence of increased selective pressures
toward cognition. They disagree, however, on whether a larger brain size holds attendant
implications for language. Brain size has therefore become a major issue in evolutionary theories
of language and speech. *Australopithecus robustus* and *A. boisei* followed, about 2 million bp.
They were on average taller (1.75 meters high) and heavier (60 kg) and had a larger brain, about

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7 See Hewes 36; Falk, 7-8; and Dunbar, 106-7.
550 cc. Skeletal evidence suggests that all australopithecines walked upright but, given powerful upper bodies, were just as comfortable in the trees. However, fossilized australopithecine hand bones evidence a distinct adaptation for precision over the ability demonstrated by the four living ape species. A second debatable issue arises, that of whether the cognitive properties that make dexterity and toolmaking possible also hold implications for language. The issue of dexterity raises a third related concern, whether language would have been expressed vocally or gesturally.

The australopithecines continued to evolve, but archeologists doubt that they made the stone tools that have been dated as early as 2.5 million bp, which have been attributed to the appearance at the same time of the first representatives of the genus Homo, known as the pithecanthropines. Homo habilis, meaning “handy man,” shared the earth with the later australopithecines, the earliest fossils on record attributed to it being dated to about 2 million bp. H. habilis was roughly the same size and weight as A. africanus, but had reduced molars and elonged incisors which evidence a change in diet from vegetation to meat. Despite the toolmaking ability, it still had very powerful hands, well suited for climbing. Even though there is no proof of a direct link between the two, researchers are fairly confident, given the constraints of natural selection, that H. habilis descended from the australopithecines, and not from another strain of evolving primates.8

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8 As Ian Tattersall notes, the list of hominid species indicated here represents the minimum number generally agreed upon by paleontologists. Although Tattersall holds to a longer list, in which there are four more species and another genus, for the sake of brevity and at no loss to the argument, this study will adhere to the short list. As for the similarity between A. africanus and H. habilis, some paleontologists believe that A. robustus and A. boisei belong to the genus Paranthropus, which died out completely, not having contributed to the development of humans. For clarification, see Tattersall 93, and Lewin, HE 16.
The genus *Homo* has been designated for two important reasons, first being the apparent use of a rudimentary stone “tool kit” for cutting and chopping, the second for the dramatic increase in brain size, from the 480 cc of *A. africanus* to between 650 and 800 cc for *H. habilis*, twice the size of that of the chimps. The stone tools were not simply found objects that hominids used for whatever purpose came to mind. They were deliberately fashioned and employed processes that called for planning and execution with specific tasks and goals in mind, and they were carried as a set. The first tools, roughly coinciding with *H. habilis*, have been called the *Oldowan* industry, and consist of half a dozen different tool styles, ranging from hammerstones, choppers, scrapers, and flakes, the last two used for cutting. Although chimps make tools for specific uses, their tools do not attain the complexity of the Oldowan industry.

Paleoanthropologists generally believe that the increase in brain size correlates with the increase in cognitive skills that result in toolmaking, with possible ramifications for language expressed in either gesture or speech. The evidence supplied by *H. habilis* invigorates the discussions concerning brain size and tool use, but it also raises two more issues central to theories of vocalized language, namely whether the cognitive demands of the migratory lifestyle or the increased sociability of hominids supplied more selective pressure for its emergence.

*Homo erectus*, or “erect man,” followed, from about 1.6 to 2 million bp. *H. erectus* had a body roughly the same size as modern humans, though much stronger, and had a slightly larger brain than its forebears, measuring 800 to 1100 cc. It was a habitual biped that hunted cooperatively with others, used fire, and maintained seasonal home or camp sites. *H. erectus* also migrated out of Africa and into Europe, India, and Asia, since representative skulls have been found in Indonesia and central China. The stone tools attributed to *H. erectus* comprise the *Acheulian* industry, which added four more types of tools to the Oldowan tool kit: two types of
handaxes, cleavers, and picks. Whereas the earlier stages of hominid development present difficulties of interpretation, paleoanthropologists agree that the cooperative living traits of the pithecanthropines offer strong evidence for an advanced degree of communication that had to be taking place, possibly exceeding that allowed by gesture alone.

The term *Homo sapiens*, or “wise man,” was first meant, in the eighteenth century, to designate modern human beings, given the assumed intelligence or wisdom of the species. But its classification proved premature, since, anatomically and culturally speaking, many intermediate hominids that have demonstrated an increase in intelligence and cultural sophistication have been identified in the past two hundred years as existing between *H. erectus* and modern humans. The term “archaic *Homo sapiens*” therefore applies to those hominids who appeared as early as 400,000 bp and survived over 300,000 years.⁹ Archaic *H. sapiens* essentially shared the same body and brain size (on average 1350 cc) as modern humans, but maintained skull characteristics of *H. erectus*, such as pronounced brow ridges and low forehead, and used the same tool kit. Nonetheless, scientists believe they probably attained a high degree of intelligence, including most assuredly, at this stage, vocal language use.

The most well-known archaic *H. sapien*, the Neanderthals, earned their designation (*H. s. neanderthalensis*) because they are thought to have been anatomically quite similar to modern humans and to have lived concurrently with other species of both archaic *Homo sapiens* and early *Homo sapiens sapiens*, from 150,000 to 35,000 bp. Their fossils have been found only in Europe and parts of the Middle East, and the bulkier bone size has been attributed to Neanderthals having lived a much more physically challenging life during the last Ice Age (the

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⁹ Richards cites a 1974 publication as introducing the term “archaic *Homo sapiens*” (85). He notes that the term *Homo sapiens* dates to the eighteenth century, before theorists even thought to include humans in the evolutionary record, and long before pre-sapient skulls were found (12).
Wurm glaciation), begun about 75,000 bp, when Europe suffered arctic winters and was a much less hospitable place than it is today. Although no taller than 1.7 meters, and weighing about 54 kg, Neanderthals supported massive musculature, and the distinctive brow ridges of the skull are thought to have supported a larger jaw and wider molars, more efficient for eating (Lieberman, ES 69).

The Neanderthals left the fossil record with significant contributions. They made their own clothes and huts, used fire, and, together with later forms of archaic *H. sapiens*, developed a substantially larger tool kit--about 60 different styles--that has been classified as the *Mousterian* industry. The tools of this period are known for their diversity, having been fashioned for very specific uses. Some are thought to express the stylistic changes imposed by different tribes, evidencing a sense of aesthetics, whereas few are even thought not to be tools at all but indicative of some form of symbolism. The Neanderthals also rank as the earliest species on record thought to have practiced human burial with the addition of grave goods. Even though Neanderthals may have borrowed the practice from early *H. s. sapiens*, anthropologists believe the evidence indicates that they exhibited a spiritual sensitivity or, at the very least, an awareness of the implication of death not expressed by previous species (Lewin, HE 73; Lieberman, OOL 163, ES 81). Paleoanthropologists roughly concur that ceremonial practice betrays the rudiments of language, speech, and culture, since ceremony betrays a type of thinking that transpires using concepts, made available only through words, which express the abstract.

But DNA tests reveal that modern day human beings do not share any traces of Neanderthal genes, meaning that the species did not produce offspring with *H. s. sapiens* but completely died out. Given the rather advanced physical and cognitive abilities of the Neanderthals, this fact may at first seem improbable. But paleontologists believe that as
hominids evolved, some adopted traits advantageous for survival in colder, more demanding environments, while others, specifically those leading to *H. s. sapiens*, adopted traits for greater socialization and speech. As we shall see below, some theorists believe that although the Neanderthals far exceeded their immediate ancestral forbears in evolutionary development, a physically inferior yet linguistically superior *H. s. sapiens*—even by slight degrees—could have had enough advantage to outlive all of its predecessors. The distinction illuminates the vast importance of a mature, vocalized language over many other selective adaptations. The challenge Neanderthal presents concerns the precise deficiencies in vocal anatomy, specifically within the supralaryngeal vocal tract, that would have hindered its survival.\(^{10}\)

The 300,000-year transition from *H. erectus* to *H. s. sapiens*, with the exception of *H. s. neanderthalensis*, has been difficult to trace because of the scant evidence of hominid skeletons and conflicting interpretations of the existing fossil record. A theory currently in favor, known as the “Out of Africa” theory (though not without its critics\(^ {11}\)), posits that the first distinct *H. s. sapiens* evolved in eastern Africa as early as 250,000 bp, migrated into the Middle East at least 150,000 bp, and into the rest of the world over the next 100,000 years or so. Examples such as Jebel Qafzeh (50,000 bp), a complete skull from modern day Israel, and Cro Magnon (35,000 to 40,000 bp) from southern France, exhibit the high forehead, reduced brow ridges, and domed skull of modern humans. Corroborating the “Out of Africa” theory, DNA testing undertaken by Luigi Cavalli-Sforza at Stanford University on skeletal finds and present living peoples of every

\(^{10}\) The supralaryngeal tract refers to the cranial elements comprising the face, mouth, and throat that are involved in breathing, swallowing, and speech, including the lips, nose, teeth, tongue, soft palate, pharynx, esophagus, and the vocal cords. See the discussion below.

\(^{11}\) Notably, Milford Wolpoff of the University of Michigan, a proponent of the “multiregional theory,” views *H. erectus* as evolving into *H. s. sapiens* concurrently on several continents. See Leakey and Lewin 214, and Lieberman, *ES* 6.
ethnicity seems to indicate that all *H. s. sapiens* have the same remote ancestor in Africa, whose descendants eventually replaced all *H. erectus* strains who had previously migrated out of Africa and developed elsewhere. Cavalli-Sforza further bolsters the theory with evidence from linguistic research that suggests that all present languages evolved from earlier proto-languages, with the strong probability of a common source located in the Middle East or North Africa.

Although the research inevitably received a fair share of criticism, the linguistic and genetic roots of present day humans surprisingly coincide (Lewin, *OMH* 106-7). If Cavalli-Sforza’s hypothesis were correct, it would accommodate one of the problematic characteristics of language, that even though the neurological and anatomical characteristics that make speech possible are genetically predetermined, language must still be learned. Spoken language would not necessarily erupt spontaneously among isolated hominid tribes, but would have to be learned and passed from one tribe to another and from generation to generation. The chances of one proto-language giving birth to all the extant languages would be just as likely, if not more so, than the chances of many languages evolving in various geographic locales. Therefore, modern languages as we know them may have developed specifically within the earliest *H. s. sapiens* tribes. The advantage of having a more advanced language would also account for why *H. s. sapiens* replaced all of the other pithecanthropines who had migrated into Europe and Asia: a distinct selective advantage simply in vocal prowess was enough to grant survival.

Besides evolving a distinct anatomy and enhanced communication skills, *H. s. sapiens* were the first to routinely produce art objects. Despite artifacts dating back several hundred thousand years, the 40,000 year mark stands as a threshold for a flood of artistic representations to follow, such as carved ivory and bones, and, probably the most famous, the cave paintings of southern France, Spain, and Italy. The tool industries of *H. s. sapiens* also surpass the
Mousterian, and are too numerous to mention here. They have been found to change and develop within several thousand year periods, and they evidence a dramatic increase in technology, socialization, and language skills. In the past 40,000 years, *H. s. sapiens* has not changed anatomically, even though our cultural and technological developments have accelerated dramatically. It would be a mistake to conclude that our physical evolution has halted, however, since hominid changes seem to take at least a quarter million years to become noticeable, and neither should our present form be thought of as the end of the line, given that evolution has proven to be continual and that, assumedly, the sun has another 10 billion years before it will burn out.

According to the theory of natural selection, every facet and by-product of the vocalized languages of *H. s. sapiens* evolved to aid in the survival of the human being. At its current stage of evolution, *H. s. sapiens* exhibit several traits that signal the culmination of human linguistic development. First, language depends on certain neurological developments that, in conjunction with the evolution of vocal anatomy, result in verbal communication. Second, as an intellectual property, language seems to be connected with certain cognitive processes, such as creative and syntactical thought, that find expression in technological invention, art work, and culture. Third, language also appears to depend to a certain degree on the shared sociability found in human community. Fourth, the voice has surpassed gesture as a form of communication, although communicative media such as writing and electronics supplement the voice today.

The remainder of the chapter shall be devoted to exploring the various and competing paleoanthropological theories as they address the emergence of the voice and language in the fossil record. As identified in this past section, the major issues under investigation are brain size, toolmaking ability, social and cognitive pressures, the communicative similarities with the
ape species, and the possible role of gesture. Following Graham Richards’s suggestion that the theories fall within three parameters, they shall be treated in turn: first, whether language occurred early or late in the record; second, whether language evolved from a vocal or gestural base; and third, whether the selective pressures towards spoken language were more cognitive or social in character (272).

**Paleoanthropological Theories of Voice and Language**

Many theorists over the past few decades have attempted to isolate one major characteristic of hominid life that would have provided enough selective pressure to make modern forms of vocalized language possible. Within the paleoanthropological literature, these theories have come to be known as “just so” stories for their proclivity to offer a definitive solution for why language appears in the human ancestry. Still other theorists are content to believe that many factors contributed to the evolution of vocalized language, and that it probably developed in a “positive feedback loop,” wherein several traits helped to give rise to speech, which in turn aided those traits in evolving. But to the degree that theories isolate specific traits that may have promoted the evolution of language, they emphasize certain aspects of human life of interest to those theorists in the humanities who tend to see human beings as essentially linguistic, even dominated by linguistic structure. Although consensus is far from reached within the scientific community, different approaches have opened up interesting points of intersection, with conclusions sometimes diametrically opposed.

Since the number of publications on the evolution of language is massive, only a specialist can claim to be familiar and conversant with them all (which I do not). Specific theorists are included here first because they have come to my attention through works that attempt to present overviews on evolutionary theory, but second because their names frequently
recur as recognized proponents of leading theories and types of research. Space simply does not allow consideration or even mention of all the figures who have weighed in on some aspect of the conversation on the evolution of the voice, speech, and language. To date, however, no one theory can claim to have isolated the definitive origin of language, but were one aspect of human life proven to stimulate the need for verbal language, our philosophies would no doubt have to undergo reconsideration in light of a prominent trait of ontological significance. Since such is not the case, many theories will be considered here in an effort to present an overview of how the voice and language have been viewed within paleoanthropology in the past few decades. This section discusses paleoanthropological theories of voice and language origins in order to examine how they position or restore the agency of the speaking human subject, and how they impact a consideration of performance, even though most have their critics and some have fallen into disrepute or have become obsolete.

**Early and Gradual versus Late and Sudden**

To think of voice and language as evolving early or late in the human record stimulates two views that interpret language ability as either central or incidental to the driving impulses of human being. As central, language serves as the key ingredient for the unique characteristics of the species; as incidental, language numbers as only one trait among many that underlie our biological and social development. If humans adopted the ability to voice speech early in their evolutionary history, then language can be thought to have played a significant role in our perception of life and constitution of social and cultural structures. The view also gives credence to structuralist perspectives of language. If, on the other hand, speech and language arrive as fairly recent developments, then our patterns and rhythms of life could best be considered in view of long-standing behavioral and genetic mechanisms. This thought bolsters the biological
perspective found in psychiatry, behavioral psychology, and genetics. The first view posits the rational human being as responding with conscious intellectual mechanisms in its engagement of the environment, whereas in the second we are merely the end product of a long trajectory of physical law and natural exigency.

From the earliest hominids to the modern human, brain size has tripled. From that fact, and other indicators from the fossil evidence such as body size, skeletal build, and lack of tools, paleoanthropologists have concluded that australopithecines more closely resembled apes than humans in their social organization, eating habits, and communication, which consisted primarily of facial and bodily gestures accompanying a system of vocalizations. By the time the brain had doubled in size in *H. habilis*, the Oldowan stone tool technologies had developed, and social structures had become more complex, as hominids now left the security of the trees for a life of organized hunting and scavenging on the savannah plains. The increase in brain size has been attributed at this point to the selective pressures that stimulated greater neurological activity, possibly stemming from either the need for greater social skills, the need to plan food gathering tasks, or both. In another million years, the brain of *H. sapiens* would triple in size and accompany such advanced social traits as burial, ceremony, art, and even trade. The gradual increase in brain size has therefore been attributed to a piecemeal acquisition of cognitive and linguistic ability, as expressed in the progressive behavioral advances of the hominids. The gradual increase supports a view of early human beings as achieving a level of consciousness and intentional behavior above that of the apes, accompanying enhancement of anatomy and neurology for vocalized language.

Ralph Holloway and Dean Falk interpret the evidence from fossil and latex molds (or “endocasts”) of the interiors of hominid skulls as revealing that hominid brains were organized
more like human brains than ape brains, meaning that there must have been distinct behavioral
differences between hominids and apes, quite possibly signaling the early advent of selection
towards speech. The brain has been lateralized, divided front to back into the right and left
hemispheres, and each hemisphere consists of four lobes that in turn account for different
functions. The frontal lobe handles movement and emotion; the temporal lobe at the side handles
memory; the parietal lobe at the sides and top of the near-rear portion handles the senses; and the
occipital lobe, at the very rear, handles visual functions (Leakey and Lewin 253). Holloway and
Falk note two indications of neural reorganization in the hominid brain, first in the development
of the anterior poles of the temporal lobes, used for memory, and second in an indication of the
enlargement of “Broca’s area,” or an area of the left frontal lobe used in speech (Holloway 9-12,
31).

According to Holloway, *Australopithecus* would have capitalized on adaptations already
pioneered by *Ramapithecus*, developing traits for enhanced bipedalism, hunting and gathering,
and appropriate social reorganization. The changes would have necessitated greater selection
towards language, even if the skills expressed were slight improvements on the gesturalism and
calls of the other higher primates (38-9). Dean Falk’s investigation has not led her to corroborate
Holloway’s conclusions, for in her estimation, the australopithecine brain more closely
resembles that of the chimpanzee, whereas the changes that Holloway notes can be recognized
more assuredly in *H. habilis*, to whom she attributes the possibility of “rudimentary speech.” She
supports her view with the evidence of the right-handed nature of Oldowan stone tool
technology,\(^\text{12}\) noting that right-handedness, which accounts for 90% of living humans, is

\(^{12}\) Archeologist Nicholas Toth, through his research designing and making hominid tools, has
found that most were fashioned by right-handed hominids. See the discussion of Toth below.
controlled by the left cerebral hemisphere, as is speech (10- 12). The proximity of speech and right-handedness in the brain indicates a probable developmental relationship between the two. By contrast, apes do not show evidence of a dominant hand preference, although every ape tends to favor one or the other.

Holloway and Falk, despite their differences, represent two scientists whose research supports an early and gradual view of adaptations for language and speech ability, although Holloway has been more generous in his designation of adaptations towards speech as early as *Australopithecus*. Both Holloway and Falk lend credence to the view that as hominids slowly evolved in their trajectory towards modern human being, some form of vocal language accompanied them. Their theories support the rather traditional view that human beings differ markedly from their relatives in the animal kingdom by their ability to rationally engage with the environment, thereby lifting themselves from the strict confines of instinct and bio-determinism. Two challenges face the gradual view. The first comes from the evidence of the stone tool fossil record, the second from research into the development of the supralaryngeal vocal tract.

Archeologists see relevance between stone tool technology and language for two reasons. First, both depend upon syntactic thought processes for their execution, and second, since speech, right-handedness, and analytical skills are related in the left hemisphere of the brain, their neurological mechanisms must have developed concurrently. Glynne Isaac notes that in contrast to brain development, tool technology developed much more slowly. The first evidence of stone tools does not appear until 2.5 million bp with *H. habilis*, which is not significant in itself since primates, otters, and birds have been observed fashioning tools to aid in food gathering, with chimps and otters keeping tools for later use. Along similar lines, primatologist William McGrew downplays tool manufacture as a distinctly human trait, noting that chimps
likewise design tools for specific activities and use different tools for different tasks (158). But in favor of the early hominids, contemporary attempts by archeologist Nicholas Toth to replicate identical tools from the hominid stone tool industries have demanded many hours of patient trial and error and experimentation in practical application, beyond the ability of chimps and many intelligent people (Lewin, *HE* 64; Lieberman, *ES* 76). Which view to favor? Isaac believes that the fairly consistent evidence of stone tool technology through the Oldowan and Acheulian industries supports the view that *H. habilis* and *H. erectus* shared a fairly rudimentary lifestyle, without much evidence of advancing linguistic or social complexity. On the other hand, the proliferation and diversity of later, Mousterian tools seem to indicate that ordered, syntactical thinking had flowered with archaic *H. sapiens*, meaning that if a correlation between stone tool technology and language exists, then language would have appeared no earlier than 300,000 bp, showing particular acceleration in growth about 40,000 bp (392-3).

The second challenge to the early view comes from the research into the development of the modern human supralaryngeal vocal tract, undertaken primarily by linguist Philip Lieberman of Brown University.13 The area known as the supralaryngeal vocal tract designates the cranial elements comprising the face, mouth, and throat that are involved in breathing, swallowing, and speech. The supralaryngeal vocal tract includes the lips, nose, teeth, tongue, soft palate, pharynx, esophagus, and the vocal cords. Although Lieberman’s theory takes into account many selective factors that contribute towards speech, such as tool use, socialization, and the cognitive development of the brain, much of his argument rests upon his observation that the shape of the modern human supralaryngeal vocal tract affords it the unique ability to create and vocalize, without nasality, the fifty segmental sounds found in our vocal repertoire, especially the vowels

13 See Lieberman, *BEL* chapters 11 and 12, and *UH*, chapter 2.
oo and ee, and the velar consonants g and k, giving us a selective advantage over all of our predecessors.14 (By contrast, only fifteen sounds have been identified in chimps.)

The anatomical development of the modern supralaryngeal vocal tract has not been accomplished without severe costs. In modern humans, the larynx and esophagus overlap, exposing us to the fatal threat of asphyxiation, whereas all other primates, including pre-sapient hominids and newborn human babies, as well as many mammal species, are able to breathe and swallow at the same time. Their larynxes are situated high in the throat and are designed to seal with the soft palate, thus making them obligate nasal breathers immune to the threat of choking. The modern human jaw is also reduced compared to other hominids, affording the mouth the ability to create distinct vowel and consonant sounds at the cost of impacted and infected wisdom teeth. Furthermore, we suffer a loss of the sense of smell according to the loss of a protruding snout and reduced nasal cavity. Far from being an accident, the capacity for mature modern speech directly results from selective traits for speech, which implies that the need for a specific vocal apparatus was critical for our survival, even at the risk of fatal hazards afforded by anatomical deficiencies. Lieberman’s view therefore posits the late development for vocalized language, recognizing that prior hominids may have developed a form of vocal communication more sophisticated than apes, yet undoubtedly inferior to ours. As obligate nasal breathers with larynxes high in the throat, for example, Neanderthals would have had extremely nasal speech, which contemporary tests on living subjects have shown to be more prone to interpretive error on the part of auditors (OOL 142). The difference, Lieberman concludes, would have been enough to contribute to the Neanderthals’ extinction.

14 Lieberman’s theory also draws support from Jeffrey Laitman’s research into the basicraniums of hominid skulls, that is, the formations of their undersides, with implications for the pharynx and larynx. See Leakey and Lewin, 261-3, and Lieberman, UH 69-77.
Taken together, evidence for early developments towards speech conflict with Lieberman’s view that anatomically, hominids were severely handicapped in linguistic ability until quite recently. The soft tissues of the brain do not survive in the fossil record, so it is difficult to verify dates for specific neurological developments. On the other hand, the vocal tracts of differing stages of hominids may be reconstructed from fossil evidence with a fair amount of accuracy. Therefore, even if areas of the brain developed towards language and speech as early as *Australopithecus* or *H. habilis*, the mutations could have been the result of pressures from some form of communication other than articulated speech, such as the vocalizations and physical gestures found in the apes.

According to the view that posits a late acquisition of vocalized language, our hominid ancestors until very recently more resembled apes than modern humans, and were likewise guided more by instinct than by conscious thought. By extension, therefore, the seeds of human culture would be found to reside in the balance between the living organism and nature rather than within linguistic constructs. The position foregrounds our primarily biological relationship with the environment, not our dependence upon the intermediary of language, as the early view proposes. The difference between an early and late view of vocal development and language acquisition likewise holds implications for an approach to performance. The late view infers that culturally we are indebted more to our primate ancestry than we might imagine. Our language structures would be relatively recent inventions--40,000 to a million years old as opposed to two to four million years old--and theatre practitioners like Artaud, Brook, and Grotowski would have been correct to posit that a visceral and valuable aspect of human being may be found in the primordial depths of our collective subconscious. Theatre educators and directors could justifiably encourage performers to “feel” their way through material and trust their intuitions
and instincts. On the other hand, the early view of language acquisition posits human being as distinctly linguistic. Early in their development, humans were noted for their attempts to break free of the dictates of instinct for a rational engagement of the environment. Accordingly, theatre practice, rather than looking backwards along an evolutionary continuum for its validation and inspiration, should constantly challenge its parameters in much the same manner as Meyerhold, Brecht, and Beckett consciously manipulate the signifying elements of the stage according to their semiotic, that is, linguistic, properties. At stake in a distinction of approaches reside questions of viability and meaning for both the performer and the audience in terms of how human society views itself.

The difference between the early and late view of vocalized language raises other questions worthy of consideration. Given that hominid ancestors probably developed communication systems evident in the apes, has mature spoken language evolved from both vocal and gestural forms of communication, or from one as opposed to the other? At what stages in their evolution did hominids make the transition to articulated, syntactical, and vocalized speech? And what are the implications for the distinction between gesture and voice?

**Gesture versus Voice**

Richards’ second parameter for evolutionary theories of vocalized language recognizes that the voice, the face, and the body communicate intentional meanings for humans, apes and many animal species. Yet language for the human species primarily finds expression through the voice. In terms of the evolution of the voice, therefore, it must be admitted that some form of communication preceded articulate speech, either through gesture or through vocalizations. The distinction demands attention given the contemporary view, especially the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the speech act theory of Austin and Searle, that interprets
speech as an embodied activity, dependent upon the intentions of the speaker to be communicated through extra-linguistic means as well as through the words employed. If gesture preceded speech in the evolutionary chain, then our present forms of communication may indeed depend upon bodily and facial gesture, possibly even hormones and intuition, more than we recognize. If language predominantly found expression through some kind of vocalization, on the other hand, then gesture could well be considered a secondary adjunct to the voice. The separation of voice from gesture warrants a closer examination of nominalism and the operation of the Saussurian sign for their privileging of the linguistic nature of thought.

To address the question of the antecedents for speech, scientists turn to the chimpanzee, our closest anatomical cousin, to supply clues as to how early hominids may have communicated. Given the genetic relationship between humans and apes, researchers posit that both the anatomical and social developments of modern humans evolved from the anatomical and social structures of their primate ancestors. By analyzing the vocal and gestural communication systems of the chimps and comparing observations with clues from the fossil record in terms of social organization and tool use, theorists attempt to uncover a continuum of linguistic development between the apes and modern humans. Given that chimps demonstrate both vocal and gestural forms of communication, theories tend to emphasize either a gestural or vocal base for the evolution of modern speech and language.

In terms of chimpanzee gestural communication, Jane Goodall identifies eleven basic facial expressions, ranging from sneers and pouts to grins and the “play face.” Furthermore, she notes that a variety of body postures such as aggressive “displays” and invitations to mating, are mutually understood by differing chimp communities (119-24). Auditorially, Goodall lists over thirty types of vocalizations, all of which indicate different emotional moods and which tend to
be produced only in the presence of an emotional state, indicating the physical and biological
stimulus for communication. Goodall notes that vocalization, behavior, and facial expression
exist together: the barks and screams of fear and anger, the lip smacks and laughs of body
contact and food enjoyment, and the grunts of sociability, to name only a few (127).
Additionally, however, the “pant-hoots” that signal location and aid in the demarcation of
territory garner the attention of linguists because of their communicability in the absence of
visual gestures, for they illustrate a purely auditory dimension of chimp signification.
Chimpanzee vocalizations and gestures also seem to be genetically transmitted since they are
understood in all chimp communities, yet they are fashioned to comply with group norms.
Different chimp groups modify grooming techniques, for example, and the calls of various
groups differ in accent. These traits may be thought of as comprising “dialects” that distinguish
one group from another (143). For these and other reasons, chimps are thought to exceed to some
degree the limits of instinct, exhibiting behaviors stemming from cultural constructs.

The experiments that involved teaching captive chimpanzees some form of language
brought to light three facts. First, chimps can listen to complex human speech and understand
many forms of speech acts. Second, they cannot manipulate their supralaryngeal vocal tracts and
their breath in order to form the most rudimentary syllables and words, despite the evidence of
fifteen vowel and consonant sounds in their calls. But third, by using sign language or a
computer key-pad with symbols, they are able to develop a working vocabulary of about a
hundred and fifty words, while not exceeding the linguistic ability of human children over the
age of three (Lieberman *UH* 77, 154-7, and *ES* 31-45). Primatologists and linguists differ on
conclusions that may be drawn from the experiments, but both sides agree that chimps exhibit a
pre-linguistic neurological substrate, which paleoanthropologists take to be the raw material out
of which human linguistic ability most likely evolved. Therefore, taking the vocalizations and
gestures of chimpanzees as a corollary for the type of communications expressed by the earliest
hominids, and believing these forms of communication to be linguistic prototypes for modern
speech, theorists have to factor when and why voice and gesture separated, and then identify
when and why the voice became ascendant.

Although many scientists view a continuity between human speech and the vocalizations
of chimps, not all consider them of prime importance, especially Gordon Hewes, who sees
gesture as playing a greater part in the evolution of language. Hewes believes that as humans
developed their social structures, particularly incorporating hunting and cooperative living,
language skills followed. But human language did not evolve after the vocalizations of apes but
from a gestural base that had associations in toolmaking and hunting abilities, two activities that
demand a higher coordination of physical movement. Gesture would therefore evolve with the
ability of greater physical precision. Furthermore, as males left home camps for hunting
expeditions, they had to develop a memory for places and direction, which in turn provided the
impetus for manual language, which would expand upon the already present forms of gesture
(38, 49). Also, hunting would have introduced a division of labor among the sexes, and the
maintenance of home camps together with cooperative living would have necessitated a system
of social communication, which would find support in the gestures used in other manual
activities (33).

Within this view, verbal language does not play a paramount role in the constitution of
human consciousness and social organization. As in the late view of language acquisition, the
gestural model posits early hominids not so much as rationally engaged with the environment,
but rather behaviorally and instinctually. Hewes grants that Lieberman’s research into the
supralaryngeal vocal tract denies any hominid but late *H. sapiens* the ability to use mature, articulate speech (43-4). He therefore believes that language must have evolved from a gestural base first, and a transition to vocal language would have occurred later, probably with the pithecantropines. Before *H. erectus*, “propositional language was mainly a matter of nonvocal manual and arm gestures. Such vocal cries or calls as were uttered served mainly for emotional expression, or emphasis of messages being gesturally communicated” (44).

In favor of a view towards voice over gesture fall a majority of theorists who appreciate the complexity of the vocalizations of the great apes, as well as those who, despite the limitations of the vocal tract, do see relevance in the developments of early hominid brains, such as Holloway and Falk, but also John Bradshaw and William Foley. To begin with, humans and apes living today share many of the same facial and bodily gestures. The face and the body supply many indications of mood and emotion, and humans cannot be said to have greatly advanced in their use of gesture, except when it comes to the rare occasions of pantomime and sign language. In these cases, the exceptions prove the norm: our gestural languages are fairly limited. If speech evolved from gesture, then it seems likely that we would have maintained some remnant of our evolved gestural forms. As it is, we do not exhibit a greater repertoire of physical gestures than chimps and gorillas. On the other hand, because of the evolution and coordination of myriad anatomical and neurological properties, human speech far exceeds the vocalizations of the apes. According to the view that the voice surpassed gesture as the dominant means of communication, scientists believe that once selection started to favor speech, which may have been only slightly advanced in *Australopithecus* as opposed to other primates, gesture was bypassed altogether.
William Foley in *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction* (1997) suggests that as hominids evolved they expanded upon the thirty or so vocal calls already identified in the chimpanzees by Goodall. But as the number of vocalizations increased, the earliest hominids would have encountered difficulty in differentiating the auditory aspects of specific calls. Selective pressure would have favored both the development of neurological structures able to handle the increase in information, as well as the anatomical structures to create distinct sounds and formulate combinations of sounds. The combinations of sounds would have led to the creation of words, and the basic lexicon of several hundred words would provide in turn the basis of a proto-language, which could have been established as early as *H. habilis*. The enlarged vocabulary and possible syntactical structures would have reciprocally stimulated even greater encephalization in hominid brains, until the complex operations of reference and the metalinguistic awareness of meanings came into play. At this point, complex language structures would have provided the cognitive pathways for advanced toolmaking ability, artwork, and cultural practices. Foley’s vocal model positions linguistic ability as the font of human consciousness, and likewise identifies vocalized language as a primary constituent of human culture (63-78).

Regardless of whether gesture contributed to the evolution of language or not, speech had definitely supplanted gesture by the time of *H. s. sapiens*. Another relevant question to be pursued then is *why* speech over gesture? The obvious answer is that speech transmits specific, detailed, and descriptive information through efficient syntactical structures at a rate much more rapidly and economically than gesture.\(^{15}\) Speech also does not suffer the disadvantage of having

\(^{15}\) For a discussion on the human ability to encode and decode speech, see Lieberman, *UH*, specifically 45-6.
to occupy the very useful hands and eyes, a trait that affords hominids the ability to carry on other tasks while talking. With vocalized language, humans can do several things at once, without the need to see who is talking or who is being addressed, even at night. Furthermore, as Bradshaw points out, speech can exceed the confines of time and space and express the abstract, while gesture for the most part addresses tangible objects in the present moment (81-2). The selective traits for a species adapting to hunting, gathering, migrating, and enlarging its social structures would therefore be innumerable (101-2).

A focus on the dominance of speech over gesture as a means of creating and using language in the service of knowledge gives weight to the nominalist views of Russell, Frege, and the early Wittgenstein, that communication basically transpires in a verbal medium, employed to make statements and share information. Nonetheless, as though in justification for the gestural model proposed by Hewes, the link between voice and gesture has enjoyed great popularity, as evidenced by the pairing of voice and gesture in rhetorical practice from Cicero and Quintilian to voice pedagogy used in theatre today, as well as by the support from phenomenological theories that posit language use as an embodied experience. Within theatrical paradigms, critics such as Roland Barthes and Bert States have recently reiterated the belief that speech and gesture comprise the communication and perception of the human being on stage (IMT 175; 154).

Furthermore, the gestural model corroborates the essentialist view of theatre embraced by Grotowski, Brook, Malina, Beck, Chaikin, and Schechner, whose experiments in behavior and expression attempted to resurrect within the performer a connection with primordial sensibilities. Notably, for these theorists and practitioners, such a connection does not find linguistic articulation, but transpires viscerally on levels deeper than cultural manifestation and intellection. By inference, such thinking implies that John Lennon’s “primal screams” on
“Mother” (1970)\textsuperscript{16} should be considered as more intrinsically \textit{human} than a lecture on the relevance of the equation $E=mc^2$. Paleoanthropological theories that promote the voice support the opposite view, that a defining characteristic of humanity lies in our ability to verbally articulate meaning and notions of truth in a public arena. Because of language, specifically \textit{vocal} language, the primordial past of instinct and intuition recedes into a pre-linguistic void, difficult to access and understand. By extension, a view of human being as linguistic and vocally articulate nullifies the endeavor of essentialist theatre practice. Rather than attempt to bypass language through performance, performance might serve the human polis more were it to embrace and explore our dependence on language, and how that dependence meets the demand for natural selection to assure our survival as a species.

Regardless of the degree that voice and gesture play in human communication, speech continues to touch and interweave with every aspect of human life, not just the intellectual. Given the numerous variables of the evolving human life-world, vocalized language seems to have resulted from both the physical and social challenges facing the hominid as it adapted to new environments and changing social structures. The final issue remains to be explored, whether cognitive or social demands would have provided more selective pressure to stimulate the adaptations towards the development of both voice and language.

\textbf{Cognitive versus Social}

The third parameter for evolutionary theories of voice and language focuses upon the selective pressures supplied by the hominid lifestyle. Cognitive demands stem from the intellectual problems facing the hominid in a migratory economy of hunting and gathering. Social demands result from the increase in the interdependence of large hominid groups as they

\textsuperscript{16} See Janov for the outline of a psychotherapy that aims to get therapands in touch with repressed feelings through primal screaming.
band together for purposes of survival. No doubt both cognitive and social demands acted upon early hominids, but researchers nonetheless attempt to verify which would supply more selective agency, for each view holds distinct significance for the role of language in the human life-world.

According to traditional anthropological views, when hominids starting walking, their social structures started to change. They were ranging farther in search of food, and they needed a greater intellectual capacity to meet the challenges, as well as greater numbers in order to ensure their success. The hominid community therefore started to grow, and the added numbers created stimulus for further change. For example, with the increase in hominid brain size came the increase in the time needed for the young to mature after birth. Compared to the great apes, human infants are less developed and require more time for post-natal growth before self-sufficiency. Chimps gather food and feed themselves as early as two years of age whereas human children on average require twice as much time. Greater numbers within the hominid tribes ensured the proper care and protection of pregnant and nursing females, as well as the nurturing of immature yet growing infants. As a result, the social structures started to grow in complexity, demanding an increase in the ability to navigate the growing webs of relationships.

Though both aspects no doubt developed concurrently, theorists consider whether the drive for heightened cognition or the growing social matrix presented greater selective agency upon the brain in terms of the evolution of language and speech. The first posits that the demands exerted by the complex changes in a predatory lifestyle forced a greater rational evaluation of the environment, including planning and executing hunts and scavenging trips, keeping track of seasonal and weather changes, and meeting the needs of the group, arguing that language would have developed as a byproduct. The other view favors pressures stemming from enhanced social
interaction as providing enough selective demands to cause an increase in brain size and
language ability. According to the social view, in larger groups there are more variables, and the
individual has to learn to evaluate the motives and actions of others. In the first view, language
arose to define the environment, whereas in the second it arose to define the self in relation to
others. The difference may be matters only of degree and emphasis, but if the cognitive view
were proven to be more viable, we might have to reconsider our definitions of reality in light of
the structural theorizing of Sapir, Whorf, and Levi-Strauss. On the other hand, were the social
view in ascendance, the contemporary debate regarding the imperative of ethics and justice
against the relativity of language, advanced by such thinkers as Levinas, Kristeva, and Rorty,
might need pursuing with increased vigor.

From the cognitive perspective, UCLA neurologist Harry Jerison sees language as the
latest adaptive response of the mammalian brain to aid in the mapping of the physical
environment. Taking into account a continuum dating back to amphibians and reptiles, Jerison
believes that the brain in successive life forms evolves in proportion to the development of
sensory inputs, enabling it to create models and maps of a “real world” as conceived by the
particular species. Giraffes and turtles, the argument goes, live in mutually foreign cognitive
worlds, not because the planet is any different, but because they perceive it differently. Whereas
brain capabilities and brain size do not provide accurate gauges of brain evolution, since forms of
toolmaking, communication, hunting, and social living are evident in such various species as
ants, bees, wolves, birds, and monkeys, Jerison does believe that the gradual increase in
encephalization of the hominid brain signals something notable. The key distinction lies in the
hominid reliance on analytical abilities as a supplement to sense perception, and analytical
abilities depend on language (410-20).
As australopithecines evolved from apes, they were adapting to a primarily predatory lifestyle that depended upon migrations and the mapping of large geographical areas. Wolves essentially share the same lifestyle, but rely on differing sensory inputs. Hominids suffered from inferior olfactory and aural senses compared to wolves, resulting from an evolutionary detour through an arboreal lifestyle. The vegetable diet of the apes, with a necessarily reduced jawbone, precluded a need for keen smell and hearing imperative to catch moving prey. In readapting to the open plains, hominids had to compensate for the sensory deficits that wolves do not suffer. By doing so they developed a neurologically based language system that served to cognitively map the physical world received through available sensory inputs, a system which in turn stimulated the dramatic increase in hominid encephalization (420-24). Such a system allowed for a verbal description and evaluation of the environment that could be memorized, recalled, and communicated with others.

With subsequent glaciations (upwards of twenty in the past two million years) and increased competition for prey, hominids would have capitalized upon the selective traits for cognitive mapping and language. The resulting mutations would have given rise in turn to the increased brain size and the tool technologies found with the pithecanthropines. Jerison believes that the pressure for survival would have necessitated a growth in linguistic ability that could express past and future events, and create concepts of time and space, in order to successfully plan and execute hunts and food gathering expeditions in new and harsh climates. In addition, hominids would have needed the ability to communicate those plans. What sets a hominid language apart from the languages of other animal species, however, is the additional perceptual depth that the hominid brain can share. The qualitative difference between human and chimp language, Jerison proposes, “is less its role in social communication than its role in invoking
cognitive imagery” (427). With a mutually shared language, a mutually shared world could be conceived, following which culture had the venue by which it could develop and flourish (424-47).

According to Jerison’s cognitive model, language evolved as both a conceptual and analytical tool. The rational capacity depends upon linguistic ability, and cognitive interpretations of reality are to some extent conditioned by language. Although his theory grants that an empirical reality does indeed exist, Jerison implies that language to some degree creates reality. Structural theorists such as Sapir, Whorf, and Levi-Strauss lend credence to the cognitive view with their observations of language and culture growing in response to the human need to define and make sense of the environment. Ironically, then, the close association thought to exist between science and logical positivism does not merit credence, since Jerison implies that the perspicuity of language argued by logical positivism is to some extent interrupted by the relativity of structure. Yet despite the relativity inherent in any particular world-view, Jerison also implies that the senses, as Merleau-Ponty posits, provide viable points of contact between the self and the physical environment. Language as it applies to the real world, therefore, allows to some degree an objective perspective, useful both for the self and for the group as it shares information and interacts successfully with the environment. Likewise, such a model still affords credibility for the empirical argument that reality can be objectively defined and understood regardless of the relativity of language structures. In summary, the cognitive theory of language evolution posits that the challenges of finding suitable food and shelter in ever-changing physical environments offer strong evidence for the development of language.17

17 Julian Jaynes concurs with Jerison, proposing that human consciousness is in essence an “analog” to the real world. In other words, language defines the real world for the mind, resulting in our becoming “conscious” of the world. See Jaynes 55.
The social model for voice and language acquisition, on the other hand, stems from the view that selective neurological mutations occur within the context of lived experience, and our enhanced and intense socialization sets us apart from other species. Theories of “social intelligence” posit that the selective forces stemming from the cognitive demands of hunting and toolmaking have little to do with linguistic ability, since both humans and apes learn how to do things by observation and imitation, not by description and explanation. Also like humans, ape species have hierarchical social structures, hunt living prey, scavenge, form personal alliances, and even wage war, but they do not have a vocalized language. However, modern human beings differ from other species given the fact that, first, our cultural expressions vary the widest, and second, no species spends as much time making vocal noises as we do. Compared to humans, chimpanzee groups spend most of their time in silence. When human children learn their mother tongue, they do it *out loud*, even when playing alone. If apes and humans are similar in so many respects, why the great need for human societies to incessantly interact in speech? The answer lies in the pressure exerted on the hominid group towards greater cooperation and cohesion in the face of changing environments brought on by a subsistence economy. Hominids had to find ways to communicate with each other within an increasingly complex social milieu.

Comparing chimp and human social life, Robin Dunbar observes that chimps spend a great amount of time--up to 20 percent of the day--grooming each other. Although highly pleasurable and desirable, even genetically driven, the activity acts as a tremendous social mechanism, since individuals are under great pressure to groom each other and be groomed in return, affording an efficient means by which friendships and alliances may be formed and maintained. Dunbar believes that as hominid groups grew in number and spent more time apart scavenging and hunting, time constraints would not permit enough grooming sessions to be
socially effective, and other mechanisms had to take their place (115). He posits that the voice offered the immediate solution, as small talk and gossip could substitute as “grooming” practices, effectively monitoring and accounting for all the group members. Whereas small groups of chimps occasionally huddle together in mass grooming sessions, physical grooming for the most part transpires as a one-to-one activity, a configuration best suited for the maintenance of relationships. In the larger human community, four to five people can be accommodated in conversational groups, through which information can be shared and radiated over wider networks (78). As confirmation of his theory, Dunbar points out that today 60 to 70 percent of all talk for both women and men is social,18 and that gossip remains an extremely effective form of behavior control and reputation management (123). Lewin corroborates Dunbar with his belief that technological skills and artistic expression are byproducts of the need to be socially adept (HE 83), and Lieberman lends credence to the view, placing great value on the human ability to imitate and the desire “to be like others” (UH 142).

In a line of thinking that accelerated with British psychologist Nicholas Humphrey’s belief that the most unpredictable element in the lives of early hominids were other hominids, Andrew Whiten and Richard Byrne support a hypothesis that interprets social intelligence as not so firmly rooted in cooperative living, but founded in the navigation of the fragile boundary between an individual’s concern to promote the self while at the same time recognize the needs of the group (MI II 2). Whiten and Byrne coined the label “Machiavellian intelligence” in order

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18 Dunbar points to studies that indicate that when men and women are in same-sex groups, they talk about the same two subjects: the self and others. When men and women are in mixed groups, however, they assume identities more in keeping with primal roles. Men dominate conversations because they are “advertising,” i.e., “displaying” like their primate cousins. Women silently evaluate the men, but, when they do speak, they engage in “networking.” See Dunbar 175-77.
to express a facet of animal behavior in keeping with the demands of natural selection: that individual organisms act for their own and their offspring’s survival (*MI II* 12-3). For those species whose survival also depends upon the success of a group, social strategies come to bear on selective traits, and the social web presents its own competitive loom, oftentimes pitting individuals within a group against each other. The theory of Machiavellian intelligence therefore attributes political behaviors already observed in apes to the hominids. It is premised on the belief that as social structures evolved, hominids would have begun a logical process of predicting how competitors and allies would behave, in essence adopting the points of view of others and imagining their motivations. Proponents believe that as Machiavellian intelligence increased in hominids, so did the neurological pathways of the left hemisphere that made language and tool technology possible. Language would have begun with the need to think strategically and syntactically, and vocalized speech would have followed.¹⁹

Countering the selfishness implicit in the Machiavellian intelligence theory, however, are those social views that recognize the immense need for hominids to become increasingly selfless and altruistic. As hominid groups increased in number, surviving on subsistence and in constant migration, the principles of food sharing and cooperative caring became dominant. Selection would have favored those traits that contributed to the overall benefit of the group at the expense of individual desires. Lieberman and Lewin contend that vocal communication has become a way by which human societies regulate themselves and promote additional pressures that further the evolutionary process (*UH* 171-2; *HE* 59). Likewise Dunbar sees the social, “grooming” use of language as becoming co-opted later in the service of religion and myth, belief systems that codify social rules that in turn promote the well being of a group (147). In these views, language

¹⁹ See the essays collected in Byrne and Whiten, and Whiten and Byrne; see also Bradshaw 178.
grew in response to the need for human groups to articulate systems of social control, all for the ultimate purpose of survival. Such systems may be faulted today for their oppressive and hegemonic characteristics, but as the social model posits, they are nonetheless critical for our assured mutual survival.

Both cognitive and social challenges probably contributed to the growth of vocalized language, but an emphasis upon one or the other highlights an aspect of the human dependence on language for the survival of the species. The difference between the cognitive and social theories of language origins lies in the former supplying a linguistic structure of the physical world, and in the latter supplying a linguistic structure of a relatively configured human community. The cognitive model offers a concrete ordering of the physical environment that grants success to the quest for food, shelter, and the meeting of physical needs. The same perspective applies today in the sciences. Disciplines like agriculture and medical research continue to create new languages in service to the human need to efficiently define, explain, and engage the environment. The social model, on the other hand, offers an ordering of the complex web of relationships existing between people in a group. It interprets vocalized language first as a tool for successful social interaction, and second, by extension, for its use in all of a community’s cultural attributes. Art, religion, and judicial practice, for example, serve in part as guidelines for behavior designed to aid the survival of the individual while assuring the survival of the group.

In terms of performance, both cognitive and social theories of vocal language support a view of performance as functioning on behalf of the individual and community. Cognitive theories corroborate the structuralist view of language as producing and defining the cosmos. Likewise, the cognitive model finds reflection in Victor Turner’s view of performance as serving
to provide an interpretation of the known life-world, which in turn imparts meaning for a group’s existence (FRT 11-13, UP 17-18). The performances may interpret cognitive data, and therefore represent a picture of the world given by a relative language construct, but such a representation affords a viable sense of contact and engagement with the physical environment, and not just with society. Meaning does not lie in the representation so much as in the effort to come to terms with the experience of a known reality. As such, the representation does not reflect signifiers without referents, as deconstruction posits, but rather the representation reflects a tangible reality existing in the points of contact between the human organism and its sensory perceptions.

Turner’s interpretation bridges the social view of language origin, since it also sees performance as providing a necessary form of expression that serves to define individuals in relation with each other. In Turner’s account, performances “probe a community’s weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation” (FRT 11). As such they fulfill an essential regulatory function, providing the moral and ethical dictates that assure the group’s internal cohesion and survival. The social model therefore accounts for the communal theatrical experiences that Schechner recognizes in sporting events, political rallies, concerts, and dances (PT 220). In its accommodation of society’s discontents, the social model also accounts for resistant forms of theatre associated with politically motivated groups like ACT UP and the solo performers Karen Finley and Tim Miller. In the social model, therefore, we find on one hand those types of performative experiences that serve to unite the individual with a community at large, providing members with the psychological and emotional salves necessary for their existence. On the other we also find those performances that challenge social norms and advocate further change, contributing to the ceaseless movement of the
evolutionary journey. In both cases, artists and performers figure as essential elements, given agency by the very linguistic constructs that provide them with both culture and voice.

In relevance to the scope of this study, the theories of voice and language origins from both the cognitive and social perspectives attribute to the individual a sense of agency and autonomy in the navigation of its physical and social environment. Both allow speaking subjects to insert themselves consciously and intentionally, via vocalized speech, in a life-world made up of physical and social attributes. The first provides access to a viable interpretation of the physical environment about which speakers can verbally articulate to each other. It allows them to evaluate choices and make plans on a level much more complex than that of other species. The second grants to the speaking subject a conscious willfulness that may even prove detrimental to society at large. Ironically, the social constrictions put in place to curb such autonomous behavior have been interpreted, from the vantage of poststructuralism, as actually precluding the individual from such autonomy in the first place. The social theories of language origins, on the other hand, posit that language supplies the speaking subject with a tool to enter the social mainstream for either negative or positive ends, the second being the more desirable. The various forms of performance in a given society attests to the agency that performers are accorded, yet none would be possible without language that finds primary expression through the vocal medium.

**Conclusion**

Even though Graham Richards’s three parameters for a consideration of language origins sufficiently serve as guideposts for a discussion, ultimately they prove somewhat limiting, since many of the theorists discussed could easily fall into several categories. Ralph Holloway’s view of an early evolution towards speech, for example, likewise favors the voice over gesture, as
does Robin Dunbar’s social model. Despite the desire to identify one trait that would most stimulate the evolution of the voice and language, most of the theorists discussed above recognize that many factors probably contributed. As Lieberman notes,

> Human language could have evolved only in relation to the total human condition. There would have been no selective advantage for retention of the mutations that gradually resulted in the evolution of the human language if language had not been of use in what Darwin in 1859 termed the ‘struggle for existence.’ (OOL 1)

Yet the frame provided by Richards helps us to understand that there nonetheless remains an overriding concern within paleoanthropology to locate those factors that may have been prominent in language development. Were they empirically ascertained, the evolution of human being as a vocal and linguistic species might be understood better. If one or several traits of ultimate significance for the human species were recognized, then theorists might be in a better position to evaluate properly the role of language in human discourse and epistemology.

If the voice and language developed early, then it indeed accounts for the unique quality of human being as rational and proactive in the environment as opposed to instinctive and consigned to the exigencies of nature. If they developed late, humans could be thought of as mere functional and technical organisms constantly negotiating their biological and ecological limitations. If gesture preceded speech, then communication and the life-experience could be viewed as more embodied than cerebral, and we would have more to gain were we to restore an appreciation for the body and how it feeds our epistemological suppositions. On the other hand, if the voice and speech supplanted gesture altogether, then we might rightly consider ourselves as more intellectually engaged with each other and the environment. If language first sprang as a complement to the real world maps of our cognitive functions, then human being could be viewed as having attained the ability to transcend consciously the dictates of instinct in order to engage the environment rationally. If voice and language accompanied socialization, than our
linguistic nature sprang from the need to define the individual in communal relationship with others.

Paleoanthropologists concur that language for the modern human being is primarily a verbal construct, and it grew in confluence with the development of vocal anatomy. As linguists attest, our languages take on a verbal character afforded by the possible sounds of the supralaryngeal vocal tract. In the application of language, the voice provides the primary medium of expression in practically all human endeavors, including the sciences, art, law, play, religion, education, and performance. Therefore the speculations of paleoanthropologists about the development of language in the human ancestry relate to the contemporary concerns for the use of the voice and language in performance. Depending upon the emphasis of a particular theory, the essentialist notions of Artaud and Grotowski either find currency or they are denied; the role of embodiment finds reiteration or it is rather denigrated behind the primary role of the articulated verbal language; and the necessity of language in the mapping and defining of the physical and social world finds different degrees of viability and importance.

Since the origin of speech, language, and the human voice remains shrouded in the fossil record, definitive answers probably never will be known. Besides, as paleoanthropologists recognize, the modern human being in its present form of evolution is still a species in process, and the linguistic changes noted by empiricists no doubt continue to unfold. A proper evaluation of linguistic ability may have to recognize changes as they come into sharper focus through further linguistic developments in centuries to come and in such non-vocal areas as our technological media (a subject taken up in chapter six). Nonetheless, despite the difficulties inherent in the fossil data, a comparison of the research and conclusions drawn from empirical approaches with the theories generated in the humanities reveal striking similarities between
both, as well as attendant biases: questions of embodiment, enculturation, and cognition steadily recur. But instead of polarizing the theories of language in the humanities in accordance to the degree that they rob or restore agency, doubt speech, valorize reason, or denigrate faith, paleoanthropology illumines the degree to which those theories coalesce. For despite the theoretical chasms that may separate phenomenology from deconstruction, or logical positivism from speech act theory, all of the competing points of view generated in the humanities find some validation within the paleoanthropological interpretations of our ancestral past. Rather than viewing the theories as standing at odds, we might stand to gain were we to think of them as complementary approaches to the same overarching dilemmas of the human condition.

In conclusion, paleoanthropological theories of voice and language origins attest to the central role of vocalized language in the physical and social constitution of the modern human being. The empirical evidence of our ancestral past testifies that at the end of a five million year odyssey, with the advent of archaic *Homo sapiens*, and to a sharper degree with *Homo sapiens sapiens* 100,000 to 40,000 years ago, the human species began to proliferate a diversity of cultural, artistic, and religious expressions with the aid of a mature form of vocal language that evolved in response to the demands of an emergent human existence. A look at the status of human cultures and technologies today impresses many of us with the relevance of such an overwhelming invention. But in a sobering and prescient observation made over six decades ago, Benjamin Lee Whorf surmised that in the past ten thousand years or so, the human race really has not achieved anything quite on par with the first *Homo sapiens* and their birth of culture, but has only “played a little with a few of the linguistic formulations and views of nature bequeathed from an inexpressively longer past” (218). For despite the controversy surrounding the contemporary debate about language, it still serves as the ultimate arbiter of our existence.
From the perspective of evolutionary theory, it has been indeed an inexpressively long time since the first hominids attempted to formulate meaningful utterances and slowly developed spoken language. In the inconceivable sweep of pre-history, the concrete signs of our vocal origins have been lost, and we can only observe with wonder the vast multiplicity of human languages and cultures. Even in the past few hundred years that we have been paying attention, we can note the rapid changes within our modern societies, our ways of living, and our forms of expressing ourselves. In this light, Derrida certainly makes sense when he surmises, “the origin is always already eluded on the basis of an organized field of speech in which the speaking subject vainly seeks a place that is always missing” (OG 177). In defense of the speaking subject, however, paleoanthropological theory concedes that the faculty of vocalized language grants us an unprecedented harnessing of our physical environment, unlike any other in the animal kingdom. Despite the relativity inherent in the differences between languages and cultures, and the attendant estrangement that might accompany them, our ability to assert ourselves through the expressive functions of the voice distinguishes us as autonomous, proactive, and intentional participants within our constructions of social worlds, as well as within what Schechner called the “bio-aesthetic web.” If the evolutionary record is any indication, our survival as a race hinges upon our ability to talk to each other.
CHAPTER 3
THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL VOICE

As the previous chapter demonstrates, empirical views of neurology and cognition hold that an objective, *a priori* reality exists, but they also posit that language does not necessarily offer perspicuous interpretations of reality, as though presenting a mirror image of the world. Rather, they view language as actually interpenetrating with our perceptions, so that our formulations of reality evolve within the subjective parameters that we also establish for our forms of expression and communication. As the next chapter discusses at length, the sciences of paleoanthropology therefore affirm a structural view, held by Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Sapir, that language serves to constitute human interpretations of reality and not simply to represent what objectively exists. In this respect, the sciences likewise validate Descartes’ philosophic enterprise of codifying the known world as predicated not upon external reality, but on the internal sense of consciousness referred to as the *cogito*. As a result of Descartes’ thought, a keystone philosophic issue concerns the intersection of the mind with the material world, and whether we can demonstrate that an exterior world exists. Apart from the sciences, his enterprise survives into the twentieth century in the practice of phenomenology, passed down from Kant and Hegel to Husserl in the quest to distinguish the rational from the real, or, in broader terms, mind from matter.

Phenomenology and empiricism both descend from the Cartesian quest to verify the human experience of reality, but both have evolved to stake their own disciplinary terrain. On one hand, empiricism has evolved from an observation of experience (as attested in the etymology of the Greek *empeiria* for experience) to practices relying on objective experimentation and optical verification, outside of the contingencies of subjective and
individual human experience. On the other hand, phenomenology evolved from the study of the sensory experiences of exterior phenomena (as revealed in the etymology of the Greek *phainesthai*, to appear, and *phainein*, to show) to the study of human consciousness as the seat of all knowledge and awareness. Both phenomenology and the empirical sciences identify language as the frontier of human thought, and as occupying a crucial intersection between sensory perception and the mind. As the last chapter demonstrates, recent empirical views of voice and language have departed significantly from nineteenth-century interpretations, particularly in reference to nominalist perspectives. The sciences still depart from phenomenology, however, in that empiricism disavows the *a priori* foundation of human consciousness as the seat of all knowledge, given its view that language and consciousness evolved in response to biological, cognitive, and social pressures.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, phenomenology rebelled against the notion, found in the emergent nineteenth-century discipline of psychology, that human rationalism was subordinate to biological operations, and it rejected the empirical charge that the metaphysical does not exist since it cannot be observed, measured, and classified. Indebted to traditional discourses of phono-logocentrism as well as Kantian Idealism, phenomenology argues that language in part serves as a window beyond the limits of human cognition, even the empirical. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, poststructuralism would attempt to complete the disavowal of the metaphysical by demonstrating that language cannot serve to present the unknown, since as a relative human construct, language cannot help but present itself. As this chapter points out, then, even though empiricism and phenomenology disagree on key issues, they nonetheless seek out communicative traction in the face of the debilitating influence of
poststructuralism. Despite their opposing ends, they both approach the voice from positive perspectives.

Since Husserl’s consideration of the voice within the phonologic tradition supplied Derrida with the arguments against which he would formulate deconstruction, Husserl serves as an appropriate bridge between traditional philosophy and the linguistic turn in twentieth-century thought. Accordingly, this chapter begins the discussion of the voice within twentieth-century philosophies of language with Husserl and two figures indebted to him, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. However, the discussions of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty also serve to demonstrate how their assessment of language and *logos* exceeds the limitations imposed upon the voice in structural and poststructural thought. The chapter also points out that a healthy strain of twentieth-century theatre practice complements the phenomenological assessment of the voice. For just as phenomenologists rebelled against an empirical reduction of the mind and metaphysics to biological and physical laws, so did theatre practitioners early in the twentieth century rebel against the growing influence of empiricism and materialism in the theatre, particularly in the sociological cast of naturalism and the psychologism of the realist stage.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, forms of theatre like expressionism and surrealism certainly betrayed debts to the revelation of the subconscious posited in psychology, but they also belied Romantic and phenomenological interpretations of the stage that seek the manifestation of the mysterious and inexplicable. Although the Romantic emphasis on nature would lose currency in the twentieth century, particularly with the growing incursion of technology, the phenomenal affiliation of the stage would continue through the end of the century, as theorists such as Philip Auslander and Elinor Fuchs interpret the operation of theatrical presence as holding great currency in both traditional and avant-garde practices,
whether in psychologically realistic theatres, contemporary interpretations of the classics, ritualistic theatres, theatres of “cruelty,” or performance art (PR 37; 70). The most famous practitioner to advocate a metaphysical dimension of the stage may be Artaud, who, with Husserl and Heidegger, likewise falls under Derrida’s critique. But as contemporary theatre criticism also reflects, Artaud served to inspire the nonrepresentational and non-narrative theaters of Malina, Beck, Chaikin, and Schechner that have come to be considered, despite their foregrounding of the operation of presence, as anticipating the postmodern theatre wherein presence has been disallowed. Since a link between the phonologism of phenomenology and the anti-logocentrism of the contemporary stage seems untenable, this chapter therefore investigates whether phenomenology can indeed be thought to have provided an antecedent for what transpires vocally in postmodern theatre practice.

This chapter serves two functions. First, it provides the necessary overview of twentieth-century forms of phonologism against which poststructuralism positions itself. In Logical Investigations (1901) and Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology (hereafter Ideas I) (1913), Husserl introduces three key concepts in reference to language and the voice that would be taken up by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty: the dependence of signification upon the corporeality of the speaker, the ability of vocal sounds to become constituent of sense, and the operation of logos within both language and the voice as an original revelation of potential meanings and states of being, and not just a secondhand, linguistically structured representation of them. The first half of this chapter discusses these concepts as they are treated in the writing of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. More than providing an overview, however, this section also points out how their thought resists the structural assessment of
language found in Saussure and Derrida. Second, this chapter traces the phonologic debts of twentieth-century theatre practice, particularly in those practitioners and theorists who argue for variant forms of theatrical presence. The second half of the chapter therefore addresses how phenomenological concepts of voice and language find reflection in the theorizing of several key twentieth-century practitioners, namely Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook.

While the voice may have been under indictment in linguistics, structuralism, and poststructuralism, this chapter recognizes that a phonologic element of the contemporary stage values the voice for its ability to evoke, if a not quite metaphysical, then certainly a universal and foundational dimension of the theatrical experience. Through a comparison of phenomenological philosophies of voice and language with the vocal practices of the “theatres of presence,” this chapter presents a phonologic evaluation of the stage that resists the effects of the linguistic turn in contemporary performance. The chapter argues that a phonologic element of phenomenology resists poststructural critique, and therefore provides a foundational tenet for the contemporary stage that survives in postmodern practice. In terms of its value to the argument of this dissertation, this chapter recuperates a sense of vocal agency for contemporary performance, even from within the ranks of phenomenology, a discourse that has lately been invalidated for its phonologism.

The Voice in Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl

Husserl owes his position in Western philosophy to his formulation of the philosophic approach of phenomenology, and for his conception of transcendental idealism. For the two projects Husserl has been labeled one of the last of the Cartesian philosophers, indebted to a foundationalism grounded in Descartes’ recognition of the cogito as the locus of knowing and
being. Phenomenology for Husserl evolved from his desire to separate a pure, *a priori* 
consciousness from the sensory data and cognitive limitations of interest to nineteenth-century 
empiricists and psychologists, and thereby establish a privileged position for human rationality 
as a foundation for objective knowledge, which by extension may be left open to the 
metaphysical. As a twentieth-century thinker preoccupied with the philosophical problems of 
consciousness and the source of meaning, yet positioning himself within the Idealist tradition 
established by Kant and Hegel, Husserl challenged the positivism of Russell and Frege, whose 
thinking concerning language and thought acknowledges empirical debts. Husserl’s endeavor 
resulted in his rejection of Platonic idealism for the formulation of his transcendental idealism, 
or the belief that an absolute consciousness accompanies and interpenetrates with the perceptual 
constitution of reality in the intellect. No longer does the Ideal exist exterior to temporal and 
spatial forms, but interweaves with the temporal and spatial. Accordingly, *meaning* for Husserl-- 
or the elucidation of universal truth--remains free of human subjectivity while revealing itself 
through linguistic intervention.

Since the voice acts as the primary means of human linguistic expression, it earns 
attention in Husserl’s phenomenology. But the voice finds sustained critique only in his early 
work, the *Logical Investigations*. From the perspective of the early work, Husserl’s views of the 
voice appear within a Platonic frame, demonstrating an adherence to the phono-logocentric 
tradition. But as Peter Simons observes, Husserl’s thinking about the voice and language would 
not change substantially with later publications that treat of the transition to transcendental 
idealism (106). As we shall see, his thinking on the voice will undergo slight revision in *Ideas I*.

In the first of the six *Investigations*, Husserl separates and defines what he calls 
*expression* and *indicative speech* (§1-§8). Indications are those marks or signs that carry
communicative intent from one person to another; they are the means by which thoughts and ideas are transmitted and received, and comprise what Saussure called *signifiers*. The key distinction between an indication and an expression is that an expression does not necessarily convey meaning; it simply exists in the mind like a sensation or visual image without a name or description. In Husserl’s terminology, an expression does not have to be verbal; it may occur in a pre-lingual state that a person grasps or recognizes without words. Saussure would identify expressions as *signifieds*. For Husserl, expressions as content exist prior to the linguistic forms they find in indications, but Saussure argues otherwise, that the structure of a language actually creates its content. Within the Platonic paradigm of the *Investigations*, Husserl’s pre-verbal thought or expression equates with an Ideal Form, and indications act as representations of the Ideal Form. As such, indications are arbitrary and meaningless in and of themselves. Only in their *use* do they act to impart a meaning, or what Husserl called the “sense” to the expression. As he puts it in §8, “The word comes before us as intrinsically indifferent, whereas the sense seems the thing aimed at by the verbal sign and meant by its means: the expression seems to direct interest away from itself towards its sense; to point to the latter.”

Husserl’s notion of “sense” as a third property exists independent of the relationship between expression and indication, but results from intentional speech. As an example of Husserl’s thought, when I think of a light bulb, it may appear in my mind without a name and in the abstract, and therefore resemble a Husserlian expression. I can even say the words “light bulb” which may indicate the concept of a light bulb, but it will have no value or meaning outside of a context. If I say the words “light bulb” to my wife, a picture of a light bulb may arise in her mind, but it will have no value since without any other linguistic cues she will have no idea whether I am approaching a subject I’d like to talk about or whether I’ve taken a fancy to
naming nouns out loud. Therefore the object and the word are intrinsically dormant, even though they both exist. But when I communicate “light bulb” in order to turn one on or replace one that has burned out, both the expression and its indication acquire their “sense” or meaning in the practical application of illumination that a light bulb affords. Both the expression and the indication “direct attention” away from themselves towards sense, and communication transpires.

The indication makes use of the sign systems of language in order to convey sense from the speaker to the auditor. But the communication of sense entails more than mere signification. Although Husserl recognizes that an indication can occur in speech, writing, or gesture, his preference for speech remains clear, since in the act of speaking the sense has the best chance of being fully comprehended. He writes,

> The articulate sound-complex, the written sign, etc., first becomes a spoken word or communicative bit of speech, when a speaker produces it with the intention of “expressing himself about something” through its means; he must endow it with a sense in certain acts of mind, a sense he desires to share with his auditors. Such sharing becomes a possibility if the auditor also understands the speaker’s intention. He does this inasmuch as he takes the speaker to be a person who is not merely uttering sounds but speaking to him, who is accompanying those sounds with certain sense-giving acts which the sounds reveal to the hearer, or whose sense they seek to communicate to him. What first makes mental commerce possible, and turns connected speech into discourse, lies in the correlation among the corresponding physical and mental experiences of communicating persons which is effected by the physical side of speech. Speaking and hearing, intimation of mental states through speaking and reception thereof in hearing, are mutually correlated. (§7)

In one respect, then, the voice takes on an epistemological role: through its position in the “physical side of speech,” or in the very sounds of words themselves, the voice adds a layer of meaning-making to the communicative act. However, anticipating the arguments of speech act theory and theatre semiotics (which will be discussed in the next chapter), Husserl positions speakers as playing an intentional role in the conveyance of sense that is absent from the
operation of signification or mere writing. For Husserl, ideal communication transpires as an embodied, living activity, made possible not by one but two people: one engaged in the process of conveying sense (or animating meaning) and the other engaged in fulfilling sense. The spoken sign differs from a written sign in that it is enlivened by the speaker; it is animated. The word on a page, on the other hand, appears as a mere “external precept,” without a “verbal character,” and devoid of a “sense-giving act” (§10). Of course written documents like books and letters intentionally communicate, but the voice through phonation, and the speaker through behavior, literally bring to life signs that otherwise remain stagnant when barred from lived experience. Favoring speech over writing, Husserl contends that writing cannot supply clarification like a live speaker can, for when questioned, writing cannot respond. Such a view echoes the view of speech over writing Plato expresses in the *Phaedrus*.

Anticipating the problems Wittgenstein encounters with the positivist consideration of signification as an ideal, perspicuous reflection of reality in *Philosophical Investigations* (1945-9), Husserl states, “We are infinitely removed from this ideal. . . . Try to describe any subjective experience in unambiguous, objectively fixed fashion: such an attempt is always plainly vain” (§28). Living speech, on the other hand, affords clarity through the give and take, question and response, of face-to-face dialogue. Husserl therefore contests the assertions of nominalists like Russell and Frege who believe words capable of objectively finding direct equivalents in the conceptual realm, completely comprehensible outside of the subjective conditions of context and use. He also problematizes Saussure’s distinction of the signifier and signified as sufficient to complete a circuit of communication, although Saussure himself recognizes a fluid and changeable aspect of the fixed nature of language, or *la langue*, in the variable and creative nature of speech, or *la parole*. To clarify, in §26 Husserl provides the example of the pronoun
“I,” which refers to the universally held concept of the first person singular, but which also refers to the specific person who employs it in conversation. It is abstract and meaningless without a context. But in naming the self who is in the act of speaking, the pronoun “I” also presents the self; it reveals the speaker’s identity and self-conception, and not someone else who may also use the word “I.” As Husserl puts it, “The word ‘I’ has not itself directly the power to arouse the specific I-presentation; this becomes fixed in the actual piece of talk.” As a signifier, “I” insufficiently expresses its signified definition since the whole sense of what is intended when “I” is used arises only in discourse.

The physical voice therefore serves in the constitution of sense, or in the revelation of meaning intended by an act of signification. But Husserl recognizes that the sounds of words and the “expressions” they signify have no ontological relationship, that they share no “internal bond.” Like Saussure, Husserl acknowledges that words as signifiers are arbitrary, as evidenced in the plurality of words in different languages that stand for the same thing. Yet in their spoken application, regardless of the relative language system, words nonetheless take on specific and meaningful relationships with the things signified, that is, the objects and thoughts that make up Husserl’s “expressions.” In the sixth Investigation, Husserl takes up the problem of the means by which the voiced word names, brings to presence, and becomes unified with the thing signified, effecting what he calls an “intentional bond” between sound and meaning. In §6 and §7, Husserl provides two examples, that of his inkpot, and that of the color red.

In the first case, Husserl explores the extent to which the verbal action of naming seems to attach word to thing:

I speak, e.g., of my inkpot, and my inkpot also stands before me: I see it. The name names the object of my percept, and is enabled to name it by the significant act which expresses its character and its form in the form of a name. The relation between name and thing named has, in this state of union, a certain descriptive character that we previously
noticed: the name “my inkpot” seems to overlay the perceived object, to belong sensibly to it. (§6)

In naming, the word and thing establish a phenomenal relationship. Neither the word “inkpot” nor the thing it signifies means anything in and of itself. The word is a simple “sound-complex” that has no inherent meaning, and the wooden thing on the desk to which it bears reference stands as an inconsequential inanimate object. Yet in the process of naming, either in a silent thought (to oneself) or in spoken indication, word and thing both come into recognition together and are classified. The character of the recognition is three-fold, for it subsumes the word, the thing, and a perceptual act.

In §7 Husserl extends his argument to consider the degree to which the word then comes to be part of the thing, to be “owned” by it. In terms of an adjective like “red,” the word designates a particular color that can be applied to many things, like hearts, apples, and fire trucks. The word gathers its sense apart from the things it describes, and cannot be said to have an “internal bond” with those things. And yet in naming a thing red, a bond is precisely what is formed between word and thing.

Yet plainly we have here an intentional bond, and one of peculiar phenomenological character. The word calls the red thing red. The red appearing before us is what is referred to by the name, and is referred to as “red.” In this mode of naming reference, the name appears as belonging to the named and as one with it. (§7)

In a phenomenal action, the name and the thing adhere. To call something red and to perceive something as red comprise the same recognizable process; the terms are synonymous. A fusion occurs between the act of naming and sense intuiting. Three elements are essential to the process, the first being key: “the physical word-phenomenon with its ensouling meaning.” The phrase refers to the word composed of the phonemic properties provided by vocalized speech, properties which taken together also provide and convey--ensoul--meaning. The two other
elements follow: the recognition of the thing named as both word and thing, and the intuition of
the meaning provided by the word as applied to the thing.

Husserl takes for granted the linguistic axiom that the forms and sounds of our languages,
including all the possible verbal marks of thought and speech, are contingent upon the
producible sounds of the human supralaryngeal vocal tract. The sense provided by words and
languages depend first upon vocalization. However, regardless of the multiplicity of languages,
in Husserl’s phenomenology the audible sounds of words become constituent of their sense as
expressed in a specific language. As Husserl puts it,

Very different verbal sounds, e.g., the “same” word in different languages, may involve an
identical recognitive relation: the object is essentially known for the same, though with the
aid of quite different noises. Naturally the complete recognition of something red, being
equivalent to the actually used name, must include the noise “red” as a part. The members
of different speech-communities feel different verbal sounds to be fitting, and include
these in the unity of “knowing something.” But the meaning attaching to such words, and
the recognitive act actually attaching this meaning to its object, remains everywhere the
same, so that these verbal differences are rightly regarded as irrelevant. (§7)

Husserl essentially identifies two characteristics of the spoken word that seem ambiguous. The
meaning of the word depends upon, becomes related to and recognized as, its “sound-complex,”
that is, its “noise,” yet the noise is ultimately unimportant, since the sense--or an ideal meaning
registered in the consciousness of an auditor--is its primary goal and destination. Both Husserl
and Saussure overcome much of this problem with the belief that social convention acts to
authorize the meanings that words acquire. But Husserl seeks an a priori dimension of meaning
as constituted outside of language and convention. The crux of the matter points to the difficulty
Husserl encountered in grappling with Platonic idealism. At issue is the degree to which the
Ideal exists outside of perception yet is known through conscious awareness and physical vocal
production. Husserl takes up the problem later in Ideas I, but in the Investigations he concludes,
ambiguity aside, that the embodied, vocalized medium best provides access to truth and
meaning, a medium through which all things become present and recognized.

Husserl’s thinking at this point reflects a Platonic conception of language as a mundane
reflection of ideal realms of being. On one hand, the meaning of words can only be known
through vocal production, and meaning registers in relation to certain sounds. But on the other
hand, the sounds of words are basically arbitrary, since meaning exists prior to the vocal
utterance and the accessibility that language provides. The distinction would lead Husserl to
consider the relation between the conscious awareness of meaning and its expression in
language, which in part served in his formulation of transcendental idealism, which introduces
the third concept of concern here, the operation of logos.

Within the frame of Ideas I, Husserl grants words a more central epistemology. They are
no longer secondary, as they were in the Investigations, useful as long as the primary “sense”
was conveyed. Here words become essential. In a revision of his earlier thought, Husserl divests
words of their representational functions in relation to the realm of Platonic Ideal Forms, and
firmly situates them within a Heraclitean conception of logos as a revealing, showing, and laying
bare. Husserl writes,

The verbal sound can only be called an expression because the signification belonging to it
expresses; expressing inhere in it originaliter [sic]. “Expression” is a distinctive form
which allows for adapting to every “sense” (to the noematic “core”) and raises it to the
realm of “Logos,” of the conceptual and, on that account, the “universal.” (§124)

No longer does “sense” exist outside of the chain of representation as it did in the Investigations.
Husserl suggests that to be known, all sense must exist within consciousness through
signification. To be grasped at all, it must be cast in language. Husserl also reconsiders the
former definition of “expression” as a non-verbal recognition of objects and thoughts, a process
he no longer considers possible. Expression, formerly thought of as the non-verbal awareness of
things, exists by virtue of signification as well; therefore expression must take linguistic form, though it does not necessarily have to be spoken.

Husserl goes on to assert that this reformulation of the role of words in the constitution of meaning is of prime importance for the practice of phenomenology. For all knowing essentially transpires through the action of a language’s ability to reveal a meaning, which is not a mere substitution of a word as metaphor for an *a priori* concept. Harkening back to the *Investigations*, Husserl maintains that between the word and the thing transpires a phenomenal unity, in which both are the same. But here in *Ideas I* he moves closer towards a position that will be fully espoused by Merleau-Ponty, that verbal language conveys, constitutes, and becomes synonymous with meaning. Therefore, transcendental idealism grants to words, ideas, and meaning their comprehensibility through a phenomenal movement, wherein a foundational element of consciousness supplies communicative efficacy to language and, by extension, the voice.

In summary, Husserl’s position on the voice remains relatively constant throughout his earlier, Platonic formulation where language serves to convey meaning, and in his later revision through the lens of transcendental idealism in which language serves to reveal meaning. Although the voice receives fuller treatment in the earlier work, in both cases the spoken, verbalized word, made up of phonetic properties, functions, through the conjunction of sound with sense, to make present the beingness of the natural world to human consciousness. The voice also provides the ontological material, specifically sound, for the means by which perception is understood and knowledge makes itself available. Many similarities exist between the thought of Saussure and Husserl, namely the social conventionality of language and the operation of signification as a relation between sound and sense, or signifier and signified. But
whereas Saussure introduces the novel distinction of words existing in degrees of difference with each other, and as actually constituting thought, Husserl looks to the operation of logos as a property inherent in the relationship between language and consciousness. Logos serves as a tool for human consciousness to grasp the revelation of meaning that results from the phenomenal bonding of sound with sense. As correctly argued by Derrida, Husserl adheres to revised traditional views of phono-logocentrism that situate the voice as the primary conduit of meaning and truth. As we shall see, theatre practitioners like Grotowski, Brook, and Schechner, like Husserl, look to the voice as providing a venue for the communication of essential human and universal meanings.

**Martin Heidegger**

As a former student of Husserl, Heidegger borrowed significantly from the phenomenological method, while rejecting the notion of a transcendental consciousness as separate from, yet interpenetrating with, physical embodiment. Heidegger’s contribution to Western thought stems from his formulation, in his 1927 publication *Being and Time*, of an existential phenomenology, one that posits individual being, or Da-sein, as cast and defined fully in relation to its existence, without an element of the transcendent. The consciousness of being is not based in an originary cogito, or the awareness of its being through rationality, but in interaction with other beings and the world. As Heidegger puts it, Da-sein is at once a “being-in-the-world” and “being-with-the world;” and in a reflexive manner, “existence defines Da-sein” (*BT* §2-§4). The question of language becomes central to Heidegger’s project, since the understanding and communication of being inevitably relies upon it to some extent. Heidegger’s critics concur that an understanding of his thinking concerning language can only be properly
arrived at after a familiarization with many of his texts, including *Being and Time* and the later essays and lectures on metaphysics, poetry, and language.¹

Within this corpus the voice finds almost no mention, except for a few paragraphs in *Being and Time* and “The Nature of Language” (1957/8). Yet the various texts consistently posit that the nature of being, cast purely into existence, can only be understood, communicated, and made present by language. Language is therefore at once verbal and linguistic, relying on structures and rules, while at the same time serving as a non-verbal escort for being, revealing and presenting being in its own essence. The aspect of language a “revealing” Heidegger defines as the operation of *logos*, that which serves to reveal being, not through representation, but through making being present as it exists in itself. Notably, the operation of *logos* may also be detected in the voice. Yet Heidegger avoids an analysis of the voice as providing the phonetic forms of language, forms that conjoin with the structural and rule-governed aspect of language. He considered such an analysis a linguistic exercise pertaining to the human sciences, and therefore of no direct concern to his project. In accordance with the parameters he establishes for himself, his interest lies with the nature of being and how being presents itself. Language as a revealing falls within the scope of his analysis, whereas language as a linguistic construct, relying upon anatomy and semiology, is too readily comprehensible through empirical approaches.

Heidegger’s thought on language as expressed in *Being and Time* relies to a great extent upon the formulations of Husserl, the two most apparent being a conception of *logos* as a revelation of meaning and the role of embodiment in communication. In the Introduction, Heidegger sets about defining and explaining his terms, a process central to his phenomenology.

¹ See Bernasconi; Bruns; Kockelmans; and Sefler.
since much of his thought relies upon his etymologies and interpretations of ancient Greek.

Heidegger rejects the traditional definitions of *logos* within philosophy as “reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground, [and] relation,” believing that they suffer from an undue emphasis on analytical properties, neglecting the value of intuition and meditation (28). Relying upon his reading of Aristotle, Heidegger defines *logos* as *apophainesthai*, or the letting be seen of what is spoken about. *Logos* for Heidegger, as for Husserl, serves to reveal the being of the speaker and the subject of the speech. In Heidegger’s words, *logos* “makes manifest what it [*logos*] is talking about and thus makes it [the subject] accessible to another” (29).

Heidegger at this stage reflects Husserl’s preference for the voice in the transmission of meaning as opposed to writing. Heidegger states, “*Logos is phonē, indeed phonē meta phantasias*—vocalization in which something always is sighted” (29). In accord with Husserl, Heidegger views *logos* as the unity and co-presentation of verbal expression and being, and in §34 of *Being and Time* he says that speech best provides the site for the manifestation of the *logos*. The face-to-face encounter best suits the revealing and manifesting of speaking beings in discourse through their “intonation, modulation, in the tempo of talk, ‘in the way of speaking’” (153). The idiosyncrasies of individual speech take on the manner of the *logos*: they serve to manifest the being of the speaker. Likewise hearing plays as central a role as speaking, for in discourse transpires both a laying bare and a perceiving. In the process of hearing one attunes to being. Specifically, however, one does not attend to “complexes of sound” as linguists attempt to demonstrate, but to the objects in the world that produce the sounds themselves. As examples, Heidegger notes that when we hear the creaking of a wagon and crackling of a fire, we hear the *wagon* and the *fire*, not the “pure noises” they make. Being attunes to being, not to sensation
In speech and in listening, we attend not to the sounds of words, but to a manifestation that words reveal.

In anticipation of his later thought on language, at the close of *Being and Time* Heidegger posits that a true philosophy of language had not yet begun (155). In a gesture indebted to his appreciation of Nietzsche, Heidegger faults Western philosophy for misreading the *logos* within an analytic tradition wherein languages may be scrutinized and defined. Here Heidegger radically departs from Husserl’s thinking, for he wished to restore to the *logos* an “*a priori* fundamental structure of discourse in general as an existential,” one he felt was understood by the pre-Socratic Greeks (154-5). For if, as Husserl posited, language was necessary for consciousness to grasp meaning, then Heidegger desired to explain the means by which being and meaning present themselves— but without relying on the *a priori* foundation of consciousness posited in Husserl. Heidegger looked to the *logos* as a means by which the existence of being and meaning impresses itself upon human consciousness, yet without the necessity for the signifying value of words. He undertakes such a philosophy of language in the later essays and lectures.

In an oft-quoted passage from the 1935 essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger articulates a consideration of language that, by reference to his novel concept of “saying,” anticipates his thinking on *logos* as revealing:

> But language is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated. . . . Language alone brings beings as being into the open for the first time. . . . Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. . . . Such saying is a projecting of lighting, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the open as. (*BW* 185)

Keeping within the frame established in *Being and Time*, Heidegger maintains that beings become manifest and revealed in the disclosing operation of *logos* in language. *Logos* as a
condition is concomitant with, not supplementary to, the nature of being. But language also
serves to “project light,” as though to illuminate something not intended by words. By way of
comparison, the essay introduces the role of art, plastic and linguistic, as functioning in a similar
manner. The work of art does not simply rely on mimesis, though it may illustrate concepts and
pictures already named and understood in language. Rather, the work of art finds its efficacy and
appeal, not because it re-presents subjects already comprehended, but because it illuminates,
lays bare, and presents a being as it exists in and of itself. As Heidegger puts it, “In the work of
art the truth of being has set itself to work,” and truth, as defined by his reading of the Greek
alētheia, means “the unconcealedness of beings” (BW 181, 173). Art, like language and logos,
embraces both the experience of manifestation and manifestation itself. In this light, logos resists
taking linguistic form in the operation of revealing and presenting it performs. Logos bypasses
discursive language altogether.

Heidegger clarifies that verbal language does not accompany art, as though words can
make the subject of art more comprehensible as literary criticism intends. Language employed in
explanation differs from language as an unconcealing. The latter finds its purist expression in
poetry, a verbal medium that does not imitate or explain, but reveals. Relying on a reading of the
Greek poiēsis, Heidegger renders poetry as an unconcealment, as a “mode of revealing.” Poetry
uses words as vehicles for original expression, and the language of poetry puts the listener-reader
in the vicinity of primal utterance. The “fundamental structure of discourse” Heidegger seeks
therefore finds expression in nonrepresentational language (Sefler 137). Such language does not
use words for their representational functions, since representation does not reveal an original
essence of being, only a copy. In Heidegger’s estimation, philosophy has to find a way to use
language in a poetic manner so that it presents. As he states in “Language” (1950), language
must be set free “from the fetters of a rational-logical explanation” and “the limits of a merely logical description” (PLT 192-3). Such a use of language in poetry—that is, such an operation of \textit{logos}—serves to reveal original states of being that have never before found linguistic or material form.

As Gerald Bruns contends, to understand Heidegger’s later thinking on language, one must give up the notion that he means to \textit{conceptualize} language. Heidegger proposes the contrary, to regard language as open, as floating free of “the grip of ideas.” What is more, Bruns reads Heidegger as advocating an attendance on the abyss that surrounds words and falls outside their domain (55-60). Bruns argues that Heidegger’s inspiration comes from his reading of the pre-Socratic fragments, wherein he advances that the early Greek uses of “the fundamental words of early thinking,” such as “\textit{phūsis, lōgos, moira, eris, alētheia, [and] hen},” are forever lost to us in the modern age.\(^2\) In order to understand them, Heidegger proposes, in Bruns’s words, “to linger in their company, or their neighborhood, and pick up on their resonances. We need to situate ourselves dialogically \textit{with} the text rather than analytically against it, in the mode of listening rather than reading” (67-8). Nonrepresentational language calls for such listening, and such dialogue transpires without the reliance on representation.

Bruns’s argument enters territory that shall be explored later in chapter six, namely the realm of listening in which the aural cast of words and poetry, not the linguistic and visual, reveal to the senses what the analytical eye (and by implication empiricism), with its self-imposed visual and scriptural limitations, cannot fathom. In his critique of Heidegger, Bruns intimates that nonrepresentational language “rings in the ears;” it impresses itself upon us as “an echoing, a lingering, a haunting or conceivably even a nagging;” it impinges upon us, impacts

\(^2\) See the essays collected in Heidegger, \textit{Early Greek Thinking}.
our existence, and exposes us to the “uncanny” and the “estranged” (116-118). Language so considered resists the traditional (and Husserlian) evaluation of logos that makes sense of what is spoken about. As Heidegger says in Introduction to Metaphysics (1953), “All by itself the logos does not make language” (145). Bruns considers a term overlooked in much Heideggerian commentary, that of phūsis as a withdrawing and a hiding of language as opposed to the logos of opening and revealing. Within a meditation on the nonrepresentational language of poetry, phūsis attends to what lurks in hiding, in the shadows of what is spoken, hinting towards what the words do not name, yet intimate anyway. As Bruns describes it, the phūsis of language shows itself “in the inability of language to keep things under control,” a control which the philosophies precisely attempt to accomplish (120).

Heidegger’s assessment of the unconcealment that takes place in language broaches the notion of difference raised by Saussure and Derrida. For Heidegger, words employed in poiēsis impress us not with meaning, but with sounds that likewise evoke the sounds of other words. In their aural constitution, words slide along their shared points of contact according to their similarities, making puns, double entendres, and errant readings available. Indeed, Heidegger’s use of the word “dif-ference,” or Unter-Scheid, finds definition in his recognition of the German prefix Unter as descending from Latin inter, and found in the English intimate.3 The etymology reveals that difference relates to a joining as well as to a separating. For his part, however, Saussure claimed that words exist as products of phonetic difference between other words, meaning that we register words according to the degree of dissimilarity that distinguishes their sounds. Accordingly, based on his reading of Saussure, Derrida argues that since words exist as

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products of the differences between them, their meanings are always deferred. Words cannot point to concrete significations, but only to traces of meaning that echo within the empty spaces between them. Likewise, Derrida interprets the opening that Heidegger points to as a fiction, created by what he calls *différance*, or the operation of difference and deferral in the illusory creation of meaning.

But whereas Derrida interprets difference as pointing to the ungrounding of meaning, Heidegger sees difference as allowing for the exposure of unconcealment and presence. From Heidegger’s position, Derrida’s thought culminates the analytical operation of traditional philosophy, which attempts to subordinate all thought and phenomena to linguistic explanation, that is, an explanation available in and through the representational nature of language. In Heidegger’s attempt to restore an “a priori fundamental structure of discourse,” he advocates, in response to the separation implied in Saussurian difference, not a linguistic rendering of language in which specific words correlate with identifiable concepts and things, but a *listening* to language in which language is allowed to speak for itself and reveal potential meanings not intended by the words employed. In this respect Heidegger claims, “Language speaks” (*PLT* 190). Again, words as art stand for themselves and do not accord with linguistic structure. Correctly understood, words elude the *mimesis* of representation in favor of the *poiēsis* of nonrepresentational revealing. As we shall see, the concept of a nonrepresentational form of art standing outside of the Western rationalist enterprise finds resonance in theatre practice indebted to the postulate of theatrical presence.

As the essays on language and poetry reveal, Heidegger’s thinking applies to both written and spoken forms of expression, but in “The Nature of Language” he returns to the voice once more, as if to query whether in its sounding it also aids language in the *logos* of revealing and the
phūsis of withdrawing. For in discourse one does not simply present audible images of words, one also employs rhythm and intonation, and the voice layers speech with the flesh of being. In this respect the voice resists the function of representation. Heidegger writes,

It is just as much a property of language to sound and ring and vibrate, to hover and to tremble, as it is for the spoken words of language to carry a meaning. But our experience of this property is still exceedingly clumsy, because the metaphysical-technological explanation gets everywhere in the way, and keeps us from considering the matter properly. (OWL 98)

Heidegger departs from Husserl’s notion that speech allows for clarification of communication in the give and take of embodied exchange. Rather, in vocal discourse the sounds and vibrations of phonation fall outside of both signification and materiality, and allude to what withdraws and hides. One cannot appeal to a “metaphysical-technological explanation” because the phūsis of spoken language retreats from analysis. When Heidegger affirms that “Language is the flower of the mouth” (OWL 99), he means to situate nonrepresentational language within a region of being that negotiates the interstices of the body and the world. As he writes,

The sounding of the voice is then no longer only of the order of physical organs. It is released now from the perspective of the physiological-physical explanation in terms of purely phonetic data. The sound of language, its earthiness, is held with the harmony that attunes the regions of the world’s structure, playing them in chorus. (OWL 101)

In summary, Heidegger does not embrace a traditional view of phonologism, reflected by Husserl, that implicates the voice as a property that presents meaning, since traditionally understood, such meaning transpires as a comprehensible linguistic activity. Nonetheless, Heidegger approaches the voice as a site of revealing, and he therefore reifies the relationship between phonē--or the sounds of the voice-- and the revelation that takes place within it. In his view, the voice, through its particular materiality and ethereality, provides a space wherein the intimation of what lies concealed at the limits of consciousness may be detected. Heidegger provides an appreciation for what may never find description or comprehension in the
philosophies, since he grants a dimension of being that lies outside of linguistic structure. He therefore detours from the clarity to which Husserl’s phenomenology aspires, since Husserl considers the phonologic to depend upon both the voice and the linguistic elements of language. Heidegger also resists the deconstruction that Derrida practices on signification, since for Heidegger, the differences of the phonetic elements of language point not to empty space and the deferral of meaning, but to another dimension of the existence of being that language cannot contain. As we shall see, Heidegger’s philosophy justifies the goals Artaud established for his theater of cruelty, even though those goals also fall under poststructural critique.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

Although relying primarily upon the Heideggerian notion of being as existing in the world, understanding and expressing itself through language, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, while not embracing transcendental idealism, remained indebted to the Husserlian postulate of a dimension of consciousness that exceeded the confines of time and space. On one hand Merleau-Ponty recognized the *cogito’s* awareness of itself, but on the other he recognized the *cogito’s* awareness of itself as bound within the physical limitations of a given life-world (*PP* xii-xiii). Merleau-Ponty’s project therefore became a prolonged interrogation into the interstices of consciousness and existence, particularly the constitution of consciousness as an assemblage of embodied, perceptual experiences. While most of his thinking as it complements Husserl’s view of the voice and language may be found in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), in later essays collected in *Signs* (1960), Merleau-Ponty approaches an appreciation for language that complements Heidegger’s notion of *poiēsis*. Merleau-Ponty therefore could be viewed as negotiating the two perspectives offered by Husserl and Heidegger. The value of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy for this study, however, lies in his concerted effort to explain how the
Meaning of discourse directly depends upon both the sounds of language and the action of speech.

Merleau-Ponty begins the chapter “The Body as Expression, and Speech” in *Phenomenology of Perception* by refuting the nominal view of language as symbols for thought, first formulated by Aristotle and given late credence by Saussure. The nominalist view stems from the Aristotelian notion that ideas exist in a pre-lingual state, and that as we speak, we peruse our mental lexicons in order to find the words that best accord with the thought we already have in mind. In this sense, meaning exists separate from the words used in expressing thought. Merleau-Ponty counters such a view with observations from experience, and emphasizes that words do not refer elsewhere for meaning, but that “the word has a meaning” (177, italics his). In the construction of his argument, he mirrors Husserl’s belief that the sounds of words constitute the meanings of words.

First, Merleau-Ponty notes that speaking bestows recognition of an object upon the object itself. In one sense, “the most familiar thing appears indeterminate as long as we have not recalled its name” (177). In a move reminiscent of Husserl’s notion of the phenomenal bond, the name and the thing adhere, and recognition of the thing as its name follows. Likewise, Merleau-Ponty believes that when we attempt to recall thoughts, we seek out words, not the unarticulated concepts they purport to signify. Second, Merleau-Ponty observes that when we speak, our minds are for the most part void of pre-designated ideas, but as we speak, our words supply our thoughts. As he puts it, “We present our thought to ourselves through internal or external speech” (177). Writers do not know what they will write before they sit down and commence writing; likewise speakers do not know what they will say until they open their mouths and formulate their thought in the act of speaking. He notes that in conversation, “The orator does
not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought” (180).

Corroborating the view of paleoanthropologists like Harry Jerison who place great importance on the ability of language to penetrate and clarify reality (see chapter two), Merleau-Ponty believes that “The word, far from being the mere sign of objects and meanings, inhabits things and is the vehicle of meanings” (178). Speaking does not “translate” thought, but “accomplishes” it.

In order to lend credence to his belief that “the word has a meaning,” Merleau-Ponty points to the arts not as representing things and events constituted elsewhere, but as bringing things and events into existence. His thinking further serves, with Heidegger, to articulate a phenomenological basis for performance as occurring not as representation, but as the presentation of a unique event. He offers that music is not comprised of notes written on a page and designating sounds; music and the meaning of music are the sounds themselves. One cannot adequately describe music or express its verbal equivalent, but only attempt to share impressions: music is the experience of sound. Likewise, notes are not the “signs” of a sonata; rather the sonata arrives through the notes played. It actually exists in the flow of sound, and “The meaning swallows up the signs” (183). The same can be said of the drama. Theatrical productions are not merely translations or interpretations of texts. Performances become an existence in their own right. Actors disappear, and the characters as realities, not as representations, appear.

Aesthetic expression confers on what it expresses an existence in itself, installs it in nature as a thing perceived and accessible to all, or conversely plucks the signs themselves—the person of the actor, or the colours and canvas of the painter—from their empirical existence and bears them off into another world. (183)

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4 See States for an application of Merleau-Ponty’s thought to the theatre.
In a similar light, Merleau-Ponty argues that words are not representations of thought; words are thought, and thought does not exist exterior to or separate from the elements used to bring it into fulfillment.

In terms of embodiment, Merleau-Ponty also credits the spoken word with inhabiting a physical space that is inseparable from the physical body. We first learn words as vocal formations and they remain ingrained within us like memories. We possess the word’s “articulatory and acoustic style as one of the modulations, one of the possible uses of my body” (180). Our physiognomy delimits phonetic properties, and we learn words as we learn to pronounce them aloud, putting our vocal apparatus in motion. Words are not images that exist separate from the actual instance of usage in either thinking or speaking. Likewise our physical expressiveness fills out the meanings aimed at by our linguistic utterances. Corroborating Husserl’s view of speech transpiring as an embodied activity, Merleau-Ponty states,

> The spoken word is significant not only through the medium of individual words, but also through that of accent, intonation, gesture, and facial expression, and, . . . as these additional meanings no longer reveal the speaker’s thoughts but the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being. (151)

Our projection of meaning through speech becomes an extension of embodiment and physical expression, akin to gesture. Just as speech presents a thought, speech presents the speaking human being. In this respect Merleau-Ponty also complements Heidegger’s view that a speaker’s use of language serves to present the particular being of the speaker, what Merleau-Ponty calls “an existential meaning.” As he puts it, “We find here, beneath the conceptual meaning of the

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5 See Stewart for the proposition that in the act of silent reading the organs of speech are put in motion to some degree.
words, an existential meaning which is not only rendered by them, but which inhabits them, and is inseparable from them” (182).

Yet Merleau-Ponty recognizes the difficulty in claiming for the sounds of language the privileged status of bestowing meaning, especially since the diversity of languages and cultures proves the contingent and relative nature of human expression. Meaning, after all, is based in convention: we respond to words with mutually established linguistic rules founded in former acts of signification. Like Saussure, Merleau-Ponty denies the possibility of a “natural” denominator undergirding the relativity of human language, since, in his opinion, there exists no evidence of a universal linguistic code shared by every ethnicity. Nonetheless, rather than accept the structural conclusion that all thought and expression must be conditioned upon language, Merleau-Ponty identifies the biological demonstration of an emotional life, responding to the fact of existence, as indicative of a foundation for human expression. Language may not be universal, but a substrate of physical, embodied existence is. Corroborating paleoanthropological theory, Merleau-Ponty believes that the multiplicity of languages and cultures erupted as the conventionalized means by which the finite set of human primal expressions, such as fear, joy, apprehension, and so on, came to be codified in various linguistic groups. In this light, the sounds of vocal expression cannot be understood as relative and contingent upon linguistic structure, since the expression of sound serves to reveal the original physical impulses of every speaker. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of ‘singing’ the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naive onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence. (187)

Since, as demonstrated above, the phonetic properties of words become embodied and enmeshed in our being, we come to inhabit the particular expressive possibilities of a language. But in use,
language does not employ signification to represent thoughts and feelings, but rather to give thoughts and feelings a linguistic space in which to dwell and become known. In other words, language does not use us, rather we use language.

Merleau-Ponty therefore complements Husserl’s belief that sounds bond with meanings, and that communication best transpires as an embodied activity. But whereas Merleau-Ponty views language as sufficient to reveal, and not simply represent, the thoughts and feelings of a speaking subject, he cannot so easily accept Husserl’s supposition that language serves to open to realms of universality and truth. Given the relative nature of language and its phenomenal relation to embodiment, Merleau-Ponty grants to language an epistemological force, so to speak, through a process of what he calls “sedimentation.” Language becomes rooted within us, and, through our reliance upon it as a means of constituting the world, it takes on the illusory qualities of truth and ideality, which our philosophies have lately identified as taking hold within the phonologic tradition of Western thought. As he explains in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, “Speech implants the idea of truth in us as the presumptive limit of its effort. It loses sight of itself as a contingent fact, and takes to resting upon itself; this is, as we have seen, what provides us with the ideal of thought without words” (190). In other words, Merleau-Ponty anticipates poststructural criticism of language with his view that through its assimilation into our perceptions of our given life-world, language only appears to grant us insight into the philosophical questions of the transcendent and real.

Merleau-Ponty therefore identifies a problem in the assumed phenomenological ability of language to surpass its relativity in order to address notions of truth and metaphysics. Anticipating Derrida’s critique of the Saussurian sign, Merleau-Ponty recognizes that signifiers exist in measures of the phonetic differences between them, and that they are relative in relation
to the signifieds they represent, without any internal meaning of their own. But whereas Derrida argues that no meaning can be found in language since signifiers, through difference, do not correspond to identifiable signifieds, Merleau-Ponty dismisses such rhetoric as paradoxical. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, the active movement of speech closes the gap between signifier and signified. Furthermore, he believes that speech does not solely rely upon previously established linguistic forms and meanings, but, in a manner reminiscent of Saussure’s la parole, opens out towards creative and original articulations. Just as Heidegger posits that “language speaks,” in his later essays Merleau-Ponty explores the peculiar ability of language to suggest meanings all its own.

In “On the Phenomenology of Language” (1951, chapter two of Signs), Merleau-Ponty investigates the movement of speech past the differences of available signifiers towards meanings previously unconsidered by the speaker. In an oft-quoted passage, Merleau-Ponty expresses what he takes to be the mediation of language between the speaker’s unformed thought and the possibilities inherent in signification.

There is a ‘languagely’ [langagiere] meaning of language which effects the mediation between my as yet unspeaking intention and words, and in such a way that my spoken words surprise me myself and teach me my thought. Organized signs have their immanent meaning, which does not arise from the ‘I think’ but from the ‘I am able to’ (88).

In one respect, Merleau-Ponty reiterates his earlier thinking that words make thought available. Speakers do not know what they will say before they start speaking, since thought takes place in words. Likewise as listeners attend to words, they attend to the intentions of the speaker. Language is more than just a mere medium of thought, since it provides thought, and in this respect it “surprises me” and “teaches me.” Hearkening to Heidegger’s notion of the unconcealment of logos, Merleau-Ponty’s phrase “languagely meaning of language” points to the aspect of language that communicates on its own. In this perspective, language intimates
meanings outside of our intended speech. In another vein, then, Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea that when we use words as “organized signs” in language, with identifiable definitions, we do not retrieve them from a mental lexicon that stores our vocabulary, but rather we speak from an active sense of possibility wherein we allow words to suggest themselves to us. As such we become partners with language, and share the task of communication.

Merleau-Ponty echoes Heidegger’s thought that the sounds of the voice provide an opening wherein the variant meanings of language may be detected. He writes,

It is in the same fashion that the spoken word (the one I utter or the one I hear) is pregnant with a meaning which can be read in the very texture of the linguistic gesture (to the point that a hesitation, an alternation of the voice, or the choice of a certain syntax suffices to modify it), and yet is never contained in that gesture, every expression always appearing before me as a trace, no idea being given to me except in transparency, and every attempt to close our hand on the thought which dwells in the spoken word leaving only a bit of verbal material in our fingers (89).

Sounds do bond with meanings, and yet sounds open to other possible meanings. In terms of signification, the words, sounds, and gestures of language do not always point to identifiable signifiers. Language necessarily allows slippage of meaning. But meaning never precedes speech because meaning results from speech. Merleau-Ponty recognizes that in the way that language completes our thoughts for us, language may exceed our cognizance of it. As he puts it, “The consequences of speech, like those of perception (and particularly the perception of others), always exceed its premises. Even we who speak do not necessarily know better than those who listen to us what we are expressing” (91).

Language therefore does not limit thought as it does in a structural frame. Merleau-Ponty points to a “peculiar power of speech” that affords us the ability to expand our realm of thought and to exceed our cultural and linguistic confines. For not everything that is expressible in language has been expressed yet, even though language remains relatively fixed in a given
moment of time. Speech can never be the mere presentation of established signifiers, for
signifiers indicate remnants of past and fixed meanings, exclusive of innovation and growth. As
language speaks, it introduces novel and original expressions and meanings, resulting in the
possibility that all language users “shall be able to think farther” (92).

Merleau-Ponty recognizes language as a phenomenon that accompanies our cognitive
growth. By doing so he negates the poststructural view of language as binding and limiting all
possible forms of thought and expression. Merleau-Ponty drives a wedge between the fixed or
synchronic nature of la langue identified by Saussure, and the variability and openness of la
parole. He states,

Each act of philosophical or literary expression contributes to fulfilling the vow to retrieve
the world taken with the first appearance of language, that is, with the first appearance of a
finite system of signs which claimed to be capable in principle of winning by a sort of ruse
any being which might present itself. Each act of expression realizes for its own part a
portion of this project, and by opening a new field of truths, further extends the contract
which has just expired. (95)

Language on one hand, in the words of Nietzsche and Jameson, may resemble a prison house to
the degree that it traps meanings and encodes them within our cultural and philosophic
constructs, but the process of active verbal discourse restores to language and the world an
opening out to mystery and wonder.

In summary, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty share a phenomenological view of
the voice in three specific manners. First, in producing the audible phonetic sounds available in
speech, the voice becomes constituent of sense. Second, since the vocal sounds of speaking
subjects in the immediate presence of one another best affords the completion of understanding,
embodied discourse exceeds written signification to some degree. Third, an operation identified
as logos by Husserl and Heidegger transcends the representation of signification within language
and the voice for a revelation and presentation of potential meanings. Merleau-Ponty
corroborates this view with his assessment of language as surpassing the intentions of the speaker in the intimation of novel ideas and expressions. Poststructuralism denies these three tenets of phonologism, given its evaluation of language and thought as bound within structural limits, and its critique of the phonologic tradition as premised upon the assumption that the voice employed in rationalist discourse provides a privileged site for the manifestation of foundational meaning.

However, Heidegger’s rejection of the Western philosophic tradition positions him to discount the rational discourses that give rise to the structural and poststructural critiques of language and thought. His quest to find alternatives to the reduction of phenomena in the philosophies led him to a regeneration of the pre-Socratic conceptions of logos and phūsis as offering a view of spoken language that allows for an alternate unconcealment of possibility, as well as an appreciation for what eludes explication. Merleau-Ponty corroborates Heidegger’s views with his argument in favor of language as actually stimulating the evolution of original thought, given its capacity to surpass the limits of structure in its suggestions of previously unintended expression. While theatre practitioners, save Sartre and Camus, may not have been directly influenced by the writing of phenomenological philosophers, a strain of phenomenological thought can be detected in twentieth-century theatre practice. We now turn to the theatre, and theatre criticism, to trace the phonologic debts of contemporary practice, particularly in reference to how the voice has been thought to open beyond the confines of linguistic structure.

The Phenomenological Voice in the Theatres of Presence

Roland Barthes and Regis Durand, two authors well aware of the poststructural turn in contemporary thought, approach the voice with an implied phenomenology. For each of these
theorists, an aspect of the sound of the voice surpasses the purely linguistic and verbal significations it produces. Barthes interprets Western theatre as “anthropomorphous,” as opposed to the imagistic theatres of the East, and in his view Western audiences perceive the actor as a unity of voice and movement (IMT 175). But for Barthes, the voice carries with it the uncanny ability to supersede dramatic text and the intentions of a director, as though its sounds cannot be defined and codified according to the dictates of a production. The voice betrays the unique aspects of its own being and personality through what he calls the “grain” of the voice, which he defines as “an erotic mixture of timbre and language, and can therefore also be, along with diction, the substance of an art” (PT 66).

Barthes strikes at the core of Heidegger’s phenomenology of language and voice, for he reads the voice not as an oral expression of words, but as the revelation of something that escapes verbal signification while dwelling within the region of sound. In his view, the aim of such vocal expression “is not the clarity of messages, the theatre of emotions,” but rather, what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony; the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language. (PT 66-7)

Yet how to characterize this “text” that does not betray “meaning” or “language”? Meaning and language traditionally understood find linguistic explanation. Barthes’s hearing of the voice, on the other hand, attends to the aural character of flesh and being. Such a hearing appreciates the nonrepresentation of what the sounds make present. Régis Durand concurs, observing,

The voices that thrill us allow us to apprehend their power of dissociation. They themselves are not concerned with diction, expressive effect. They let something through which has to do with origin and loss, and the determination of a space where ecstasy is possible. (103)
Durand draws a parallel between Barthes and Heidegger, proposing that both seek a return to vocal, verbal, and pre-significative origins. Durand also intimates that within such a hearing a type of deconstruction takes place, one in which the voice can finally be “set free from the fetters of the signifier’s organization,” and where one can hear “sound untamed by syntax” (102).

Barthes and Durand’s discussions of the voice point to the theme of theatrical presence of interest to contemporary criticism. The term finds its recent currency in the poststructural critique of the phenomenological fascination with the presentation of being and meaning. As the previous discussion demonstrates, at stake in a poststructural critique of phenomenological discourse is the degree to which anything can be said to be present, as opposed to being based in linguistic representation, which, as poststructuralism argues, invalidates meaning through the operation of difference and deferral. David Allison, the translator of Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), defines presence as taking two forms: first,

> Something *is* insofar as it presents itself or is capable of presenting itself to a subject—as the present object of a sensible intuition or as an objectivity presented to thought. Second, we say that a subject or self in general *is* only insofar as it is self-present, present to itself in the immediacy of a conscious act. (*SP* xxvii)

In both aspects, being bypasses linguistic intervention altogether, impressing itself upon others or the self simply through conscious awareness or intuition. Theatre theorists tend to emphasize the first, the impression made upon others, given the dialectical nature of performers and their audience.

Elinor Fuchs interprets the modern theatre as an “aspiration to presence,” which she defines, after Thomas Whitaker, as the embodiment of the dramatic narrative within the mise-en-scène becoming “so present as to be happening now,” and as “the circle of heightened awareness in the theatre flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the dramatic world” (70). Auslander relies on the Aristotelian concept of catharsis to explain the sensation of presence as
“the relationship between actor and audience--the actor as manifestation before an audience--or, more specifically, to the actor’s psychological attractiveness to the audience, a concept related to charisma” (PR 37). For Auslander, the experience of modern theatre relies upon the presence of another human being on stage to whom the audience is able to cathect and by whom the affects of the performance are able to occur, this through either the representation of character or through the presentation of the actor’s self (PR 37). For both of these theorists, presence traditionally understood also imparts a sense of the spiritual and metaphysical essence of human being.

In From Acting to Performance (1997) Auslander equates modernist stage practice with the phenomenological concept of logos, which, in his definition, likewise provides a revelation of meaning within the theatrical context. He writes,

Theorists as diverse as Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski all implicitly designate the actor’s self as the logos of performance; all assume that the actor’s self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths. (30)

Since Auslander strives to put Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski under poststructural critique, however, he argues to the contrary, after the order of Derrida’s deconstruction, that the performance actually creates the actor’s self, and the actor’s presence is therefore illusory. In similar fashion, Fuchs relates the modernist theatre of presence with such practitioners as Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, and Chaikin. But rather than invalidate their work through critique, in The Death of Character (1996) she aims to demonstrate that later, postmodern theatre, such as that of Lee Breuer and Robert Wilson, offers a “revision of the ideal of theatrical presence” through the deconstructive lens of Derrida, who, in her mind, undermines both the metaphysical and humanist assumptions of the modernist stage (71-2).
But Auslander and Fuchs’s arguments against theatrical presence stand at odds with Barthes and Durand’s recuperation of the phenomenal voice. How to reconcile the apparent paradox in contemporary criticism? Can a phenomenological regard of the voice coexist on the contemporary, postmodern stage wherein presence and the phono-logocentric have been disallowed? The following discussion of the voice in the modernist stage practice of Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook aims to elucidate their phonologic debts to phenomenological thought. But since a phonologic element of phenomenology resists poststructural critique, particularly Heidegger’s nonrepresentational language and Merleau-Ponty’s view of language as “opening a new field of truths,” this section also argues for a phenomenological tenet for the contemporary stage that may be thought to survive the poststructural assault on modern practice.

Antonin Artaud

Artaud has garnered much attention in recent decades by theatre practitioners and theorists like Grotowski, Brook, and Schechner who have been attracted to the radical postulate of an essential, ritual theatre, and by poststructuralists like Derrida and Lyotard who question the validity and practicality of his theories. As a theorist Artaud certainly may be considered ahead of his time for anticipating the break that theatre would enact between language and representation, but also for anticipating, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, the poststructural concern with the tyranny of Western thought as a whole on contemporary life. Artaud’s project and the focus of his theoretical writing, collected in *The Theater and Its Double* (1938), was the formulation of a “theater of cruelty,” one that rejects the representation found in traditional theatre practice for the staging of a primal, visceral experience of human existence, stripped of the trappings and illusions of social mores. Artaud’s efforts directly support, in practical fashion,
what Heidegger’s theory envisions: a nonrepresentational form of art that resists explication in rationalist discourse.

For Artaud, the types of traditional theatre that flow from a specific language system support the process of what Merleau-Ponty called the sedimentation of meaning, and he therefore considers it useless. Such a theatre only reinforces and reiterates the linguistic and cultural constructs already in place, and offers no insight into the possibilities that may lie outside of those constructs. As he puts it, “The fixation of the theatre in one language--written words, music, lights, noises--betokens its imminent ruin, the choice of any one language betraying a taste for the special effects of that language; and the desiccation of the language accompanies its limitation” (12). In contrast, the true theatre for Artaud resembles the primal expressions that sprang from the desire of the first human beings to communicate themselves and their surroundings. The essential theatre does not inhabit language nor becomes established as a social institution; rather it constantly originates as a renewal of humanity. As he sees it, “The theatre, which is in no thing, but makes use of everything--gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, darkness--rediscover itself at precisely the point where the mind requires a language to express its manifestations” (12). In a contemporary setting, where language and culture permeate and totalize all aspects of human life, the goal of the theatre should be to “break through language in order to touch life” (13). Such a description mirrors Heidegger’s interpretation of an art that resists a rational language, or a language of explanation, in its embrace of a language of nonrepresentation and unconcealment.

Artaud interprets contemporary Western theatre as a “theatre of dialogue” in which all of the other elements of the stage, including the sound of the voice, are placed in the background, subordinate to an author’s words. Artaud rejects dialogue altogether and proposes instead that
theatre seek its own “concrete language, intended for the senses and independent of speech” (37). Like Heidegger’s nonrepresentational language, this language does not necessarily employ words or communicate linguistically, since it aims to express thoughts that are “beyond the reach of the spoken language” (37). The language referred to by Artaud operates as the phenomenological *logos*, since it reveals the essence of being in a non-verbal state. Artaud refers to this state as making present “the manifested,” or “a sort of primary Physics, from which Spirit has never disengaged itself” (60). Artaud’s concept of language offers a concise definition of theatrical presence: “It consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words” (38). Like Heidegger, Artaud draws the analogy of such a language to a *poetry* not of words but of *poieisis*, of revelation and unconcealment (39). The poetry of the stage finds expression in the ensemble of “music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, and scenery” (39).

Artaud repeatedly stresses that the theater of cruelty should revive a sense of metaphysics lost in the West. As a religious and mystical venture, the theatre employs the voice as though it were engaged in *incantation*. The voice as metaphysical has the potential to produce “physical shock,” to “shatter as well as to really manifest something” (46). The meanings of such verbal expressions that shatter, shock, and manifest, are only grasped intuitively, and may not be translated into an intelligible tongue. But they are nonetheless realities experienced by everyone, regardless of ethnicity or cultural background (54-7). In Artaud’s theatre, all the elements are designed to address and infuse the senses, without the added medium of spoken words. In a reference to the Balinese theatre, Artaud speaks of sound and movement as resembling a
“sonorous rain as if resounding from an immense dripping forest” (57). But Artaud’s theatre is not referential or mimetic; it exists in the present, and creates its own actuality. “In this theatre all creation comes from the stage” (60), and on this stage the voice is used for its visceral qualities as one element in an ensemble. Artaud’s theatre “extends the voice. It utilizes the vibrations and qualities of the voice. It wildly tramples rhythms underfoot. It pile-drives sounds” (91).

Artaud’s view of theatre and the voice therefore complements the Heideggerian view of the logos as unconcealing and making present meanings and states of being that words cannot contain. In “La parole soufflée” and “The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,” two essays collected in Writing and Difference (1967), Derrida invalidates Artaud’s project since, in his view, nothing can precede the effects of signification. Once the voice sounds, and once the theatre places anything on the stage, the voice and the theatre take on the character of a representation. For anything to be meaningful, it first has to be established in a signifier, which has no intrinsic meaning of its own since it exists in degrees of difference and deferral with other signifiers. Derrida’s critique of the voice and of Artaud will be taken up at length in chapter five, but for here let it suffice to recall Heidegger’s argument against the type of rational discourse Derrida employs, and Merleau-Ponty’s inference that Derridian deconstruction simply presents a paradox. According to Heidegger, Artaud hearkens to a listening that cannot be explained in a discourse that focuses on representation. Artaud recognizes in the arts the movement of another principle, the tension of the logos with phûsis, wherein unconcealment strives against the hiding and estrangement at play at the limits of consciousness, outside of the grasp of ideas. As we shall see, his thinking on voice and performance finds reflection in the experiments of Grotowski and Brook, and even in early critiques of the postmodern stage.
Apart from the early collection of essays *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968), Grotowski shied away from systematically writing and publishing his theories for the theatre. Still, his published interviews and lectures, as well as the journals and essays of his collaborators, provide a fairly accurate outline of Grotowski’s views and experiments, from his work with the Laboratory Theatre in Poland (1957-69) to his “Art as Vehicle” period (1986-99) in Pontedera, Italy. Surprisingly, though many critics have commented on the nature of Grotowski’s work resembling a form of actor preparation and discipline, little has been written about Grotowski’s vocal training. Two articles collected in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, “Actor’s Training (1959-1962)” and “Actor’s Training (1966),” give some indication of Grotowski’s work on the voice during his time with the Laboratory Theatre. As his work progressed through the Theatre of Sources (1976-82) and the Objective Drama (1983-86) periods, his collaborators revealed the growing importance of the voice in the singing and chanting of songs. As Lisa Wolford and Jennifer Kumiega reveal in their publications, however, the work perceived as vocal training during the later periods was still based upon the exercises and methods outlined in *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Therefore in this discussion of the voice in Grotowski’s work, those early essays will serve as a primary source of information.

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6 See in particular *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Wolford and Schechner, which gathers in one volume many of the articles on Grotowski published in *The Drama Review* over a 35-year period.

7 Wolford 42 and Kumiega 123-125. Both authors clarify that Grotowski hesitated to conceive of his work as a method of training that could be codified in a text and duplicated elsewhere.
To begin with, Grotowski acknowledged a great debt to Artaud.\textsuperscript{8} In his discussion of his vision for a contemporary theatre as articulated in the essay “Towards a Poor Theatre” (1965), Grotowski employed a language reminiscent of Artaud’s hypothesis of a metaphysical theatre. Theatre in its origins, Grotowski believed, was born in religious practice, and it “liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe.” Spectators of such a religious theatre gained a “renewed awareness of . . . personal truth” (22). Grotowski, like Artaud, also believed that contemporary society had become alienated from primal origins, had no conception of “universal truths,” and needed the “confrontation” with myth more than the identification with it offered in contemporary readings of the classics (23). The goal of such a confrontation, made available in Grotowski’s “poor theatre,” was to strip away the phony and enslaving social masks that contemporary society has forced individuals to wear, and return to human experience the “common human truths” of our existence (23). In this respect, Grotowski compliments Heidegger, who through his reading of the pre-Socratics, desired an experience untainted by Western rationalist discourse. As the various publications on Grotowski indicate, these preoccupations would remain with him throughout his career.

Unlike Artaud, Grotowski spent over forty years attempting to realize his theories in practice, a lifelong endeavor that constantly evolved through shared projects with small groups of actors willing to undergo a rigorous training conceived as a process of “rebirth.” Grotowski’s theatre might best be thought of not as a theatre aimed towards the spectator, but as an actor’s theatre, primarily invested in the actor’s growth. As Grotowski’s later periods attest, audiences rarely were permitted to witness his productions or experiments. In every phase of Grotowski’s work, which he styled as a research into the actor’s process that continued the work of

\textsuperscript{8} See Grotowski’s essay on Artaud, “He Wasn’t Entirely Himself,” in \textit{TPT}. 

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Stanislavski, a central concern was the development of actors as fully restored and vital human beings. In the essay entitled “Methodical Exploration” (1967, TPT), Grotowski formulates three goals of his investigation: “a) To stimulate a process of self-revelation, going back as far as the subconscious. . . . b) To be able to articulate this process. . . . c) To eliminate from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one’s own organism. . . .” (96). As expressed in Towards a Poor Theatre, the training of actors in Grotowski’s work with the Laboratory Theatre may be seen first as a process of stripping down, of discovering and eliminating hindrances to the creative imagination. Grotowski termed this process a via negativa, or a process of learning “what not to do” (101).

In Eugenio Barba’s notes that comprise “Actor Training (1959-1962),” he expresses Grotowski’s intent to impart to actors a power and quality of voice able to penetrate into the physical interior of the spectator.

The spectator not only hears the voice of the actor perfectly, but is also penetrated by it as if it were stereophonic. The spectator must be surrounded by the actor’s voice as if it came from every direction and not just the spot where the actor is standing. The very walls must speak with the voice of the actor. . . . The actor must exploit his voice in order to produce sounds and intonations that the spectator is incapable of reproducing or imitating. (115)

The voice for Grotowski supersedes, as does the work of art as expressed by Heidegger, mere verbal signification for the conveyance of a heightened awareness of the presence of being. Even more so, for Grotowski the expressiveness of the actor’s voice should exceed that of the average or untrained spectator, revealing the possibility of human growth. In order to condition such a voice, Grotowski developed a routine of exercises that Barba outlines in some detail (115-124, 133-141). Grotowski emphasizes two conditions for all voice work: proper respiration and the use of all the potential body resonators. Grotowski also supplements these with observations on diction, pausing, and “vocal imagination.” Although many of the exercises resemble those found
in contemporary voice manuals, Grotowski takes care to attribute specific exercises to various international sources, such as Hatha Yoga (116), Beijing Opera (117), African theatre (122), European Opera (124), and even to a Peruvian singer (123). Although not as overtly anti-Occidental as Artaud, Grotowski’s preference for non-European traditions, and his belief that they somehow better connect with the vital essences of life, remains apparent. In this respect, Grotowski echoes Heidegger, who sought escape from the myopic world-views imposed by the Western philosophic tradition.

Grotowski interprets his work as beginning where Stanislavski left off, with the concept of “physical actions” that proposes that the inner truth of an actor becomes manifest not by psychic will but by the commitment to a fully executed physical action. At the time of the training seminar that resulted in the essay “Actor’s Training (1966),” from notes taken by Franz Marijen, Grotowski had progressed in a formulation of what a theory of physical actions entails, and his ideas are evident in his articulation of new vocal exercises. In Marijen’s account of the seminar, Grotowski states, “There is one absolute rule. Bodily activity comes first, and then vocal expression” (151). In a perspective reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, the body and consciousness exist prior to audible expression. Grotowski aimed to return the voice to an unconditioned, natural state, free to express itself in a union of consciousness and instinct (178). According to his view, “In the vocal process, all the parts of the body must vibrate. It is of the utmost importance--and I shall go on repeating this--that we learn to speak with the body first and then with the voice” (152).

The exercises used in the 1966 seminar emphasize a greater connection between body and voice, and an increased plasticity of vocal range. Grotowski had the participants sing from different resonators in the body, stand on their heads and recite text through various octaves,
make animal noises, and imagine themselves stimulated by various physical sensations. All the while, Grotowski would touch, knead, and poke different body parts of the participants in order to extend their bodily awareness in terms of their speech. In their own way, the exercises resemble those developed by Cicely Berry and Kristin Linklater, who took a more psychoanalytic approach to “freeing” their students from unconscious blocks and hindrances. Psychologism, however, does not enter into Grotowski’s discussion. His language reflects that he sought organic and holistic results, and he believed that his process should present no psychic stress. Throughout the exercises, he encouraged the participants not to think but to respond physically. Grotowski believed, as did Artaud, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, that thought, language, explanation, and theory get in the way of natural and essential processes. He states in closing to the 1966 seminar, “The body must work first. Afterwards comes the voice” (172).

Grotowski could be viewed as attempting to establish acting and voice pedagogy for Artaud’s theater of cruelty, pedagogy that strives to stimulate communication from a core of human expression that precedes linguistic intervention. As Wolford clarifies, in Grotowski’s later periods, the singing of “ritual songs of ancient traditions” was supposed to function “as a tool through which the practitioner can explore his connection with sources” (GODR 117). She quotes an article by Jean-Pierre Thibault, wherein he writes that such singing relates to ritual processes, and was designed to “have a direct impact on--so to say--the head, the heart and the body of the doers, songs which can allow the passage from a vital energy to a more subtle one” (Wolford, GS 366). Complementing Artaud, then, Grotowski approaches a Heideggerian view of the voice as expressing the manifestations of meaning and being that exist outside of rationalist discourse. In terms of their impact on twentieth-century practice, Grotowski’s efforts did not exist in a vacuum, and his voice pedagogy did not remain his alone. His former student, Eugenio
Barba, employed similar approaches to the voice in his training of actors at the Odin Teatret, as outlined in Ian Watson’s *Towards a Third Theatre* (1993). Grotowski’s work also influenced Peter Brook, whose own attempts at establishing a theatre that digs beneath linguistic and cultural inscriptions approached the voice from positions reminiscent of phenomenological thought.

Richard Schechner’s attraction to Grotowski is well known to theatre academics, and his essay, “Aspects of Training at the Performance Group,” published in 1972, reflects debts to Grotowski’s approach to actor preparation. Concerning the voice, he states:

In some ways voice work transcends all of the four steps of performer development. Voice work is at the same time the most sophisticated and the most primitive element in training and performance. The voice is identical to the breath--to the ancient motion of spirit, of life coming from outside and possessing the body, or of man’s essential inner life. (60)

Schechner’s view of the voice and its employment in productions by the Performance Group betray the quest for essentialist foundations for human experience evident in the thinking of Artaud and Grotowski. In a telling reflection of phenomenological thought, Schechner states that in the Performance Group, the voice is not used for representative, linguistic ends. Rather, in doing vocal exercises,

The performer does not think about what to say, he doesn’t use the voice as the means of saying what he knows; he uses the voice as a means of finding out what he is saying. Using the voice need not be an expression of something more basic; using the voice is in itself an essential act. In this way new sounds, new songs, new languages are possible. (56).

Schechner reiterates Merleau-Ponty’s view that in speaking, language reveals to speakers their thoughts. He also corroborates Merleau-Ponty’s belief that the creative and intentional nature of speakers opens possibilities for the growth of language and thought. But Schechner’s views more fundamentally position the voice in a phonologic role. The sounds of the voice do the work of communication, but not according to linguistic rules. In this manner, Schechner, like Artaud and
Grotowski, seeks a Heideggerian realm of expression that bypasses a reliance on rationalist discourse.

**Peter Brook**

Dissatisfied with traditional forms of theatre based on the sanctity of the text and mimesis, Brook’s career since the early 1960s embarked on an investigation of avant-garde and international theatrical practices so as to arrive at a process of the expression of what he viewed were universal truths. As he stated in the opening of *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera, 1946-87* (1987), “My interest is in the possibility of arriving, in the theatre, at a ritual expression of the true driving forces of our time” (*SP* 31). His interest would lead him to establish a “Theatre of Cruelty” after the order of Artaud at the London Academy of Dramatic Art in 1964, and to found The International Centre of Theatre Research in Paris in 1970 with a company comprised of an international ensemble of performers, who in the following decades would tour Africa, Australia, the Middle East, and India in search of universal performance codes. With the Theatre of Cruelty, Brook aimed to establish a strong presence and unity of actor and audience so as to produce “a circle of unique intensity in which barriers can be broken and the invisible become real” (*SP* 41), much as for Fuchs the theatre of presence creates a “circle of heightened awareness” flowing from actor to spectator. Likewise, his stated purpose of the International Centre was “to be instruments that transmit truths which otherwise would remain out of sight” (*SP* 107). The question of a tangible, non-verbal theatrical language would present for Brook one of his most engaging problems.

Brook, like Artaud and Merleau-Ponty, imagined the voices of prehistoric peoples as somehow more intrinsically available to the emotions. Brook, like Richard Wagner a century before him, considered contemporary verbal arts, particularly opera, as direct descendants of the
vocalizations of the first human beings to the degree that they express the fundamental sensibilities of human experience (SP 169). Brook likewise granted to speech, if it is well considered and crafted as in the art of Anton Chekhov, an “entire unspoken complexity of energies between the characters” (OD 12). One of Brook’s first projects with the International Centre investigated whether a verbal language could be created that emitted from primal instincts and yet carried universal significance. The result, the creation of a new and original language for the production Orghast (1971), sprang from the company’s free-play and improvisation with the two thousand year old Persian ceremonial language known as Avesta. Brook believed that Avesta betrays a vital sense of humanity and spirituality in its close association of sound and meaning. In his view,

It was to be declaimed in a certain manner in rituals whose sense was sacred. The letters of Avesta carried within them concealed indications of how the particular sounds are to be produced. When these indications are followed, the deep sense begins to appear. In Avesta, there is never any distance at all between sound and content. . . . As spoken, Avesta is meaningful directly in relation to the quality made by the act of speaking. (SP 110)

Reminiscent of the “intentional bond” that Husserl perceived transpiring between sound and sense, the sounds of Avesta, for Brook, betray a deep sense of human truth and meaning that precedes linguistic articulation. The sounds carry a meaning that is perceived by the organism of the human body, despite the inability of the intellect to verbalize or explain it. Such an

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9 Symons quotes Wagner: “The oldest lyric arises out of tone and melody, in which human emotion at first uttered itself in the mere breathing of vowels. . . .” (302). Note the Romantic, onomatopoeic debts of The Rolling Stones’ guitarist Keith Richards attributing his compositions to a process of following “vowel movements.” Note also Jameson’s definition of the Stones as “high-modernist” (P 62).
attendance upon sound correlates with the type of listening one employs with Heideggerian nonrepresentational language.\textsuperscript{10}

Brook’s position complements Merleau-Ponty’s belief that the primal urges towards expression result in comprehensible vocalizations. Though Brook differs with Merleau-Ponty’s recognition that social agreement in the end makes language intelligible, he imparts to the audible, physical, and non-linguistic aspects of the voice the ability to express universally felt intentions. After his tour of African villages with a small group of actors, Brook observed, “In searching to discover how the human voice can vibrate in a manner that matches a certain emotional experience, one finds certain sounds. Now we found that those sounds made by our group and the sounds made by the Africans in some of their singing were the same” (123). The voice for Brook is not limited by isolated and various language systems, but it transcends language in order to express universal human experience. In this respect, Brook’s thinking also reflects the structural anthropology of Levis-Strauss and Victor Turner (whose views concerning language and performance will be taken up in the next chapter), since, in their view, the various and relative languages and performances evident in the world’s cultures spring from a foundational, structural core of the human psyche. But Brook, like anthropologist Colin Turnbull, whose publication \textit{The Mountain People} (1972) Brook adapted for his performance \textit{The Ik} (1975/6), remained open to a mysterious and inexplicable experience of performance (\textit{SP} 135-7).\textsuperscript{11} Brook betrays his phenomenological debts, reflecting the view that the voice to some degree communicates across the differences of linguistic structure. Neither was Brook the last to

\textsuperscript{10} In fairness, despite Brook’s optimism, not all critics felt that the language of \textit{Orghast} communicated. See Counsell 159.

\textsuperscript{11} See Turnbull, “Liminality.”
adopt such a view, for as we shall see, his thinking survives in what has been labeled postmodern performance.

**The Phenomenological Voice in Postmodernity**

Artaud’s desire to unshackle theatrical expression from the stultifying effects of tradition found resonance with practitioners like Grotowski and Brook, as well as with the practitioners of what has been labeled the revolutionary and experimental theatres of the United States in the 1960s: Beck and Malina’s Living Theatre, Chaikin’s Open Theatre, and Schechner’s Performance Group. As critics like Arthur Sainer and Arnold Aronson attest, the revolutionary theatres consciously embraced Artaud in their resistance to established theatre practice. By doing so, they also echoed Heidegger’s concern to create an artistic space in which something original and outside of rational discourse could become manifest. Critics therefore tend to situate the revolutionary theatres as the culmination of the modernist and humanist desire to effect a lasting liberation of the human spirit from the corrupting influences of institutions and oppressive ideologies.

Oddly, however, a number of theatre critics, among them Michel Benamou, Josette Féral, and Nick Kaye, acknowledge Schechner, Chaikin, Malina, and Beck as offering the first instance of a postmodern theatre (Benamou, PP 3; Féral 173; Kaye 13). The revolutionary theatres earn the designation mostly for the resistance to text as expressed in their nonrepresentational approaches to performance. On the other hand, Fuchs regards them as modernist since they did

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12 Chaikin, Malina, and Beck do not discuss the voice to the same degree as Schechner, Brook, and Grotowski, therefore their work is not discussed here. In an interesting confluence of talents, however, Kristin Linklater, the British voice teacher known for her work with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and Shakespeare and Co. in Lenox, Massachusetts, worked with Chaikin’s Open Theatre for the 1968 production *The Serpent*. See Aronson, *AAT*’91.

13 See also Innes.
not reflect the theoretical impulses of deconstruction that she locates in the later postmodern theatres of the 1970s and 80s (72-91). Auslander likewise accords them with modernism, since he believes that they did not betray the self-conscious political irony of the performances of the 1980s (PR 21-34). The problem of definitions haunts discussions of postmodern theatre in contemporary academia, and no consensus exists. Most problematic may be the question of whether the modernist sense of theatrical presence may be interpreted as existing on the postmodern stage, since critics like Fuchs and Auslander disallow it. Because Derridian deconstruction argues that the modernist discourses surrounding the experimental theatres from Artaud to Schechner actually create the sense of presence manifest in their productions, presence cannot be thought to emanate from some \textit{a priori} and fundamentally truthful exterior source. The conflicting definitions of postmodern theatre will be taken up at greater length in chapter five, but the present section aims to illuminate the debts to Artaud and Heidegger implicit in one strain of contemporary criticism that addresses postmodern theatre. This section also revisits Barthes and Durand’s assertion that a phenomenal property of the voice escapes the inscription of linguistic structure.

The two essays published by Chantal Pontbriand and Josette Féral in \textit{Modern Drama} in 1982 offer early examples of an interest in the break with representation seen to occur in the theatre and performance of the 60s and 70s. Interestingly, neither author uses the term “postmodern” to designate the type of performance she aims to critique, although at one point Pontbriand uses the term “post-modern presence” to designate the sense of “presentness” in contemporary performance that distinguishes itself from the “classical presence” that aligns with the “re-presenting” that occurs in traditional theatrical paradigms (155). Both authors find the word “theatre” inadequate to define the contemporary spectacles that no longer rely on
representation for their existence, and both designate the term “performance” as more adequate to the task. Both also identify similar artists and performers as belonging to this new genre of performance that is no longer theatre because they are believed to have shared the one trait of resisting classification according to the traditional models of art, theatre, dance, or music. Féral and Pontbriand mention Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown, Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson, and Vito Acconci as prominent examples. Yet both essays stem from Féral and Pontbriand’s preoccupation with the manifestation of presence in performance.

Along with the avant-garde in the first half of the twentieth century and the happenings of Kaprow and Cage in the 50s and 60s, Féral identifies Artaud as a theoretical antecedent for such varied contemporary performances as those of the Living Theatre, Elizabeth Chitty, Acconci, Foreman, and Brown. She states, “Performance seems paradoxically to correspond on all counts to the new theatre invoked by Artaud: a theatre of cruelty and violence, of the body and its drives, of displacement and ‘disruption,’ a non-narrative and non-representational theatre” (170-71). For Féral, performance challenges the spectator with the perceived fragmentation of the actor’s body and theatrical space, and with the absence of discernible meaning explicitly set forth in any narrative. In this light, Féral interprets performance as staging Derrida’s concept of *différance*, in which meaning and identity can only be seen to occur within the relationship of a system’s constituent parts (173). Yet for Féral, performance simply does not aim to present fragmentation for the sake of fragmentation, but in order to provide an entirely new way of looking at the performed human subject. As she explains, “Performance does not aim at *a* meaning, but rather *makes* meaning insofar as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject eventually emerges” (173).
Féral therefore reads performance from the humanist and phenomenological position reflected in Heidegger, for she seeks a reconstitution of the subject against the limitations and inscriptions imposed upon it by linguistic systems. Her citation of Derrida raises the problematic issue of whether any subject can be conceived outside of language, since for him no presentation is possible without representation. Yet this she resolves with the rather unsatisfactory rhetorical maneuver of equating representation with theatre and presentation with performance. Regardless of her reading of Derridian deconstruction, however, her essay nonetheless attests to her attraction to the postulate of an originary human essence and the manifestation of theatrical presence. Accordingly, for Féral, the presentation of the voice in performances by Monk, Wilson, and Foreman should be heard to break with the linguistic codes of verbal signification and narrative and to present instead a “point of passage for energy flows--gestural, vocal, libidinal, etc.” (174). In this respect she locates in the voice phenomenal properties likewise identified by Barthes and Durand.

Pontbriand recognizes that the notion of theatrical presence has come under critique in contemporary theory, yet she still attempts to “understand the meaning of a reactualized presence” in those performance situations that resist the traditional paradigms of representation and the actor-audience complicity in the constitution of meaning (155). Furthermore, she notes that contemporary performance relies more upon technical means of presentation rather than upon live performers in order to effect the sense of fragmentation noted by Féral. She therefore turns to Walter Benjamin who, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), offers a critique of the “aura” of a work of art (which she equates with presence) as dependent upon the sense of “uniqueness” of the live performer. Benjamin posits that the uniqueness and aura of the live event is lost in the mechanical reproducibility of film. Pontbriand
uses Benjamin to argue that performance subverts the traditional reception of theatrical presence, yet she still seeks within performance, like Féral, the manifestation of “a new and different presence, a radical presence” (156). While she strips this radical presence of a sense of the metaphysical associated with phenomenology, she nonetheless asserts, “performance aims to show the real” (15). In her definition, contemporary performance makes manifest what previously remained hidden by traditional linguistic orders of representation.

When Pontbriand describes the work of Foreman, she echoes sentiments expressed by Heidegger in his address of the *logos* and *phūsis* of language. She writes, “Foreman wants the spectator not to concentrate on the thing, but to look between and among things, and to listen in order to hear what is between the works” (160). Such listening can only attend upon the voices and sounds that do not signify the narratives and meanings commonly reiterated through codified linguistic systems like dramatic texts. Pontbriand, like Féral, approaches performance from a humanist perspective that attempts to identify a grounding essence of human being, even where human subjectivity seems to be deliberately obscured and hidden. Pontbriand and Féral also provide a space wherein a listening of the voice outlined by Barthes and Durand may take place.

The nonrepresentational performances distinguished by Féral and Pontbriand have by now become referred to as postmodern, despite the difference in critical definitions of postmodern theatre and different considerations of which performances may be included. In a noteworthy shift, Féral and Pontbriand attempt to situate a type of “deconstruction” as operative within performance, though not along the lines outlined by Derrida. Whereas Derrida disallows the originary presence of any state of being or meaning outside of the operation of *différance*, Féral and Pontbriand interpret deconstruction as doing the work of Heidegger’s *logos*, since, in their view, deconstructive performance cannot rationally articulate what it strives to reveal. They
view postmodern performers as breaking with traditional notions of representation, while striving to awaken sensations within the audience that bypass rationalist explanation, much as Artaud’s performers were to sear the guts and psyches of their audience. In this respect, Féral and Pontbriand reflect the school of contemporary theory that interprets Heidegger and Nietzsche as anticipating the postmodern turn and offering it theoretical ballast.¹⁴ Féral and Pontbriand also employ deconstruction in a similar fashion as Durand, as one that sets the voice free “from the fetters of the signifier’s organization” (102). In this manner, the voice may be heard, as Barthes notes, as a “carnal stereophony,” which in itself constitutes the “substance of an art” (PT 66-7).

Conclusion

While not directly cognizant or informed by phenomenological thought, many twentieth-century performers still reflect a phonologic regard of the voice that hearkens to the theories of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. In the writings of Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, and Schechner may be detected a view of the voice as providing a locus of meaning, not simply through linguistic utterance, but through the production of sound. All of these theorists betray the belief that the voice provides a conduit for the expression of essential and universal truths in a manner similar to the phono-logocentric tradition of Western thought, and that the voice also aids in the manifestation of theatrical presence. Through a comparison of phenomenologists with modernist theatre practitioners, this chapter has pointed out the similarities between them, particularly the view of the dependence of expression upon the corporeality of the speaker, the ability of vocal sounds to become constituent of sense, and the operation of logos within voice

¹⁴ See Causey, TP; Palmer; and Gregory Bruce Smith.
and language as an unconcealment of potential meanings and states of being, and not just imitations of them.

But through the transitional, experimental theatres of Beck, Malina, Chaikin, and Schechner, which directly acknowledged Artaud and his desire to create a theatre that breaks with institutional and representational forms of theatre, a phenomenological element of performance survives in postmodern theatre and criticism. Particularly, the relationship drawn between postmodern performance and deconstruction reflects the Heideggerian notion of a revelation of a nonverbal, non-rational state of being existing and making itself present through nonrepresentational forms of art. The relationship between Heidegger and the postmodern may be most evident in the contemporary theorizing of Barthes, Durand, Pontbriand, and Féral. As these theorists to varying degrees attest, in response to the silencing of the voice on the postmodern stage, phenomenology, a prime target of deconstruction, actually provides a tenet for vocal production in postmodern practice. Although an analysis of the voice in postmodern practice has been incomplete here—for indeed many theorists, Fuchs and Auslander among them, contest the notion “post-modern presence”—it will be taken up at greater in chapter five. For now, I close with Patrice Pavis’s observation, shared by Herbert Blau, that the contemporary stage still supplies the “unitary space” denied by deconstruction, not only because of the cultural heritage to which all theatre belongs, but also because of the heritage of “vocal, gestural, and innovative practice” that descends directly from the modernist and phenomenological traditions (TCC 57).15

15 See also Blau, “Letting BE BE Finale of Seem” and BT 86-7.
CHAPTER 4
THE MUTABLE VOICE IN THE LINGUISTIC TURN

As phenomenologists attempted to maintain the voice as an essential signifier of truth and being, reiterating the tenets of the phono-logocentric tradition, the linguistic turn in Western philosophy focused upon the constructed nature of language as the primary means by which we think and communicate. The positivists Peirce, Russell, and Frege emphasized that language provides the conduit through which reality becomes accessible to consciousness, while the structuralists, after Saussure, posited that linguistic structure actually manufactures the various conceptions of reality available in human discourse. The linguistic turn therefore dislodged the voice from traditional philosophical epistemologies, since sound could no longer be maintained as constituent of sense, but simply as one means among many by which ideas find expression. Likewise the status of the agency of the speaking subject came into question, since individuals could no longer be held to interact objectively with their environments without the subjective mediation of language.

Reflecting the linguistic turn in Western philosophy, the language of the stage, as well as attendant notions of the efficacy of stage speech, came under investigation as reliable signifiers of sense. In one quarter, influenced by structuralism and Russian Formalism, theatre semiotics arose with the particular aim of studying the signifying properties of the stage. In another, as an indirect expression of the preoccupation with language, dramatists and theatre practitioners as various as Brecht, the Absurdists, Beckett, and Handke reflected dissatisfaction with traditional notions of representation and the status of the speaking subject. Their experiments highlight a shift in emphasis, away from mimesis, in which the stage elements directly relate to
comprehensible concepts and realities existing outside of the confines of the production, to the operation of the stage elements themselves.

This chapter explores the relationship between the linguistic turn in Western philosophy and theatre practice, with particular attention to the status of the voice and its relevance for a consideration of the speaking subject. Since the linguistic turn introduces a gradual silencing of the voice in twentieth-century thought and practice, this particular chapter necessarily shifts its focus from critical theories directly or tangentially concerned with the voice to those theories that hold implications for the speaking subject through a concentration on language and speech. Within this discussion, the voice does not figure as a central, problematic issue so much as a symptom of the status of the speaking subject.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on a distinction within language philosophy that reflects two oppositional characteristics of language identified by Saussure. On one hand, Saussure defines language (la langue) as a fixed and unchangeable entity that provides a grammar and vocabulary for a speech community that no single member may intentionally alter. The unchangeable aspect of language Saussure called synchronic. On the other hand, Saussure viewed speech (la parole) as a facet of language use that affords individual language users the ability to create novel forms of expression within the language. Through such novel forms, changes within the language may occur, and this changeable aspect of language Saussure identified as diachronic. Structuralism, expressed in the anthropology of Levi-Strauss and the linguistics of Whorf, tends to emphasize the synchronic nature of la langue and its totalizing effects on human culture and thought, whereas the speech act theory of Austin and Searle tends to emphasize the diachronic nature of la parole and the sense of autonomy it restores to the speaking subject. The distinction points to a problematic crux of twentieth-century thought: how
to account for the agency and creativity of speech within the seemingly totalizing and
determining nature of linguistic order?

This chapter compares the structuralist conception of language as a fixed linguistic and
noetic field to speech act theory’s recuperation of the intentionality of the speaking subject, and
relates how each perspective finds expression in dramatic theory and practice. The chapter
proceeds in four parts. The first discusses the structural perspectives of Saussure, Levi-Strauss,
Turner, Sapir, and Whorf and the implications for a view of the speaking subject as constrained
by linguistic systems. The second responds to structuralism through a consideration of the
ordinary language philosophy of Wittgenstein and the speech act theory of Austin and Searle,
and how they resuscitate agency for the speaking subject. The third discusses the incorporation
of structuralism and speech act theory in theatre semiotics, with particular attention to the
semiotic analysis of the voice on stage and how theatre semiotics reveals, in Jan Mukarovsky’s
words, “informational and autonomous” aspects of the speaker and the voice. The fourth
discusses views of language, speech, and the voice in several dramatists and practitioners
reflective of the linguistic turn, namely Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, and Handke. This chapter
argues that despite the denial of the voice as constituent of sense in twentieth-century Western
philosophy, and despite the disenfranchisement of the speaking subject found in structural
thought, the voice continues to act as an essential significative property on the contemporary
stage, presenting the speaking subject as an autonomous agent, even in those modernist theatres
that place the voice and speech under suspicion.

An investigation into the linguistic turn and related theatrical experiments merits
attention since they anticipate poststructural theory and postmodern theatre practice, wherein the
voice has come under critique. In relevance to the scope and concern of this dissertation, if a
recuperation of the voice were possible despite the totalizing effects of structuralism, then the contemporary assessment of the voice in poststructural theory and postmodern practice may have to undergo revision.

**Structuralism and the Muted Voice**

By defining language as an arbitrary construct in which the phonetic properties of words do not have a direct existential relationship to the things they signify, Ferdinand de Saussure, in the *Course in General Linguistics* (1915), initiated the silencing of the voice that would culminate in poststructural thought. Saussure provided Derrida with the basis for the deconstructive argument against Husserl’s phenomenology by arguing that words are identified and understood not so much by the sounds they contain, but by how their sounds contrast with the sounds of other words (*Course* 114). Words do not point directly to their referents, as nominalism assumes, but exist in degrees of difference with other words. Therefore, within the structuralist perspective indebted to Saussure, meaning has not been established in advance of language, but depends upon and is produced by socially manifested linguistic structure. As he puts it, “language includes neither ideas nor sounds existing prior to the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences arising out of that system” (118). Accordingly, the voice no longer maintains the position of privilege it held within the phonologic tradition, since “it is impossible that sound, as a material element, should in itself be part of the language” (116).

But whereas structuralists and poststructuralists alike tend to focus upon the social constructedness of language, Saussure’s hypothesizing stems from a preoccupation with signification that likewise concerned Husserl. For within their respective systems, both theorists found the positive nature of signification--that is, the attendance of meaning upon the communicative act--not altogether clear or adequately explained. The issue raises a significant
question in terms of the agency afforded the speaking subject. How do speakers intentionally create and comprehend meaning across the deficiencies of the arbitrary nature of language?

Both Saussure and Husserl begin with the recognition that the vocal apparatus provides the sounds for all of the words in human languages. Words exist because they are formed first by phonation and articulation. Through convention, a word (for Saussure the “signifiant” or “signifier”) then becomes associated with a distinct mental image (what Saussure called a “concept” and later terms “signifié” or “signified,” and what Husserl variously terms the non-verbal “sense” or “expression”). Whereas both theorists agree that the words of a given language are arbitrary, they differ on the status of the ideas they signify. Husserl asserts that ideas exist prior to the linguistic system. Saussure counters that ideas, like the signifiers used to represent them, are relative products of the linguistic system. Saussure bases his argument for the relativity of ideas on the observation that different languages do not translate directly. He states, “If words had the job of representing concepts fixed in advance, one would be able to find exact equivalents for them as between one language and another. But this is not the case” (114-5). Saussure therefore breaks with the Aristotelian view, echoed by Husserl, that mental images are the same for all peoples, since, in his view, differing peoples conceive of phenomena differently, and likewise express them differently. Within his perspective, both words and ideas exist as “differential and negative” properties (118).

Saussure and Husserl, however, share the belief that the relationship established between word and concept creates a positive and comprehensible meaning. Husserl, as noted in the previous chapter, provides an explanation through a phenomenological method in which words “overlay,” “reveal,” and form an “intentional bond” with the concepts signified, and he thereby advances a contemporary view of phonologism. Saussure differs, believing that since concepts
are not concrete entities given in advance of language, words cannot behave nominally and act as direct referents for sense. A gap between signifier and signified always exists. Therefore, for Saussure, language functions in a “mysterious process” ("ce fait en quelque sorte mystérieux") by which it acts as an “intermediary” between thought and sound (110-1/156). Meaning resides neither in the thought nor in the words used to express it, but surfaces apart from language as a distinct and separate “positive term.”

Saussure hesitates to explore the domain of meaning, content to limit his investigations into the linguistic forms that languages provide, emphasizing that “Linguistics, then, operates along this margin, where sound and thought meet. The contact between them gives rise to a form, not a substance” (111). His primary interest lies with the forms of language structures themselves, not so much with the cognitive processes of comprehension. But by terming language “mysterious,” Saussure does not mean to concede a metaphysical operation akin to that proposed by phenomenology. He simply admits that he was unable to completely account for the psychological functions that transpire in the creation of meaning. Without the benefit of later research in neurology, Saussure could only skirt the problem and hypothesize that the cognitive faculty acts something like a sieve that shifts through the myriad differences of terms and ideas available in a language until a sediment of meaning, mutually understood by two communicants, becomes clear enough to be agreed upon (121-32). Saussure foresaw the need for neurological research into the cognitive operations of the brain in order to verify the exact nature of signification, taking care to clarify that linguistics can only venture so far into physiology and psychology (7). He nonetheless serves to move the discussion of language away from the metaphysics of Husserlian phenomenology and towards the empirical sciences.
Saussure provides a significant break with the traditional and phenomenological views of human beings as using language to intentionally and objectively engage the physical world. Just as important, he provides a break with the phonocentric view of the voice as providing an epistemological link between human being and the transcendent. Beginning with Saussure, the epistemological nature of human being becomes reduced to the operations of linguistic and social structure. For in his view, individuals “passively register” the language held in common by the community at large, and their will and intelligence are subordinate to the limits of that language (14). Language therefore dictates the possibilities of expression, and no individual can exert a change upon the language (19).

Saussure seemingly advances, and structuralism and poststructuralism affirm the view, that the individual cannot exceed the expressive confines of linguistic structure, but such is not the case. For Saussure separates language (la langue) from speech (la parole), viewing only the first as a synchronic and impermeable phenomenon that subsumes the entire speaking community. On the other hand, he defines speech as “individual and ephemeral manifestations” (“les manifestations en sont individuelles et momentanées”) (19/38) that escape the synchronic constraints of language, since speech acts are voluntary and open to creative free-play in the combination and slight alteration of words. Since Saussure believes it impossible to study all of the ways individuals use language, he states his concern to be solely the study of language (la langue), and not speech (19-20, 96).¹ The speaking subject’s use of speech outside of the

¹ Upon this score Noam Chomsky differs with Saussure, believing that the creativity and variability of individual speech acts may be made comprehensible, and this through the “transformational generative grammar,” which he nonetheless locates as operant within neurological, even genetic structures. Since his work avoids treating the voice, it will not be discussed here.
confines of linguistic structure is therefore excluded from the Course, even though Saussure does not discount it or belittle it as a social and empirical fact.

Unfortunately, Saussure’s distinction between a study of language and a study of speech has been overlooked within the deconstructive critique of the autonomy and agency of the speaking subject. Whereas Saussure indeed strips the voice of its traditional participation in the constitution of sense and the revelation of meaning, he does not subject individuals to the linguistic hegemony embraced by the poststructuralism of such theorists as Lacan and Foucault. He even affirms that diachrony happens in part because small groups within the community create linguistic change through their own creativity. He states, “Speech contains the seeds of every change, each one being pioneered in the first instance by a certain number of individuals before entering into general usage” (97). Within the structuralist view of language and speech, the question of intentionality and agency remains open to debate, and surfaces in the work of such figures as Levi-Strauss, Turner, Sapir, and Whorf.

Claude Levi-Strauss follows Saussure’s cue that linguistics shares the same ends as other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, and psychology, namely, to study “the role of signs as part of social life” (Course 15). By combining Saussurian linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalysis in an application to anthropology, Levi-Strauss defines culture as an expressive psychic corollary to the linguistic structures of a particular language group. In other words, cultures find the forms they do as an expressive outgrowth of the linguistic structures underlying the thought of a particular group. Yet Levi-Strauss betrays a debt to traditional epistemologies with his belief, shared by Merleau-Ponty, that all cultures, regardless of the vast differences between them, ultimately share a base structure encoded in the social and mental make-up of human consciousness. The link between language and culture exists because, as Levi-Strauss
was to express in 1977, “the human mind is only part of the universe, [and] the need to find order probably exists because there is some order in the universe and the universe is not a chaos” (MM 13). As he states in Structural Anthropology (1958), the study of culture through a “comparative structural analysis” hoped to afford insight into the universal mechanisms that underlie and define all of human nature (SA 21). For Levi-Strauss, some kind of order precedes Saussure’s relative structures that in turn make all thought and language possible.

Levi-Strauss nonetheless contributes to the poststructural view of language with his assertion that every linguistic structure relative to a social group inherently supports belief systems and attitudes that find expression in the group’s behavior (SA 37). The two fields of language and belief become mutually supportive, forming a “functional relationship” that finds creative outlet in cultural manifestations (SA 39). In Levi-Strauss’s view, culture, like language, molds discourse “beyond the consciousness of the individual, imposing upon his thought conceptual schemes which are taken as objective categories” (SA 19). As language users raised in specific social and cultural contexts, speakers are unaware that their languages impose specific world-views (SA 21). Therefore Levi-Strauss, like the poststructuralists who follow him, views speakers as confined to a finite range of expression, equivalent to the range of a specific language. The construction of social institutions like art, law, and religion likewise reflect the biases of language, since language appears to lay “a kind of foundation for the more complex structures which correlate to the different aspects of culture” (SA 69). Levi-Strauss lends credence to Saussure’s notion that languages have connections with social institutions (Course 21), yet the parameters of Levi-Strauss’s thought, like Saussure’s, still beg the question of whether individual intentionality impacts cultural and linguistic norms.
Victor Turner offers structural anthropology a response that helps recuperate the agency of the speaking subject, while at the same time providing theatre scholarship with a unique perspective on the critical social role of performance. Turner believes that both ritual and theatre, like law and taboo, function as types of monitoring systems for given societies. Ritual and theatre differ from law and taboo, however, in that they uniquely offer the community different degrees of self-reflexiveness and metacommentary. Turner defines ritual and theatre as stemming from a universal process operant in all societies, that of the social drama, which unfolds in four stages, “breach,” “crisis,” “redressive action,” and “outcome.” Turner stresses that performances do not derive from or reenact the entire social drama, but that they evolve specifically from the third stage of redressive action, the ritualized responses to crises, which often come in the form of a recognizable, performative process similar to trials or the practice of shamanism (UP 8-9). Likewise religious practice, dance, and theatre have evolved as crucial aesthetic elements in the maintenance of group cohesion (UP 11). The performances offer commentary on the major social dramas within any social context, affording the members of a group insight into “their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes, and ideological perspectives” (UP 17).

Turner believes that many subgroups with differing identities exist within every society, and each subgroup produces its own specialized versions of performance that attempt to account for their own life experience. The performances therefore supply an essential component of the individual’s and the group’s attempts to provide themselves with meaning. Turner ascribes to individuals great creative and expressive freedom in their performances, going so far as to shift the structural view of social life as a closed noetic system to one that is evolving and “spiraling.” In this light, performance for Turner reflects Saussure’s definition of la parole as affording linguistic change. Within Turner’s model,
Individuals can make an enormous impact on the sensibility and understanding of members of society. Philosophers feed their work into the spiraling process; poets feed poems into it; politicians feed their acts into it; and so on. . . . The cosmology has always been destabilized, and society has always had to make efforts, through both social dramas and esthetic dramas, to restabilize and actually produce cosmos. (UP 17-18)

If the structures underlying a given belief system were so firmly in place that they precluded critique or alteration from within the system, then Turner’s model for performance would be unworkable. Turner therefore grants individual participants and observers an increased role in the creation of value and meaning, above the prescriptions of culture emphasized by Levi-Strauss.

Complementing Turner, Sapir takes a structuralist view of language that admits the changeability implicit in Saussure’s view of la parole. Admittedly, Sapir may be known best for his contribution to what has been rather mistakenly called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which posits that linguistic structure produces forms of thought. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been identified as a preliminary articulation of the Foucaultian, poststructural view of all speech acts as subordinate to the totalizing impositions of linguistic and cultural constructs. But the attachment of Sapir’s name to that hypothesis is not altogether warranted, since Sapir’s own views take into consideration many seemingly contradictory aspects of language, favoring the freedom and creativity of the individual speaker. Nonetheless, depending upon one’s perspective or editorial slant, his statements concerning language could also be construed to support arguments in favor of linguistic hegemony.

Within the two published full-length works by Sapir, Language in 1921 and the posthumous collection of essays Culture, Language, and Personality in 1949, the most sustained argument in favor of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis may be found in the 1929 lecture “The Status of Linguistics as a Science” (found in CLP), where he states:
Language is a guide to ‘social reality’. . . . It powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. (CLP 68-9)

Taken out of the context of his larger concerns with language, Sapir appears to support the Saussurian supposition that linguistic and cultural systems construct the perception of the physical world in which we live and bind all forms of verbal expression. This is only in part true, for a careful reading of the above paragraph reveals the many qualifiers Sapir carefully inserts. If human beings do not live in the objective world alone, one might ask to what extent they do objectively engage the world in spite of linguistic restrictions. And if human beings are very much at the mercy of a particular language, it may be worthwhile to explore the extent to which they are not.

In response to the notion of complete linguistic hegemony, Sapir, like Saussure, distinguishes between the synchronic nature of language and the variable nature of speech. In Sapir’s view, members of particular social groups or geographical locations may generally speak the same language and follow the same linguistic rules, but individual speakers differ in their use of style, in the employment of different words and phrases, and especially in the shadings of accent (CLP 16, L 147). Second, speakers do not always use language in its referential aspect. Not all speech acts intend to communicate the symbolic significations of the words chosen. Sapir, like speech act theorists, offers another view of speech, that it is rarely referential but for the most part “expressive,” communicating meanings beyond the mere indicative value of the words themselves. Dialogue transpires with many variables--behavior, tone of voice, situation, and the relationship between speakers--all of which need to be taken into consideration in a study.
of signification and the completion of comprehension (CLP 10). Such variables might indeed accord with social and linguistic rules, but their boundaries are less easy to codify, and they are more prone to the faults of invention and the vagaries of interpretation.

Third, Sapir takes note of the way languages constantly change and adapt to differing environments, undergoing a process of what he calls “drift” (L 147-70). Even though individual speakers may be unaware of it, they greatly contribute to the minute changes that take place, much as Saussure’s individual speakers contribute to the diachronic aspect of language evolution (L 155). Language as an expression of a people’s understanding of its world constantly shifts, accommodating new environments and experiences, borrowing from other languages, and sometimes aggressively transplanting others. Therefore Sapir differs with Levi-Strauss, observing that “there is no general correlation between cultural type and linguistic structure” (CLP 33), meaning that language does not create the ideas and beliefs of a specific speech community. Given the instances of the rapid transmutation of language over racial and cultural lines, Sapir discounts the structuralist corollary thought to exist between language and culture. As an example, Sapir notes that the English language sprang from the confluence of Celtic, Norman French, and Anglo-Saxon sources, and yet British culture could hardly be mistaken for Irish, French, or German cultures, or even a combination of their parts. Likewise, as a result of colonization, peoples of various cultures and ethnicities in the United States, South Africa, and Australia, none of which could be mistaken for another, share English as their primary language (L 209-212). Some aspect of language use must therefore stand apart from the dictates of culture and linguistic hegemony, thereby weakening the structural view of la langue as a totalizing noetic influence.
In the final analysis, Sapir struggled with the distinction between the autonomy of individual language users and the formal restrictions of linguistic structure on modes of thought and speech. As he saw it, “speech as behavior is a wonderfully complex blend of two pattern systems, the symbolic and the expressive” (CLP 14). On one hand, language provides the symbolic pattern, or the forms within which thought takes place (L 218). On the other, the individual human speaker can subvert those forms with expressive free-play. For Sapir, like the neurologist Harry Jerison, the rub seems to be situated within the recognition of language, defined in this case as a compendium of symbols, as the only means available to humanity to codify the given material and social world. But rather than interpret language as constructing the world or holding the real world at bay given the referential aspect of its symbols, Sapir and Jerison believe that as the world already exists, it can to some degree be objectively perceived, presented to the self, and communicated to others. Admittedly, in this frame, thought and speech can only be possible with language. But like Jerison, Sapir believes that the primary role of language is not communication within a social milieu so much as the “vocal actualization to see realities symbolically” (CLP 15). In other words, in accordance with the cognitive model of language evolution discussed in chapter two, Sapir views language as providing the verbal medium by which we successfully make sense of the world and our environments. But such a model does not imply that language therefore conscribes all possible thought. Language does not use us; we use language, and we can exceed the seeming limits of structure in order to use and expand upon the “symbols” of language in the novel creation of free expression.

Sapir’s student, Benjamin Lee Whorf, offers arguments to the contrary, and from within linguistics he therefore bolsters the structural view of language as a totalizing noetic system. Likewise, his contributions to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis tend to overshadow the conclusions of
his predecessor, as well as Sapir’s positive regard *la parole*. Stimulated to explore the relationship between the referential aspect of language and the patterns of thought and cultural expression, Whorf emphasizes the degree that individual human beings are subsumed by the language structures of their given linguistic communities, and thereby limited in the form and content of possible thought and speech. Echoing Saussure, Whorf believes that linguistic structure provides both the words of a language and the ideas they represent. Whorf himself employs the term “linguistic relativity principle” which means, for him, “that users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world” (221).

Through his comparison of native-American and European languages, Whorf believes that speakers consistently view reality through the prisms established by linguistic structure. The Hopi language, for example, does not have words that designate three-dimensional space, but it does have an abundance of words for location and direction. Hopi has no equivalent word for “room;” the concept would instead be rendered “in a house” or “in an architectural interior” (202). Hopi also does not differentiate verb tenses. Since the Hopi situate consciousness in the present tense, the notion of someone running, present, past, or future, is rendered instead as the state of running, the remembrance of running, or the expectation of running (213). Native Hopi speakers do not share the spatial and linear orientation of Europeans, and Europeans do not share the synesthetic sensibility of the Hopi. The two therefore live in different conceptual worlds, with implications for their thought and speech processes. Furthermore, they can only cross the linguistic divide that separates them *after* they have been exposed to differing linguistic schemes, but not before.
Whorf in part agrees with Sapir that as language provides the form of thought, it shapes the content of ideas as well. As he argues,

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds--and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way--an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. (213)

Echoing Saussure, Whorf defines human beings as subject to the epistemological realm designated by specific languages, and no longer as dispassionate and objective participants in a communal global environment that is readily comprehensible and communicable by all. Whorf also declines from considering the degree to which individuals may exert some change upon their relative linguistic systems. That task has been later taken up, specifically against Whorf and against poststructuralism in general, by such philosophers and cultural theorists as Jürgen Habermas, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and Christopher Norris, who believe that empirical truths may be codified despite the relative concepts available in differing linguistic schemes.

Whorf likewise discounts Sapir’s notion of language drift. In his view, the introduction of the English language to Australian aboriginal cultures, for example, would force a reordering of aboriginal thought and cultural expression. For Whorf, the difference between culture and language lies in the fact that culture is simply a composite of mutable norms, whereas language is a more rigid and totalizing system that engulfs the thought processes and forms of expression that it overtakes (156). A change in language does not mean that one system of signification replaces another, leaving the content intact as Sapir intimated, but that an entire way of interpreting reality substitutes for another, altering the content itself. According to Whorf, Levi-Strauss may have been more correct in positing a corollary between language and culture, but he
would be mistaken to assume that all cultural expression resides on a similar, universal base. The multiplicity of languages proves too problematic for such a simplistic view. Therefore, instead of encouraging a “comparative linguistics” in order to deduce the similarities between languages, Whorf proposed the pursuit of a “contrastive linguistics,” believing that a greater understanding of human cognition and the physical world lies in the appreciation of the various world-views formulated by the many different languages available (240).

But Whorf should not be mistaken as a poststructuralist ahead of his time, for he did betray a phenomenological view of human consciousness similar to that expressed by Husserl and Heidegger. Even though his contribution to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis predated the poststructural view of language and culture, he was as yet unwilling to embrace the more overwhelming--even nihilistic--implications of his theories upon the assumed primacy of human existence. As he states in an essay of 1941,

> My own studies suggest, to me, that language, for all its kingly role, is in some sense a superficial embroidery upon deeper processes of consciousness, which are necessary before any communication, signaling, or symbolism whatsoever can occur, and which also can, at a pinch, effect communication (though not true AGREEMENT) without language’s and without symbolism’s aid. (239)

Whorf therefore grants every individual some sort of natural and intrinsic characteristic prior to the introduction of language. He also remained optimistic that the linguistic and scientific communities might someday reveal a “deeper process of consciousness,” since their disciplines have become aware of the relativity of language structures, and the debt that such scientific paradigms as empiricism and rationalism owe to European language constructs and world-views. Whorf adhered to a traditional view of philosophy and science as plumbing the limits of structure and knowledge, and possibly tapping into the pre-linguistic resources of human identity.
Within the structural frame the voice loses the position it once held in the phonologic tradition. The voice may transmit a language, and even take a key role in the creation of the phonetic sounds of language, but it hardly provides a conduit to truth or a codifiable reality. Accordingly, as the voice slips from its privileged position in phonologic discourse, it likewise slips from a consideration in twentieth-century language philosophy. Instead, the focus shifts from the voice to the status of the speaking subject. Within structuralism, the expressive potential of speakers has been consigned to the limits of a given linguistic scheme. If anything, a hearing of the voice only identifies the linguistic and cultural situation of the speaker, since all speakers may only reflect the conceptions and biases inherent in their linguistic communities. Within contemporary sociological frames, the thought has by now become commonplace. As cultural anthropologist David M. Smith avows, “It is now quite readily accepted that speech differences directly correlate with a number of social groupings and may indeed be among the major indicators of the social slots an individual fills” (97). One’s voice does not signal individuality, but only betrays the assignations of a specific cultural domain.

Furthermore, as Fredric Jameson points out, within structuralism, “the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign eliminates the myth of a natural language” (PHL 31). But just as important, the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign also eliminates the myth of a natural world. As Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Whorf attest, our linguistic and cultural constructs reflect our subjective understandings of our immediate surroundings and our experiences of them. Therefore the “mental experiences” that Aristotle speaks of are not the same for all, since language shapes how those experiences are perceived and interpreted. Whorf leaves open the possibility that differing mental experiences may be shared across linguistic divisions, but in the absence of
cross-cultural bridges, people would remain cognitively isolated within their respective worldviews.

Ironically, however, despite the rather strong version of structuralism described by Jameson and advanced by poststructuralists like Foucault, none of the theorists discussed above seem to declare overtly that language completely robs human beings of agency or proactiveness in their physical and social worlds. Furthermore, the construction of language as a means to account for reality, as expressed by Turner and Sapir, stems from necessary behavioral and logical processes indicative of the unique constitution of human being. Far from restricting human thought and expression, language affords an intentional interaction with fellow human beings and the environment. Linguistic structures by definition do not present faulty conceptions of the world or prohibit individuals from speaking comprehensibly. Language is simply the means by which human beings go about the business of being human, and they have no choice about the matter, nor should they. Turner and Sapir respond to the structuralist view of the speaking subject formulated by Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Whorf by considering the agency afforded through the role of la parole. Their efforts address the persistent problem of contemporary linguistic theory: how to account for the autonomy of the speaking subject within the totalizing linguistic and noetic structures of language? And for the purposes of this study, can the voice play any part in granting such autonomy? Similar questions have been raised within another branch of twentieth-century language philosophy: speech act theory.

**Speech Act Theory and Vocal Agency**

John Searle characterizes the philosophy of language in the first half of the twentieth century as falling within two strands: one followed the linguistic task of analyzing semiotic properties for the elucidation of meaning, the other concentrated on language use in differing
speech situations. In the first he numbers Saussure and the logical positivists Frege and Russell, but Searle also mentions Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921). In the second he names the later Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1945-9), as well as Austin and P. F. Strawson (*SA* 18). The schism of thought points to two of the concerns of this chapter, the difference between the synchronic nature of language structure and the creativity and free-play of language use, and the implications for the role of the voice in communication. This section argues that the line of thinking beginning with the “ordinary language philosophy” of Wittgenstein, and culminating in the speech act theory of Austin and Searle, provides a view of the variable nature of speech that refutes the strict confines of linguistic structure. Speech act theory also reinvigorates a view of the voice as playing an essential role in the constitution of meaning. As such, speech act theory offers theatre scholarship a view of both the voice and stage speech that helps account for their necessary significative roles and their essential permanence in performance.

Although in one sense Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* has been viewed as advocating a positivist assessment of language, particularly in terms of its proposition of clear and descriptive elucidations of philosophical problems, the work stems in part from a confrontation with the ambiguous nature of language use. Despite acknowledging the positivist (as well as phenomenological) view that “A name means an object. The object is its meaning” (3.203), Wittgenstein also admits that “What signs fail to express, their application shows. What signs slur over, their application says clearly” (3.262). The work in many ways anticipates and articulates a problematic issue of twentieth-century language philosophy: the means by which an arbitrary and abstract construct accomplishes perfectly intelligible utterances. Wittgenstein’s

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2 See also Searle’s introduction to his *The Philosophy of Language*. 
conditional argument in favor of a positivist view of language as a mirror image of the empirical world would by the time of the *Investigations* give way to the appreciation of the life-world in which language operates.

Countering nominalism, Wittgenstein observes that speech envelops a multiple use of language that oftentimes has no intention of conveying information. Ordering, guessing, commanding, joking, reporting, and singing, rather than being different types of linguistic exercises, are simply part of the fabric of life’s activities. For this reason Wittgenstein coined the term “language-game” to express the sense of improvisation and play that comprises the majority of pedestrian language use (*PI* §23). Rules are necessary for speakers to enter into the speech community, yet rules need not determine all forms of expression. Speech hardly aims at exactitude, and in practice every utterance falls short of an ideal. Nonetheless, Wittgenstein observes, speech intentionally strives after an ideal, and in the end it finds itself ideally suited for what it wants to accomplish (*PI* §98). The rules therefore appear indeterminate, and practical language use negates a sense of logic. Wittgenstein admits that the sciences need exactitude and logic in order to meet successfully their stated methodological ends, but he appreciates the paradox that one could “know and say” the height of Mount Blanc, for example, whereas one could know but *could not say* the sound of a clarinet (*PI* §78). Words don’t always stand in for what they aim to express.

The point for Wittgenstein lay in the refusal of language to be analyzed and classified according to semiotics. The multiplicity and transitoriness of language-games resist the notion that individual sentences could be made to accord with structuralist principles (*PI* §90). As far as Wittgenstein could tell, the essence of language, the “mysterious process” that Saussure speaks of and neurology seeks to reveal, lay forever hidden (*PI* §91). Hence, in his opinion, our
perceptions of “philosophical problems”—or those that fall outside empirical observation—may not lie alongside or beyond the scope of language as an objective tool, but may result from our mishandling of linguistic properties. As Wittgenstein puts it, “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (PI §109). Upon this issue comparisons have been made between Wittgenstein and Derrida, since both thinkers turn to the inner workings of language for an explanation of the seemingly outward manifestations of phenomenal experience. But whereas for Derrida the speaker slips into a kind of vertiginous void of signification, for Wittgenstein the speaker approaches the shore of meaning precisely through a clear understanding of the shortcomings of language.³

Instead of attempting to untangle the contradictory rules of language for a truthful explication of “reality,” Wittgenstein suggests that the entanglement is precisely what we should appreciate. Similar to Whorf’s proposition of a contrastive linguistics, Wittgenstein posits that “The language-games are rather set up as objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not of similarities, but also dissimilarities” (PI §130). Wittgenstein comes at the problems of language and philosophy in much the same manner that Whorf approaches language and culture: the disjunctures are not there for us to smooth over or eradicate, but to investigate for their potential insights into the nature of being. From the perspective of the analysis of the Investigations, language, knowledge, and speech stem from and are understood within the greater paradigm of lived experience. Instead of an insistence on rules and structures, we should be after a greater appreciation of the necessity of that experience, and how it provides the context for the production of meaning.

³ For an overview of comparisons between Wittgenstein and Derrida, see Garver and Lee.
Austin likewise approaches the philosophy of language by way of his dissatisfaction with the positivist insistence that language simply makes statements that can be proven true or false, and he argues instead for a view of practical language use that was to form the basis for speech act theory. In *How To Do Things With Words* (1962), Austin designates statements that aim at conveying information, be they descriptive or explanatory, as “constative,” and the “language-games” that Wittgenstein speaks of as “performative.” Performatives comprise the myriad uses of speech that Austin characterizes as performing a type of *action*, such as wagering, swearing, making a promise, and naming (4-6). In these types of speech acts, the content does not matter so much as that something is accomplished.

Of relevance to the voice, Austin observes that the first constituent of the performative lies in its being spoken. As he writes, “The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act (of betting or what not), the performance of which is also the object of the utterance” (8). One cannot make an oath, take a vow, name an object, or issue a threat without using one’s voice and engaging in speech. Austin does not address the issue of whether writing or gesturing counts in the performance of the action, but his distinction emphasizes the traditional view from linguistics, corroborated by the social theories of evolutionary language origins (see chapter two), that language issues from an engagement of the sounds of the voice within a social milieu. Second, semiotics figures little in the performance of the action since signification and the exchange of information constitute minor elements in the composition of sense. Of greater relevance to the efficacy of the speech act is the situation in which the performative occurs. Austin states,

Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions, whether ‘physical’ or ‘mental’ actions or even acts of uttering further words. (8)
In placing a bet, for example, both parties must intend to meet their obligations, and in the case of a court of law, only those so appointed are qualified to render judgment. Speech becomes sanctioned within the context of its being a mutually understood social activity. Accordingly, no aspect of speech--including the semiotic--could be thought to exist objectively outside of the social matrix.

Through his examination and classification of different types of speech, Austin aims not so much at clarifying the various operations available to the speaking subject, but on shedding light on yet another problematic issue of the philosophy of language. For as Wittgenstein observes, not all language use conforms to a dispassionate exchange of information and the revelation of fact. Language with all its ambiguity cannot be the subject of an empirical study that probes its relation to the elucidation of truth and falsehood. Austin points out that language, particularly *vocal* language, is ideally suited for the lubrication of social intercourse, wherein it accomplishes a multitude of tasks unique to the human species. The philosophy of language has to take into account the observation that language primarily exists within speaking communities that function according to their own social contracts. Austin introduces into the contemporary conversation on language the notion, acceptable to phenomenologists but problematic for poststructuralists, that speech is not so much a product of linguistic structure as it is the relative expression of the embodied subject speaking through the medium of the voice.

Following Austin, Searle agrees that the abstract existence of symbols, words, or sentences do not comprise the basic units of linguistic communication, but rather the actions surrounding the articulation of such symbols, words, and sentences. Still, Searle recognizes the need for syntactical rules and grammar, that is, linguistic structure, for the execution and comprehension of a speech act. For, as he argues, “I promise” does not mean “I propose,” and
yet without the honest intention to keep a promise, “I promise” means nothing (SA 45).

Accordingly, in Searle’s view, meaning has to result from both the phonetic and linguistic substance of the utterance as well as the context in which the utterance occurs (SA 16). Speakers essentially communicate via two sets of rules, the first linguistic, the second social, and a study of one would be incomplete without the study of the other. Searle’s project, advanced in his principal work *Speech Acts* (1969), is “to state a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the performance of particular kinds of speech acts and then extract from those conditions sets of semantic rules for the use of the linguistic devices which mark the utterances as speech acts of those kinds” (22).

Searle’s basic point is that words are not totally void of content and do indeed participate in the constitution of sense and meaning, but they are inanimate and meaningless without the context of social convention and the intention of speakers to communicate. Reminiscent of Husserl in the *Logical Investigations* (1901), Searle observes that we know what words mean by definition, but words have no relevance and therefore no value outside of their application. Searle solves the paradox of language, that is, the ambiguous aspect of language that seems to accord with rules while at the same time breaking them, by pointing out that the goal of meaning is ultimately comprehension on the part of auditors. As he puts it, “The characteristic intended effect of meaning is understanding” (SA 47). Despite the contested nature of discourse, and the obfuscation inherent in the insincerity, deception, irony, or elusion characteristic of many language-games, there still remains the possibility of the completion of certain speech acts resulting in the satisfaction of understanding between two parties. Searle therefore restores to language a precision capable of explicating scientific and philosophical problems as well as communicating across the discontinuities of daily life.
Searle does not claim to advance any revolutionary observations about certain aspects of language philosophy; his stated goal is to clarify what he viewed as minor inconsistencies within the work of his contemporaries (SA 131). He primarily cautions against an exclusive view of language from either semiotic or behavioral perspectives. But as we saw above, Wittgenstein and Austin recognize that language, besides being performative, indeed supplies an exactitude necessary for the pursuit of empirical goals. Therefore the degrees of difference between the three thinkers discussed above might be interpreted as a matter of emphasis or the result of the swing of the pendulum: all three attempt to account for the relative and inventive nature of speech against the synchronic nature of language.

But from any angle, all three theorists, and speech act theory in particular, restore to the speaker a position of privilege in the communicative chain. Despite the dictates of linguistic or social structure, individual speakers within their own speech communities are granted the autonomy to obey or disregard the seemingly necessary rules of expression, and thereby establish the parameters within which they create and fashion sense. Of course speech act theory does not restore to the voice its former privileged position in phono-logocentrism, since speech act theorists do not attempt to access either transcendent realms of being or foundational meanings through language. Nonetheless, speech act theorists bolster the arguments of Sapir and Turner, who believe that individual speakers and performers can create a novel use of language and thereby escape the seeming dictates of linguistic hegemony. In terms of its implications for the voice, speech act theory places the vocalized sounds and tokens of human phonation within a greater ensemble of elements, including semiotics, behavior, and context, that comprise the constitution of meaning relevant to a specific linguistic community. Whereas Saussure discounts the sounds of the voice as ultimately relative in the constitution of sense while recognizing that
sounds are necessary to create words, speech act theory considers the sound of the voice essential for the embodied and active completion of communication and the transmission of intended meanings. Granted, the differences in perspective may be only a matter of emphasis on the role of the voice in discourse. But the voice and the speaking subject both fall from the critical purview of structuralism and poststructuralism because of the perceived totalizing nature of language. Importantly, speech act theory recuperates vocal agency by foregrounding the autonomous and intentional nature of the speaking subject over the hegemony of structure.

Saussure distinguished between language and speech, and concentrated his study upon language structure. Speech act theory, on the other hand, could well be thought to supply the type of research Saussure hesitated to perform on the variable and individual nature of speech, for it certainly attempts an explanation of how the negative and differential status of sounds, words, and ideas come to communicate intentional and comprehensible meaning. Therefore structuralism and speech act theory could be viewed as complementary in their address of the philosophy of language and the problematic nature of signification. The degree to which each grants or denies the agency of the speaking subject remains the key issue between them.

The study and practice of theatre in the past century likewise reflects a preoccupation with the nature of language and its expression through vocalized stage speech. The next two sections investigate specific areas in criticism and practice where issues of the linguistic turn may be detected. The next section particularly addresses theatre semiotics, whose approaches to the voice and stage speech mirror the distinction between the fixed and mutable nature of language expressed in structuralism and speech act theory. To the degree that theatre semiotics incorporates speech act theory in its assessment of the voice, it offers a strategy by which vocal
agency may be recuperated within contemporary theatre criticism, possibly even criticism of the postmodern stage.

**The Semiotics of the Stage Voice**

Indebted in part to structural linguistics, the Prague semioticians of the 1930s set about analyzing and codifying the operations of stage signs, a practice recently resumed in the full-volume works of Jean Alter, Marvin Carlson, Marco de Marinis, Keir Elam, Erica Fischer-Lichte, Susan Melrose, and Patrice Pavis. The results of the various investigations undertaken by semioticians reveal that the voice as both a stage sign and as a signifier of dramatic text and action eludes consistent analysis and therefore maintains a somewhat ambiguous position within theories that attempt to view the stage as a penetrable and constructed field of representation. As variable language use resists the rigid, synchronic aspect of language rules, so does the personal and expressive nature of the voice exceed its purely linguistic--that is, verbal--function. Likewise, in the way the voice as a signifying agent disappears from consideration within structural frames, so it disappears from the consideration of theatre semiotics. As testimony to the resistance of the voice to reductive systems, Alter, Carlson, de Marinis, Melrose, and Pavis do not bother to set aside a chapter or section devoted to it. On the other hand, Elam and Fischer-Lichte, in attempting to codify the voice according to semiotic principles, best define it as operating more in keeping with the tenets of speech act theory than structural linguistics.4

Prague semiotician Jan Mukarovsky, in his 1934 essay “Art as Semiotic Fact,” establishes a parameter for much semiotic analysis in his observation that works of art have two functions, “autonomous and informational” (7). As informational, art represents objects found

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4 In fairness, although they do not engage the voice or speech to the same degree as Elam and Fischer-Lichte, Alter and de Marinis do set aside small sections acknowledging speech act theory.
either in reality or in the artist’s imagination. As autonomous, they present themselves, whether they are explicitly representational or not. As Bert States describes it, with a nod to Heidegger’s “On the Origin of the Work of Art” (1936), when we look at a pair of shoes in a Van Gogh painting, we do not think of a pair of real shoes elsewhere, nor are we aware that the shoes are representations of shoes as Van Gogh saw them. Rather we enter into the world of the shoes as it exists in the painting (4).

Likewise the voice, when sounded on stage, informationally represents the voice of the character and the text of the author, but it also presents itself as it exists autonomously. The voice has sounds and an expressive potential all its own, belonging only to one actor whether that actor is “in character” or not. The informational aspect of the voice tends to garner the attention of critics since it can be described within the confines of a production--it provides the vehicle for the author’s text and aids in the interpretation of character. But the autonomous aspect always remains slightly opaque; for how does one describe the idiosyncratic nature of a voice? As Roland Barthes notes in his oft-cited essay “The Grain of the Voice,” adjectives seem inadequate to the task. Just as Wittgenstein could not say the sound of a clarinet (a task comedian Steve Martin equates to dancing about architecture), one cannot say the sound of a voice.

From the informational perspective, Petr Bogatyrev sets some parameters for semiotic analyses of the voice, noting that it provides the conduit for dramatic text and that, employed as a sign of character, it indicates social status, background, education, and so on, through the choice of dialect, vocabulary, tone, and the like (36). Speaking of the autonomous aspect of the voice, however, Jiri Veltrusky, in his 1941 essay “Dramatic Text as a Component of Theatre,” recognizes that as an element of the material of the actor, it exceeds the significative properties of the text.
In theatre, the sign, created by the actor tends, because of its overwhelming reality, to monopolize the attention of the audience at the expense of the immaterial meanings conveyed by the linguistic sign; it tends to divert attention from the text to the voice performance, from speeches to physical actions and even to the physical appearance of the stage figure. (115)

In addressing the voice, Veltrusky essentially provides a hierarchy for the signification of meaning. Although the text provides the verbal environment in which the play takes place, the sounds of the voice subsume the actual words spoken. Furthermore, the behavior of the actors takes precedent over what they say, and even the presence of certain actors may cloud how their behavior might be interpreted.

According to Veltrusky, the autonomous aspect of the voice has the potential to interrupt a reading of the informational aspect. Actions, even vocal actions, indeed speak louder than words, and the actions do not necessarily have to accord with the intentions of the script. Stanislavski recognized the same. Aware that the success of a production depends more upon the skill of the performers than the brilliance of the writing, Stanislavski created a system of actor training that emphasizes the believability of character behavior. Veltrusky further argues that one reason why Maeterlinck and Craig desired to replace actors with puppets was because, the text and its visual representation being of paramount importance, puppets could be manipulated to accord with the text and not overshadow it. (115). Puppets without a text are inanimate objects, but actors without a text present a collage of images and sounds with no clearly discernible referents.

Veltrusky therefore sees a “dialectical tension” between the text and the performer, since the words of the text can be sounded only by the voice of the actor, and the actor/character remains undefined without words to say. But the voice has the potential to subvert meaning since meaning “is so tenuously tied to sensory material--the sound components on which the linguistic
meaning relies” (115). In other words, vocalized words do not behave like simple signs, strictly referring sound to sense. Actors have the ability to manipulate sounds to subvert the sense to their own pleasing. The disparity need not be antagonistic, since much of the art of the theatre depends upon the virtuosity of the interpretation. As Veltrusky notes, “The actor gives more weight and punch to the language he voices and, in return, receives from it the gift of extremely flexible and variable meanings” (115-6). The point for both Bogatyrev and Veltrusky is that both aspects of the voice, informational and autonomous, may be read according to the context of the entire production. But whereas Bogatyrev, from an informational perspective, tends to view the voice as a signifier of particular meanings through the semiotic lens offered by structural linguistics, Veltrusky, emphasizing autonomy, approaches the premises of the speech act theorists, who believe the situation and intention of the speaker more influential in the constitution of sense.

The contemporary semioticians Elam and Fischer-Lichte divide the signifying aspects of the voice into what they call linguistic and paralinguistic features in order to clarify the difference between the significative properties of the text and the intentions of the performers.5 Linguistic features directly handle the verbal elements of vocalized language; they convey the sounds of the words spoken. Paralinguistic features may be described as enhancements for vocalized sounds, including such variables as pitch, tone, timbre, dialect, and non-verbal sounds such as sighs and laughter, all of which contribute to the interpretation of the character and to the intended authorial meanings (Elam 78-83; Fischer-Lichte18-29). Therefore both linguistic and paralinguistic features may be defined according to their semiotic and informational functions within a production.

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5 Elam credits the distinction to George L. Trager.
But of all the paralinguistic features, only timbre identifies the voice of a specific speaker, since timbre results from the unique physiology, age, and health of a particular human being. Timbre, for the most part, cannot be changed voluntarily; it remains a defining characteristic of the individual performer, and it is therefore the most autonomous of the paralinguistic features. Whereas Elam believes timbre behaves as a stage sign, Fischer-Lichte attempts to define it as a Peircian “indexical sign” that points to the immutable nature of the “sex, age, health,” and, oddly, “mood” of the speaker. Since, in her opinion, timbre is “not produced in order to communicate” but exists as a given in keeping with a specific form “like the physique or face,” she believes that timbre should not be read as a paralinguistic feature, nor should it be thought of as representative of character (24). Although her argument misses the mark—the sex, age, health, and mood of the actor, like the physique and face, unless deliberately disguised, do communicate and are read as characteristics of the character portrayed--Fischer-Lichte intimates that something about the voice resists signification, placing it within an autonomous realm. She essentially identifies a problematic characteristic of the theatrical voice, one that does not fit comfortably within structural, informational frames.

Both Elam and Fischer-Lichte agree that the paralinguistic features of the vocal performance aid in the exposition of linguistic meaning, and they argue that such features can be clearly understood within the context of a performance. Vocal inflections, pauses, volume, tempo, and so on contribute to an audience’s understanding of the psychology and idiosyncrasies of the characters, thereby enhancing and communicating the intended meanings of the production. Yet Fischer-Lichte expresses caution on this point, for she hedges against a clear informational reading of expression in favor of the autonomy of invention, stating that “No stable relation has yet been shown to exist between the complex features of a paralinguistic sign
and its meaning” (23). Fischer-Lichte supports the view that a changeable characteristic of paralinguistic features exceeds the fixed nature of linguistic structure. Like Searle who desires to explore the relations between semiology and behavior, Fischer-Lichte emphasizes that paralinguistic features must be read in tandem with the linguistic signs of the text, noting that “The overall meaning of an expression can be established only if the specific relation between the two types of signs is also taken into account” (29). Fischer-Lichte’s view leaves room for the voice’s autonomous nature to foster interpretive error on the part of the audience, much as for Veltrusky the voice has subversive potential in its ability to divert attention away from the text. Vocalized stage signs are not always clear since the voices of speaking human beings elude the strict classifications of semiotic analysis. If a speech act were similarly interpreted and understood by every member of an audience, then individuals would never disagree about the “meaning” of a scene, a line spoken, or a piece of stage behavior. Yet structure does not provide perspicuity.

In a similar vein, Elam views speech within the theatre not as a form of representation but as an event. Indebted to Mukarovsky and acknowledging Austin’s speech act theory, Elam defines dialogue as comprising the dramatic action of a production, since speech typically performs the most common types of activity between people, such as informing, ordering, requesting, threatening, and so on. As he puts it, “The speech event is, in its own right, the chief form of interaction in the drama” (157). Dialogue does not report events, but provides the medium for the expression and presentation of events. As an autonomous entity, speech does not refer to or represent actions taking place elsewhere; speech constitutes the very action of the play. Elam writes, “The central personal, political, and moral oppositions which structure the drama are seen and heard to be acted out in the communicative exchange, and not described at a
narrative remove” (162). Although linguistic and paralinguistic features of the voice may be read according to semiotic principles, they should not be thought to fulfill only representational functions. Their informational aspects become subsumed by the reality of the autonomous event transpiring in the present, through both the significations and the presence of the voice.

Theatre semiotics illustrates the difficulty in attempting to define language and speech solely according to the tenets of either structuralist linguistics or speech act theory. As Searle recognizes, the execution of the speech event incorporates both semiotic principles as well as the variable contingencies of behavior, situation, and intent, illustrated in the confluence of linguistics and speech act theory in the codification of stage speech. The theatre presents an intriguing test case for an analysis of speech and language, given that the theatre differs from “real life” in that it is assumed to be a representation of something else. Stage speech traditionally understood as based upon and representing an established text would therefore seem to corroborate the structural view that individual speakers have no autonomous agency, since their speech is not original but previously scripted. Accordingly, the theatre serves as a potent model for Derrida’s deconstruction of speech found in *Writing and Difference* (1967), since, in his view, all speech resembles stage speech in that it is based upon prior utterances, with no possibility for original expression. Bert States argues against such a perspective and draws upon the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, who perceived the autonomous nature of the stage event. States notes that even though the text of *Hamlet* may be established in advance, every production of Hamlet varies widely, even every performance of a production. The actors who bring the characters to life infuse their performances with the intentional creative agency that each brings to their role (120-21). Therefore in the theatre, as in real life, representation gives way to
presentation, as individual speakers engage the changeable aspect of *la parole* with all of the
signifying potential of their voices and behavior.

The question remains whether the modernist and postmodernist stage practice that puts
the language of the stage under interrogation could be seen to accord with the semiotics of voice
and speech formulated by Elam and Fischer-Lichte. Whereas the following chapter offers a
critique of postmodern stage practice, the next section applies structural linguistics and speech
act theory to several modernist dramatists and practitioners who reflect the concerns of the
linguistic turn in Western thought. The final section of this chapter investigates whether the
rehabilitation of *la parole* witnessed in speech act theory, and the autonomy granted the voice in
theatre semiotics, revive a sense of vocal agency in the work of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, and
Handke, whose work contests the efficacy of language and presents a disenfranchisement of the
speaking subject.

**The Linguistic Turn in Theatre Practice**

The linguistic turn to various degrees influenced or found reflection in different
practitioners who explored or questioned the use of language on stage. Bertolt Brecht, indebted
to Formalist criticism and Marxism, desired to create an audience of critical spectators aware of
the significative operations of the stage and its unwitting participation in the creation of the
illusory semblance of reality and truth. The absurdist experiments with narrative interrupted the
traditional reception of theatrical representation, pointing up the relative and changeable nature
of stage signs through situations in which spoken language could not make sense of plot. Samuel
Beckett and Peter Handke likewise offer clear examples of a disruption between the voice, text,
and representation, and critics consider their work direct antecedents to postmodern theatre. The
following discussions of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, and Handke explore the ways their treatments
of the voice, speech, and language reflect structuralist thought. It also points out the ways the presentation of the voice in their work resists structuralist delimitations in favor of the agency of the speaking subject. This section investigates to what degree the voice in their work grants autonomy and agency to the speaking subject.

**Bertolt Brecht**

Brecht’s attempt to “literarize” the theatre epitomizes a subjection of stage practice to an exercise in reading, one in which the aural tenets of the spoken word are made subservient to the cold analysis of the eye and the mind. Influenced by Victor Shklovsky’s view of art as “making strange” the commonplace, Brecht desired to jolt his audience out of the habitual reception of drama as a fictional entertainment, and press upon it the relevance of art as a didactic and pedagogic supplement to issues of social importance. Brecht wanted to create an audience of critics who approached the theatre as a scholar approaches text, with close scrutiny and with the attitude of an expert. In the essays collected in *Brecht on Theatre* (1957), Brecht repeatedly outlines the stated aims and procedures of the *epic theatre*, in which the mimetic illusion and psychological reality of the “modern theatre” give way to a critical dialectic between the stage and the auditorium.

In examining the several essays that address the actor’s role in the epic theatre, one finds that the voice loses its traditional privileged role as a primary signifier of the author’s meanings and the character’s psyche. That meanings were filtered through the persona of an actor meant for Brecht that the traditional theatre aimed to address the heart, not the head (15). He desired to reverse that trend with untraditional uses of speech and text. The introduction of screens and projected titles would preclude the audience from being carried away by illusion, prompting it to read and adopt a detached view of the stage (43-4). Speech delivered in dispassionate and
detached tones would divest it of the incantatory aura familiar to the traditional, sentimental, and moralizing theatre (38-9). In place of the one-way transmission of text from the actor to the spectator, appealing only to the feelings, a new epic stagecraft and epic style of acting would foster an atmosphere of debate and critical thought. In short, Brecht’s emphasis on the eye over the ear mirrors the structural denial of the voice in favor of a critical view of the stage in which all of the elements are visually (and empirically) classified and controlled.

In the essay “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect” (1940), Brecht proposes that actors still develop the psychologically realistic voices of their characters, and he argues that they should use them fully only in rehearsal. Actors were to learn to inhabit the life of a character so that they might quickly abandon it, reveal it, and comment upon it in performance, and so break the empathetic connection that usually attends the traditional theatre (137). In performance the actor avoids the transformation into character so as to keep a critical distance. Stage speech in the epic theatre therefore sounds like a “quotation.” The text is nonetheless present, but it is “alienated” from its accustomed hearing (138-9). In this respect, Brecht attempts to heighten the informational aspect of the voice, since the audience would become aware of stage speech as scripted and representative of an author’s thoughts, not the thought or expression of the person on stage. Likewise the sense of autonomy that attends the presence of the actors as they aid in the fostering of illusion would be interrupted.

In an earlier essay, “The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting” (1931), Brecht suggests that to accomplish an epic style of acting, the epic actor might have to be more skilled in his art than the traditional journeyman actor. As he posits, “The epic actor may possibly need an even greater range than the old stars did, for he has to be able to show his character’s coherence despite, or rather by means of, interruptions and jumps” (55). In order to establish a contrast, the
actor must first be able to inhabit the character fully, and be just as able to abandon it quickly. The actor simultaneously plays two parts, the character and its detached copy. The contrast on stage results in a sense of alienation, in which the audience becomes aware of the operation of the text.

But in a telling description of the use of stage speech, Brecht grants the actor great expressive potential. He writes,

The directness of the relationship with the audience allows and indeed forces the actual speech delivery to be varied in accordance with the greater or smaller significance attaching to the sentences. . . . The underlinings, the character’s insistence on their remarks, must be developed as a piece of effective virtuosity. . . . A daring and beautiful handling of verbal media will alienate the text. (138-9)

Therefore, even though the epic production aspires to create an objective relationship to the subject material and create an audience critical of the stage elements, stage speech in the epic theatre capitalizes upon traditional voice pedagogies. Traditionally understood, through elocutionary exercises the actor learns to manipulate artistically the voice’s linguistic and paralinguistic features, and thereby more forcefully illuminate and personify the text. Brecht likewise intends for his actors to learn to capitalize upon the full expressive potential of their voices--to the point of “virtuosity”--only for means opposed to traditional theatre practice. Ironically, while the epic theatre attempts to break with the Aristotelian notion of catharsis that attends the traditional, sentimental theatre, it reinvigorates the persuasive practice of Aristotelian rhetoric upon which the traditional theatre is based. Rather than presenting a dispassionate recital of text, epic actors fully exploit their voices in order to engage their audience critically rather than emotionally.

On one hand, Brecht’s epic theatre intended the voice to lose the significative value it maintains in the traditional theatre, especially in terms of the evocation of sentiment. Likewise,
the voice was not to be considered as the prime locus of meaning and reflective of epistemologies indebted to the phonologic tradition. However, even in Brecht’s formulation, the voice cannot become completely informational, subordinate to the critical endeavors of the practitioners and coming under the scrutiny of the audience. The epic actor still capitalizes on the autonomous nature of the voice and speech in order to establish rapport with the audience. For Brecht, Charlie Chaplin, star of the silent screen, represented the ideal epic actor, given his penchant for physical exaggeration and metacommentary (56). Ironically, however, in the epic theatre the voice hardly remains silent. Instead, the voice is subjected to a type of discipline that exceeds the demands of the traditional theatre, since it is asked to do more. Indebted to Saussurian linguistics and Formalist criticism, Brecht theoretically advocates a practice that silences the emotive, incantatory voice in order to align the informational voice with the semiotic and critical endeavor of the epic stage. Yet in Brechtian practice the voice does not become completely dispassionate, but rather utilizes its expressive autonomy. The voice finds a reified position of importance as an essential component in the revelation and exposition of meaning on the critical stage. As such, vocal practice on the epic stage grants the speaking subject a position of agency in terms of the intentions of the production.

**Eugene Ionesco**

The theatre of the absurd experimented with the use and reception of language on stage, and many absurdist plays are memorable for the seeming disparity between what characters say and do, what they mean, what the audience sees, and what the author may have intended. In various plays by Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, and later Albee and Pinter, words and language prove inadequate to perform any meaningful action, and the situations in which characters find themselves, as well as their behavior, fail to shed light on their own purposes and
aspirations. Given the intrusions of linguistic structure on human behavior and speech, and the attendant denial of linguistic agency present in the absurdist canon, the plays have been identified as anticipating the postmodern theatre wherein language and signification have been put under scrutiny. Yet critics position the absurdist as modernist for their adherence to notions of character and the self as preceding the impositions of language. Following the existential theatre of Sartre and Camus, absurdist playwrights present characters who seek meaning within a world in which traditional Western epistemologies no longer apply, and where rational discourse has been severely handicapped. This discussion questions whether any sense of agency or autonomy can be accorded the characters who populate the absurdist plays. Rather than offer analyses of several well-known plays, the discussion here will concern itself with two by Ionesco, *The Chairs* and *The Lesson*, since these texts offer direct commentaries on the absurdist view of language and speech.

In *The Chairs* (1952), a married couple in their nineties hosts what appears to be a party for a very large group of invisible guests. From their dialogue before the guests arrive we gather that the couple has lived a long life together and that they are very familiar with each other’s personal oddities. But quickly we begin to doubt the sincerity of their conversation. The woman treats the man as though he were a child in his own pretend world, where he was once a general, and he tells her to drink tea when there is none. On one hand we might imagine that the couple suffers the effects of senility, but our suspicions run deeper. We learn that the man has planned the party in order to reveal his “message” to the world, and that he has hired a professional “Orator” to speak for him. The couple hardly seems fit to accomplish even simple tasks, let alone manage a room full of people, but we doubt that guests will actually arrive, since the woman intimates that their life together revolves within the stories they tell each other. She says, “It’s in
speaking that ideas come to us, words, and then we, in our own words, we find perhaps everything, the city too, the garden, and then we are orphans no longer” (120-1). The two old people gradually reveal that they live in a world literally created by their own speech, reflecting the structuralist supposition that language creates thought and reality.

The first guest arrives as a figment of the couple’s imagination, but they talk to her as though she really exists. Likewise all of the other guests exist in the couple’s imagination, outnumbering the thirty-five seats available. Yet even though the couple speaks in earnest to all of the guests, their speech at times takes on the character of improvisations, according to the assumed relationships that exist between them. The old man speaks of heroism with the Colonel, and flirts blushingly with his old flame Miss Belle. The old woman acts like the dutiful housewife to most of the guests yet grotesquely panders herself to the Photo-engraver. The couple seems to be engaged in an elaborate game of some kind in which their speech suits the fictional situations of their imaginations, but there seems to be no ultimate point to their behavior.

As the time for the Orator to speak draws near, the Emperor arrives, and the old man increasingly anticipates explaining “everything we hold dear,” while the old woman begins to literally echo his words.

Old Man: I must go to present my most humble respects to his Majesty, the Emperor . . . let me pass . . .

Old Woman [echo]: Let him pass . . . let him pass . . . pass . . . ass . . . (148)

Finally the Orator arrives and he is the only person to appear in the flesh. Oddly, he seems to be oblivious to the presence of the old couple, and he does not hear them when they speak to him. Nonetheless, his presence seems to satisfy each of them completely, and they entrust him with the message. After exclaiming, “Long live the Emperor,” they then commit suicide by jumping
out of windows (159). But the Orator cannot deliver his speech. He turns out to be a deaf-mute who only utters the sounds “He mme, mm, mm. Ju, gou, hou, hou. Heu, heu, gu, gou, queue.” Although the Orator writes something on a black board resembling “Adieu Dieu,” or Goodbye God, he soon leaves the room with the impression that he communicated nothing at all (159-60).

In The Chairs, the speech of the old people constructs the world they inhabit. Although their words betray semantic properties, they really have no meaning. Since from the structural perspective all verbal expression does not reflect ideas established in advance of language, but only from social convention, the world the old couple inhabits exists only in their imagination. Their speech does not objectively reflect a reality than can be described or comprehended except as an imagined fiction, and in the case of the old woman, speech surfaces only as an echo of someone else’s prior utterances. Mirroring Saussure’s proposition that the sounds of the voice and the words of language do not directly relate to ideas or meanings but are arbitrarily given in degrees of difference with other words, in The Chairs speech has been divested of its signifying property. In the case of all three people portrayed in the play, their voices are incapable of transmitting any kind of meaning. Similar to Levi-Strauss and Whorf, who posit the existence of deeper structures or pre-linguistic forms of consciousness, the old couple hopes that meaning might reveal itself through an outside entity, an Orator who might deliver the “message.” Yet the Orator, supposedly qualified to speak and impart meaning, literally has no voice. Anticipating the poststructural argument, Ionesco presents the Orator as incapable of articulating one coherent word, and he therefore cannot serve as a harbinger of truth.

In The Lesson (1951), a teenaged female pupil arrives at a professor’s house in order to gain instruction for doctoral exams. When her preliminary conversation with the professor revolves around whether she knows the capital of France and the names of the seasons, we
immediately realize that language should not be regarded seriously in the milieu of this play. At the outset we may be led to believe that *The Lesson* offers comedic commentary upon the current state of education or the assumed qualifications of academics, but when the atmosphere turns threatening, the play offers more than mere parody. No doubt intentionally from Ionesco’s point of view, the professor’s murderous furor begins to percolate as he delivers his diatribe on languages. At his first mention of “the elements of linguistics and comparative philology,” his maid offers the dire warning, “philology leads to calamity” (60), an ironic statement given the common belief that languages are designed to bridge understanding. Yet in Ionesco’s world, violence attends linguistic expression.

Everything about the professor’s remarks appears nonsensical, even as they are delivered with threatening overtones. Part of his intent seems to be to teach the pupil correct elocution, but he never lets her speak, constantly telling her not to interrupt and to keep quiet. For all his lecturing, his words remain incomprehensible and fail to fulfill his intentions. In a telling description of phonetic properties, the professor expresses that words with deliberate meanings fail to communicate:

> If you utter several sounds at an accelerated speed, they will automatically cling to each other, constituting thus syllables, words, even sentences, that is to say groupings of various importance, purely irrational assemblages of sounds, denuded of all sense, but for that very reason the more capable of maintaining themselves without danger at a high altitude in the air. By themselves, words charged with significance will fall, weighted down by their meaning, and in the end they always collapse, fall . . . (63)

The professor intimates that words are sounds that are supposed to portray beautiful forms without a trace of content. Like Saussure, he unwittingly strips the phenomenological view of language of its efficacy. Sound does not adhere to sense; sound is simply sound, which may or may not be accorded aesthetic value. In a rant that could easily be mistaken for a parody of
traditional stage speech instruction, the professor extols the voice while stripping it of any practical use-value:

In order to project words, sounds, and all the rest, you must realize that it is necessary to pitilessly expel air from the lungs, and make it pass delicately, caressingly, over the vocal cords, which, like harps or leaves in the wind, will suddenly shake, agitate, vibrate, vibrate, vibrate, or uvulate, or fricate or jostle against each other, or sibilate, sibilate, placing everything in movement, the uvula, the tongue, the palate, the teeth . . . And the lips . . . Finally the words come out through the nose, the mouth, the ears, the pores, drawing along with them all the organs that we have named, torn up by the roots, in a powerful, majestic flight, which is none other than what is called, improperly, the voice. . . . (63-4).

When the professor finally reveals a knife and demands that the pupil learn how to pronounce the word “knife,” the student has been bludgeoned into submission by his constant droning. At one point she even exclaims, “Oh, your voice! It’s so piercing!” and moments later, in a sexualized frenzy, he stabs her to death (73).

As in *The Chairs*, speech in *The Lesson* ends in death, leaving the impression that nothing was communicated. But rather than presenting worlds completely void of sense, Ionesco portrays individuals caught up in bizarre quests for meaning. Since language provides the primary medium of knowledge and expression, the characters cling to their own paltry fictions and modes of speech, hoping for some kind of deliverance from their linguistic routines into a more complete elucidation of truth. Ultimately, however, their words mean nothing, and deliverance leads to silence. In Ionesco’s plays, the voice cannot bridge the gap between sound and sense, and words ultimately cannot articulate meaning, thus supporting Saussure’s theory of the differential and negative character of both words and ideas. Therefore, Ionesco leaves his characters impotent, stripped of vocal agency, and unable to intentionally engage the world through language.
Samuel Beckett

In several of Beckett’s plays a voice, sometimes named, sometimes unidentified, haunts characters in seemingly schizophrenic states of psychosis. In *Eh Joe* (1965), the old man Joe suffers in his head a relentless voice that claims to be a dead specter of his past. In *Footfalls* (1975), the female character May paces a lone room, carrying on a dialogue with the disembodied voice of her presumably dead mother. While these plays exhibit an acknowledged debt to the psychologism of Jung in the positing of an inaccessible realm of the subconscious, they rely upon a fundamental semiotic characteristic of the voice—that even without a body it signifies a speaking entity. Although the context may be blurred and the meaning indecipherable, the voices communicate to listening others, complete a circuit of signification, and meet the parameters outlined in theatre semiotics, fulfilling informational and autonomous functions. But in two of Beckett’s pieces, *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) and *Not I* (1972), the presentation of a voice deliberately disrupts communicative intent, introducing into Beckett’s work an interrogation into the presumed efficacious use-value of the voice in providing agency and effecting a meaningful, informational circuit of communication.

In *Krapp’s Last Tape*, a sixty-nine year old man listens to an audiotape recording he made of himself thirty years earlier. As he speaks from the recorder, he recounts characteristics of a younger self that similarly reflect the old man presented before us. They both subsist on a diet of alcohol and bananas, rummaging about a den in the “old rags” of an unclean housecoat. They both dictate into the recorder from notes scribbled on envelopes, and they keep track of the tapes in a ledger. They both recount failed sexual affairs, and chagrin of the younger men they

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6 Many critics cite Beckett’s attendance of a 1935 lecture by Jung; see the references to the lecture in the biographies by Bair and Cronin.
say they used to be, as presented in even earlier tapes. The poignancy of the piece stems from the observation that Krapp has become deluded into thinking himself a wizened critic of the world, offering profound insights into his existence, when in reality he is a man who defines himself by a fictitious life manufactured on tape.

Krapp’s past—even his identity—exists as a voice, recorded over decades and preserved in catalogued boxes. In the course of the play, Krapp locates and listens to a tape he made on the occasion of his thirty-ninth birthday, during which he reveals that his life up to that particular age had been dedicated to intoxication and sexual license (218). On the tape, he desires to tell of an experience that seems to have given his life meaning and direction, presented as a moment of perfect happiness that accompanied a sexual experience. As the recorded Krapp says, “We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side” (220). Although Krapp fast-forwards over his articulations of the new insights and resolutions for his life, he plays the poetical allusion to the sexual union three times, as though desiring to relive it. But the image of the old man mumbling over the machine, replaying the tape over and over, appears sad and pathetic, since from his dress and demeanor we gather that nothing about his life had changed after that one moment of enlightenment. He still indulges in alcohol, entertains a prostitute weekly, and makes endless recordings of his ramblings.

During the second playing of the tape, however, we learn that the one past event that Krapp holds dear is robbed of significance, since moments before it occurred, Krapp had broken off the affair with his lover (221). Krapp projects much meaning onto the voice of his former self, but that voice has been discredited. The voice does not speak of a concrete reality but of a fleeting illusion of connection. The recorded voice fails Krapp in its traditional role of providing meaning, since it only betrays his delusions. Because they are arbitrary marks, Krapp can
manipulate the recorded words through edits and fast-forwards in order to signify whatever meaning he desires. As relative and changeable entities, the sounds of the voice and the words they signify seem not to point to a singular truth established in advance of their production, but exist, in Saussure’s terms, as arbitrary and differential entities.

Yet such is not the case. Ironically, while Krapp attempts to edit the tape so that it only communicates what he wants to hear, the voice on the tape exposes him as a fraud. Despite his attempts to silence and manipulate his recorded voice, it nonetheless establishes a truth concerning Krapp and his past, and it communicates that truth to the audience. Krapp may cut and rearrange words according to possible structural configurations and thereby fashion different informational meanings from the same finite set of sounds, but an autonomous aspect of the voice still asserts itself. The living Krapp witnessed on the stage discredits his own speech and precludes his being taken seriously, but the recorded voice of a younger Krapp maintains a sense of communicative traction and agency in its ability to reveal truth. Therefore Beckett seems to indicate that even though language may be mutable in the hands of speaking subjects, a verifiable truth still exists. Countering the structuralist supposition, Beckett intimates that language does not completely fashion reality according to linguistic structure.

*Not I* is constituted of one monologue, in which only a speaking Mouth without a body delivers the entire text in the presence of a silent and indistinct Auditor. The Mouth begins speaking before the curtain rises and continues after the curtain lowers at the end. All we can assume is that the voice always speaks, droning on in a mad delirium. As Billie Whitelaw, the actress who created the part for Beckett, describes it, her work on the text comprised not of searching for and imparting meaning to the words, since meaning is indeed difficult to decipher, but of simply delivering the words in a fashion that suited Beckett (118-22). Whitelaw’s voice in
the BBC film of the play flows in rapid-fire fashion, in which words, phrases, and pauses stream forth with raspy, crazed inflections. But the text does not fully reveal the Mouth’s identity, nor why the text exists at all. As in *Eh Joe* and *Footfalls*, the voice sounds disembodied, ghostly, and otherworldly. Only a few hints from the text intimate that the voice refers to a seventy year-old woman emotionally exhausted, having difficulty keeping track of her own thoughts, and having particular difficulty with her speech:

> she! . . . realized . . . words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognize . . . at first . . . so long since it had sounded . . . then finally had to admit . . . could be none other . . . than her own . . . certain vowel sounds . . . she had never heard before . . . elsewhere . . . so that people would stare . . . the rare occasions . . . once or twice a year . . . always winter some strange season . . . stare at her uncomprehending . . . and now this stream . . . steady stream . . . she who had never . . . on the contrary . . . practically speechless . . . all her days . . . how she survived! . . . (379).

Whitelaw characterizes the piece variously as “verbal vomit” and “verbal diarrhoea,” and the Mouth as a “rioting, rambling hole” (116-33). Her thoughts indicate the difficulty one encounters in attempting to attribute to the play some kind of discernible sense. But Beckett’s piece at least reiterates the phenomenological evaluation of language and signification as indicative of a cogito. For in its identification of a seventy-year old female persona, the texts intimates that a discernible consciousness inhabits the Mouth, even though the words spoken do not point to readily comprehensible meanings. As Whitelaw confesses, even though she was asked not to “act” the part, she nonetheless identified strongly with the sense of character she felt surfacing in the piece. Therefore, even though both Saussure and Husserl recognized that words are relative, even empty entities, unless a community of speakers gives them value, in *Not I* speech serves to identify a thinking, communicative human essence, even though the Mouth exists in social isolation. *Not I* may not employ the informational aspect of the voice in communicating a clear narrative, but it still relies upon the autonomous presentation of a voice,
particularly Billie Whitelaw’s voice, to signify human being and to create an aesthetic experience.

*Not I* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* present two examples from Beckett that point to a questioning of the voice as a reliable signifier of sense. Although the situations of the characters seem to betray a psychological commentary on states of human speech, the plays also reflect the nagging concern within linguistics of the significative properties of language and discourse. In a reflection of the structural break with nominalism, words in Beckett’s plays do not always act as signifiers directly referring to identifiable signifieds and constituent meaning. Meaning has been deliberately disguised and words appear variable and manipulable. Yet precisely in Beckett’s plumbing of the human psyche do we find that his presentation of voice and speech betrays some significance. Beckett’s plays acknowledge that the experience of life and its subjective expression by various speaking entities—be they real people, mental projections, or audiotaped recreations—break with the tidy explanations offered by the rationalist discourses of psychology, sociology, and linguistics. In Beckett, voices sound for no apparent reason, mirroring the senselessness sometimes thought to attend human existence. But the voices nonetheless indicate a human identity, even though that identity may not be readily defined. The examples of *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I* at least testify that whereas words and language may not be always comprehensible, the voice still signifies the human impulse to communicate, and therefore claims for itself some form of vocal agency.

**Peter Handke**

Handke termed two of his early pieces, *Offending the Audience* (1966) and *Self-Accusation* (1966), as “Sprechstücke,” or “speak-ins,” since they do not aim to present visual
tableaux but rather audible images created by the voices of the performers. As he puts it in a note to the plays, “They point to the world not by way of pictures but by way of words; the words of the speak-ins don’t point at the world as something lying outside the words but to the world in the words themselves” (K ix). Handke intended to challenge the mimetic aspect of theatre in which stage actions are thought to represent events that occur in the text or that have previously occurred elsewhere. The actors were not to adopt characters but to play themselves, consciously addressing the audience without the illusion of a “fourth wall.” Handke states that he simply wanted to make the audience aware of the trappings of theatre, and that the speak-ins were “autonomous prologues to the old plays” (K ix). Handke follows Brecht in a tradition that aims to disrupt the illusion of theatre through a dialectic with the audience, but he also engages the linguistic concern with language as a verbal referent to sense. Handke reflects the structural conception of language not as objectively classifying reality but as subjectively providing relative and constructed impressions of it, noting, “the words that make up the speak-ins give no picture of the world but a concept of it” (K ix).

In the example of Offending the Audience, four speakers stand in a line facing forward and address the audience with commonplace observations about the theatrical experience and how this particular piece does not meet traditional expectations. The four speakers take turns reciting such lines as “You are sitting in rows. You form a pattern. You are sitting in a certain order. You are facing in a certain direction” (K 7), as though divesting the theatre of its assumed phenomenal properties used in the manufacture of illusion. But the actors also inform the audience that they will not be met with a story, characters, or illusion, elements that Brecht

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7 See The Ride Across Lake Constance and Other Plays for the Sprechstücke “Prophecy,” “Calling for Help,” and “Quodlibet.”
referred to as belonging to the classical or traditional theatre. They exclaim, “Here you don’t receive your due. Your curiosity is not satisfied. No spark will leap across from us to you. You will not be electrified. These boards don’t signify a world” (K 9). Rather, in this case the theater simply signifies another linguistic system in which all that happens is a product of “theatrical” structure. Reflective of the structuralist assessment of language creating reality, no phenomenological or metaphysical process infuses the experience.

Yet the speakers make no pretence that they are not speaking the words of an author. They admit that they reproduce the text of a playwright, even though they make no attempt to portray anyone but themselves. They say, “Our bloodcurdling screams don’t pretend to be another’s bloodcurdling screams. We don’t step out of our roles. We have no roles. We are ourselves. We are the mouthpiece of the author” (K 10). An ironic tension persists: as long as the stage relies on a text, the words are never truly spontaneous creations of a speaker, and voices act informationally. But the theatrical experience is nonetheless created as a product of the speaker’s autonomous voice. Handke admits that despite his attempts to unmask mimesis and the real seat of signification, namely the structures immanent in the text and in convention, as an author he still needs someone to speak his words intentionally and “bring them to life,” so to speak. The actors on stage still provide specific vocal behaviors that he cannot. Handke raises the perplexing question of the degree to which the speaker can claim agency under the auspices of structure.

Handke revisits the issue in *Kaspar* (1967), which more fully explores the notion of the speaking subject constituted by the speech or text of another. The protagonist of the piece, a clown-like character named Kaspar, appears as a figure devoid of socialization, not knowing how to walk efficiently and seemingly “astonished” to find himself on stage (63). He has only one sentence that he speaks over and over, “I want to be a person like somebody else was once”
Kaspar yearns to be constituted as a thinking, feeling, and communicating person, and after some attempts to turn the stage into a home environment, the voices of three “prompters” address him over loudspeakers. Reminiscent of the prompters of traditional theatre, “they speak a text that is not theirs” in an attempt to give Kaspar more words to speak and actions to perform (66). Handke describes the prompters’ voices as automated, not so much human but seemingly produced by machines and recording devices:

[They] should always be completely comprehensible, their manner of speaking should be that of voices which in reality have a technical medium interposed between themselves and the listeners: telephone voices, radio or television announcers’ voices, the voice that tells the time on the phone, the voices of automatic answering services of all kinds. . . . (59)

Even though the prompters supposedly supply Kaspar with a language, the forms of their speech sound inhuman, lacking the warmth of flesh and blood, and pointing up their constructed, inorganic nature. By introducing Kaspar to linguistic structure, however, the prompters enculturate him and bring him into social discourse. Handke therefore illustrates the structural supposition that language structures constitute the thought and speech of individual speaking subjects. Notably, however, prior to language Kaspar betrays desires and motivations.

In the course of the play, then, the interchange between Kaspar and the prompters grows increasingly antagonistic. Kaspar struggles with the realization that on one hand language provides the only medium of knowledge and discourse, while on the other the forced imposition of a language feels uncomfortable, even alien. Handke presents Kaspar as betraying an element of consciousness that attempts to break free of the confines of language, even though his consciousness seems to have resulted in part from the introduction of language. The issue of the relationship between language and consciousness reflects the cognitive and linguistic theorizing of Jerison and Sapir, which grant the human dependence on language in order to create maps and interpretations of the world (see chapters two and three). The question still remains whether all
conscious thought must be reduced to the operation of language, or whether some creative autonomy may be accorded the speaking subject. In response, Handke presents six identical Kaspars in the final scenes of the play, all emitting similar noises, as if to signify that language erases individuality and even erases the possibility of an original voice.

Elinor Fuchs and Patrice Pavis identify Handke as heralding the postmodern theatre because of his address of theatrical and linguistic structure, his erasure of character, and his focus upon text, not illusion, as the locus of the stage event (Fuchs 76-6; Pavis TCC 57). But with Offending the Audience, Handke also mirrors Brecht’s concern for a critical stage dialectic, and in the example of Kaspar, he shares with Beckett and the absurdist a preoccupation with human consciousness and intentionality in situations void of meaning. In the first case, Handke uses the voice to signify the autonomous human being present on stage, however compromised by the presence of the given, authorial language. In Kaspar Handke likewise presents, with Ionesco and Beckett, a discernible human consciousness or identity existing prior to the imposition of linguistic structure. But more than the others, Handke seems to embrace in the example of Kaspar the structural position that language creates consciousness, thought, and reality. Accordingly, although language follows a sense of vocal agency or human autonomy, language still shapes the possible expressions available to the speaking subject.

**Conclusion**

The turn to language as a primary philosophical problem in the past century stimulated the structural perspective within the linguistics and anthropology of Saussure, Whorf, and Levi-Strauss, which denies the phonologic view of the voice in the production of meaning in favor of the dominance of relative linguistic structures on human epistemology and expression. Accordingly, within the structural perspective, the agency traditionally afforded the speaking
subject has been weakened, reinterpreted as stemming not from an originary consciousness, but from the systems of thought that language structures create. On the other hand, Wittgenstein’s ordinary language philosophy and Austin and Searle’s speech act theory provide a reply to structuralism with their recuperation of the intentionality and creativity of the speaking subject. In their view, speech does not occur in the abstract, strictly adhering to linguistic rules, but as autonomous events in the flux of human congress. The context, intent, and sincerity of every speech act must be taken into account in the elucidation of meaning, and these variables are not so easily subsumed by linguistic structure. Furthermore, Austin in particular restores the voice as an essential indicative agent, resisting the structural relativity of sound and sense by positioning the voice as necessary for the execution of the speech act.

The breach between structuralism and speech act theory points to a distinction Saussure identified. On one hand language (la langue) appears as a synchronic entity that provides all of the possible expressions of a community, and individuals cannot change it. On the other hand speech (la parole) affords speakers some creative freedom and intentionality in their individual use of language, which also allows for changes within the given linguistic system. The difference in perspective between structuralism and speech act theory illustrates a problematic issue in language philosophy: the degree of autonomy the speaking subject may be afforded within the dictates of linguistic structure.

Indebted to structuralism, theatre semiotics aids in a study of the comprehension of stage signs, but even semioticians concede the resistance of the voice to clear and definitive analysis. Mukarovsky offers guidelines for critique by distinguishing between the informational and autonomous nature of stage properties. Accordingly, Bogatyrev emphasizes the informational aspects of the voice as it serves as the conduit for dramatic text, whereas Veltrusky clarifies the
voice’s autonomy in its ability to subvert intended meanings through subtleties of interpretation. Elam and Fischer-Lichte further delineate the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the voice, pointing out how each may be used for either informational or autonomous ends. Importantly, through the autonomous presence of the voice on stage with its ability to offer variant interpretations of text, theatre semiotics restores vocal agency to the performer, despite the linguistic confines of the text or production. In this manner, the role of the variable nature of *la parole* becomes evident on stage, wherein it can be seen to exert changes upon the intended meanings of a production.

The linguistic turn finds reflection in several modernist dramatists and practitioners, namely Brecht, the absurdists, Beckett, and Handke, whose work shifts from traditional considerations of plot, narrative, and character. Influenced by the structuralism of Russian Formalism, Brecht desired to create an audience of critical spectators, aware of the significative operations of the stage. But Brecht’s epic stagecraft demands a verbal agility that exceeds that of traditional practice, capitalizing on both the informational and autonomous aspects of the voice. Indeed, like Brecht, the dramas of the absurdists, Beckett, and Handke require actors trained in traditional voice pedagogies for the clear expression of their texts, regardless of how these texts put language and stage speech under suspicion. Ironically, in practice impacted by the totalizing effects of structure, the voice becomes reified in use while at the same time contested as a coherent medium.

In plays by Ionesco, Beckett, and Handke, however, language and speech appear problematic. The plays reflect the structural view of words as relative constructs, not directly referential of discernible meaning, yet nonetheless constituent of the thought of the speaking subject. Still, the autonomous nature of the voice helps to locate conscious human entities and
signified meanings within the theatrical event, specifically within Beckett’s work. Ionesco and Handke, on the other hand, raise the issue whether the speaking subject may be afforded any agency or intentionality, mirroring the philosophical issue of the position of the subject within the confines of linguistic structure. *The Chairs, The Lesson,* and *Kaspar* particularly present rather bleak views of the individual as completely subsumed by violent, linguistic hegemony. Yet these dramatists have been situated within the modernist enterprise for their perceived concern with the relationship between the human being and the possible articulation of meaning. As Pavis notes, Handke’s dramaturgy betrays a “quest for an aesthetic and social common ground” in which communication takes place, though not necessarily in the traditional orders of representation (*TCC* 57). The same can be said for Ionesco, Beckett, and Brecht, who still rely on the vocal human being to create their theatres and express their respective themes. While the voice and the speaking subject undergo severe critique within certain modernist plays, the theatre event itself betrays the humanist desire to restore a privileged position of autonomy and agency to the speaking human subject, even in the face of the challenges presented by the linguistic turn.

Postmodern theatre, on the other hand, after the order of poststructuralism, has been said to deny the humanist endeavor altogether in its erasure of the human subject and in its heightened focus on text and mise-en-scène.⁸ We have yet to see, however, the degree to which the presentation of the voice in postmodern theatre escapes the autonomy and significative value it acquires in speech act theory and theatre semiotics.

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⁸ See again Fuchs, and Pavis *TCC.*
CHAPTER 5

THE VOICE IN POSTMODERNITY

As the previous chapter indicates, the structural assessment of the voice and the speaking subject in linguistics and anthropology anticipated the deconstruction of voice and speech in poststructuralism. In its turn, poststructuralism ideologically informs the silencing of the speaking subject believed to have taken place in postmodern performance. Premised upon Derrida’s critique of the voice as complicitous with the logocentric tradition of Western thought, theatre critics view the spoken word on stage as empty signification, void of the meaning afforded by the traditional epistemologies lately reiterated by phenomenology and speech act theory. However, in the majority of publications addressing the postmodern stage, the voice earns nary a mention. Rather, in a succinct expression of the critical consensus, Jacqueline Martin in *Voice in Modern Theatre* (1991) reiterates a commonplace of contemporary criticism when she states, “In the postmodern theatre, speech has no function except to show its failure as a medium of communication” (31).

This chapter argues against the prevailing assumption expressed in Martin’s assertion. For an investigation of the status of the voice in postmodern theatrical practice reveals that contemporary performers use the human voice to recuperate the speaking subject in an age in which speech and subjectivity have come “under erasure.”¹ In its methodology, this chapter discerns the disparities between poststructural views of voice, speech, and language, and the practical use of voice, speech, and language on the contemporary stage. It also brings into

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¹ *Sous ratour*, or “under erasure,” designates for Derrida a type of writing that acknowledges its penetration by *différance*. Critics have come to apply the phrase to practically any notion of writing, speech, or subjectivity, as it is applied here to the voice. For a brief discussion of “under erasure” in Derrida’s work and its source in Heidegger, see Gayatri Spivak’s preface to *Of Grammatology* xiv-xviii.
discussion issues raised in the previous two chapters, whether views of the voice in
phenomenology, speech act theory, and theatre semiotics can serve to restore a sense of vocal
agency to the speaking subject, even against the arguments of poststructural criticism.

The chapter proceeds in two parts. The first section investigates the status of the voice in
poststructural theory, and it discusses the problems theory presents for recent theatre criticism,
particularly in terms of the competing definitions of postmodern theatre. The second section
examines the use of the voice in postmodern theatre, identifying how practice either supports or
negates contemporary theory and the critical view of the stage. Instead of presenting a broad
spectrum of contemporary performance, the investigation undertaken here will be limited to five
performers or collectives overwhelmingly recognized as postmodern within the theatre academy,
and who therefore avail themselves to a broad readership: Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, the
Wooster Group, Karen Finley, and Laurie Anderson. Since these performers represent various
styles within the performative spectrum, comparisons to other performers or collectives
mentioned, such as Meredith Monk, Vito Acconci, Pina Bausch, Forced Entertainment, and Split
Britches, are not undertaken. This chapter argues that postmodern theatrical practice uses the
human voice in order to seek out and reestablish points of meaningful contact in a cultural milieu
unsettled by the vagaries of postmodernity, and that the practice accords more with the tenets of
speech act theory and phenomenology than poststructuralism.

The Voice in Poststructural Theory and Contemporary Criticism

As much in the preceding chapters makes clear, the voice occupies a relatively small and
in some cases inconsequential position in those twentieth-century theories concerned with an
examination of language and speech. Structuralism, speech act theory, and to an extent
phenomenology grapple more with the transmission of meaning through signification than the
transmission of meaning through the production and comprehension of phonated sound. The latter process has been consigned to the empirical classifications of anatomy and neurology, two disciplines that provide validation for the research on the voice undertaken in paleoanthropology (see chapter two). Were it not for Husserl’s explication of the voice as the one medium that best allows sense, both linguistic and metaphysical, to be made present, the voice may have fallen from twentieth-century discussions of language philosophy altogether. For Husserl provides Derrida, and to a lesser degree Lacan, with an articulation of the voice that, in the light of Saussurian linguistics, proved troublesome and worthy of investigation.

In chapter six of *Speech and Phenomena*, “The Voice That Keeps Silence,” Derrida addresses the interpretation of the voice offered by Husserl in defense of the logocentric tradition. As discussed in chapter three of this study, Husserl views the voice as the immediate linguistic medium that best presents meaning--that is, meaning defined as the locus of a verifiable and objective truth--believing that phonated sound reveals intended sense, despite the arbitrary designation of signifiers found in different languages. Derrida argues that Husserl is mistaken when he contends that the sounds of the voice and the composition of words bond with a pre-linguistic meaning. Such a fictional bond, in Derrida’s view, supports “an unfailing complicity here between idealization and speech [voix]” (75). For Husserl, the voice assumes a

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2 For the English reading public, the silencing of the voice that Derrida stages is already anticipated in the translation of the title *La Voix et la Phénomène*, which a literal translation would render *Voice and Phenomena*. The translation of voix as speech compromises the English reading of chapter 6, since there both la parole and la voix are translated as speech, with the French only occasionally bracketed for comparison. In a personal correspondence, the translator, David B. Allison, informed me that the choice, one that he resisted, was motivated by the editor’s desire to accommodate an Anglo-American audience already predisposed, from the vantage of 1973, towards the language of analytic and speech act philosophies.

3 See note 2. Allison agrees that something of the sensual and phenomenal nature of la voix, an element central to Derrida’s argument, is lost when replaced with speech.
privileged position in the hierarchy of signification because the sounds of the voice, like the ideal that they make present, do not have spatial or temporal form. The sounds of the voice seem alive of their own accord because they exist both inside and outside of the speaker, are understood simultaneously by the self and by others, and make themselves understood by the speaker in the act of speaking. In Husserl’s view, as interpreted by Derrida,

> The ideality of the object, which is only its being-for a nonempirical consciousness, can only be expressed in an element whose phenomenality does not have worldly form. The name of this element is the voice. The voice is heard. Phonic signs (‘acoustic images’ in Saussure’s sense, or the phenomenological voice) are heard [entendus = ‘heard’ plus ‘understood’] by the subject who proffers them in the absolute proximity of their present. (76, italics his, brackets the translator’s)

In other words, for Husserl, the bond that adheres between sound and sense stems from the animation of verbal and aural signification by a speaker, and the produced “acoustic image” makes its full effect in the interior of an auditor as an ideal, pre-expressive meaning.

Derrida asserts to the contrary that the voice can never point to an ideal and objective meaning since the concept of primordiality, or of all original sense and its concomitant presence, has already been constituted by differance (82). Drawing upon Saussure’s observation that signifiers are comprehended by their phonetic differences with other signifiers, Derrida argues that difference infuses the constitution of the assumed origin of ideal sense and presence, bringing with it all the corruptions that ideality attempts to transcend, such as temporality and externality. Ideal presence cannot be experienced and ideal meaning may not be communicated since no ideal identity, purity, or origin can be thought to exist. Derrida writes, “we come closest to it in the movement of differance” (82). Our speech simply attends to traces of abstractions that assumedly point to an idealized image, but the assumption is mistaken. Derrida characterizes all expression, vocal and written, as based upon the trace, or what he calls a “protowriting” already
at work in the origin of sense. The voice therefore has no ideal that it may approximate, and no transcendent realm it may access.

Derrida’s poststructuralism therefore differs from the structuralism posited by Saussure and echoed by Levi-Strauss, Sapir, and Whorf (see chapter four). Saussure’s critique of the sounds of language as existing in degrees of difference with each other introduced the realization, in Garver and Lee’s words, that “a second domain of reality must be recognized, different from that known through physics” (24). For in the structural view, language does not serve as a transparent medium for the observation and comprehension of reality; rather, language to some extent acts as an interpretive veil dropped between reality and linguistic thought. But whereas structuralists believe that a verifiable reality still exists beyond the contingencies of language, Derrida posits that such a reality can never be verified or ascertained. By extension, the imposition of language and the operation of *différance* rob the speaking subject of agency or the ability to speak intentionally of verifiable truths and empirical realities.

Lacan introduces another view of the effect of language on the human subject. Through an application of structuralism to the psychoanalysis of Freud, Lacan interprets human consciousness as structured by language. In his landmark essay “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience” (1936/1949), Lacan proposes that the integrated, interior *cogito*, as expressed by Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, could not exist since the image of the self is constituted by an exterior form and later given linguistic definition. The exterior form first comes through the recognition of a mirror image in which the child attempts to invest an identification of the self as ideal, but the image in reality remains an exteriority that cannot account for the sense of interiority that the child feels. The interior sense “symbolizes the permanence of the *I*,” and the exterior image “prefigures its alienating destination” (*E* 2). The
mirror stage proves a formidable inhibitor since it introduces for the subject notions of temporality, space, and embodiment that contrast with an inner sense of primordiality and wholeness (
\(E^4\)). With the acquisition of language, the subject then comes to understand that it inhabits a great social web and is determined by laws and practices established prior to its existence, which further frustrate the will to integrate the self. Life for every conscious individual then becomes a delicate balance between adjustment and neurosis. The individual ego must navigate the boundaries--what Lacan called “the knot of imaginary servitude”--between nature and culture, and all action and speech are born of the desire to reintegrate the primordial self (\(E^7\)).

In the 1953 lecture “The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis,” Lacan outlines what he saw to be the operation of speech. He defines it as the subject’s unconscious desire to meet the demands of self-fulfillment instituted by the fracture of the self in the mirror stage and compounded by the acquisition of language (\(SLP\ 11\)). As translator Anthony Weldon describes it, Lacan proposes that in speech, signifiers act according to linguistic rules but they also allude to, or create images of, the subject’s perceived lack of wholeness and identity (\(SLP\ xi\)). Therefore the communicative act for Lacan involves much more than simply attending upon words and their supposed semiotic definitions. Listening to another’s discourse also entails attending upon the “intimacy of gestures” and the “silent notes” that accompany speech and reveal aspects of the subject’s self-conception. As Lacan writes, “Even if it communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that the Word constitutes the Truth; even if it is destined to deceive, here the discourse speculates on faith in testimony” (\(SLP\ 13\)). Significantly for Lacan, and differing from the intentionality proposed in speech act theory, talk does not find grounding in signification or even
in an accurate assessment of the self. A sounding of the voice simply serves in the attempt to
make contact, whether communication is completed or not.

Also, since the subject exists in a state of psychic fracture resulting from linguistic
impositions, neither can speech suffice to express the sense of interior anguish or desire felt by
the subject. The subject therefore speaks in order to establish that a void exists, and also in the
hope that speech might eventually serve to make present what is perceived to be absent. Subjects
use their voices for venues of connection despite the fallibility of language. Human life therefore
cannot be viewed as situated within an objective reality but only in a vast network of symbols
that each individual must learn to navigate while preserving a coherent sense of self, or what
Lacan calls “a little reality” within the subject (SLP 42). For Lacan, the voice serves to bridge the
interior self with the exterior world of others in an equivocal game of symbolization. But given
the relative nature of language and the lack of an identity of the self, the speaking subject cannot
speak coherently of an empirical reality or an a priori “truth.”

Although writing and speech comprise the prime targets of his deconstruction, Derrida
challenges the Western privileging of the voice as a recurrent site for the reiteration of the
logocentric tradition and the manifestation of metaphysical presence. In a parallel gesture, Lacan,
from a psychoanalytic perspective, questions the rational positing of the voice as indicative of an
integrated cogito. The views of Derrida and Lacan combine to put the voice into disrepute in
poststructuralism, as the speaking subject can no longer be thought to address its given life-world
with the assurance of foundational ideologies made manifest in the vocal utterance. But the voice
manages to escape the attention of other theorists who join Derrida and Lacan in contributing to

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4 For further elaboration of these themes, see Lacan’s essays “The agency of the letter in the
unconscious or reason since Freud” and “The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire
in the Freudian unconscious,” both found in Ecrits. See also the essays by Rosolato.
the poststructural turn in Western philosophy, since Foucault, Jameson, Lyotard, and Kristeva, among others, concentrate their investigations upon the subjugation of language to textuality, writing, the production of knowledge, and the notion of subjectivity. However, since their views combine to implicate the voice as an agent of discourse, two figures who are cited regularly in theatre criticism will be discussed below, Foucault and Lyotard.

Foucault grants that the entire Renaissance humanist endeavor was founded upon a well intentioned “will to truth.” But he believes that through the establishment of institutionalized forms of codification and verification, the processes of truth-seeking have become corrupted by “whole strata of practices” unconsciously designed more for the maintenance of the institution, not for the execution of the institution’s intended purpose (AK 219). No objective truth may be claimed as long as the existence of a discipline depends upon its continual adaptation to the matrix of pressures operating upon it from all spheres, nor may individual practitioners of a discipline possibly evaluate their positions from the perspective of the interior of their discourse. Hence, in Foucault’s view, the environment in which speech takes place conditions all vocal utterance. Objectivity does not exist since the speaking subject has no verifiable position from which it may speak with the force of originality or truth. As Foucault states, “It is therefore not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say . . . its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its systems of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance” (AK 130). Within Foucault’s perspective, the voice becomes a transparent medium, available only to the exigencies of force and hegemony.

According to Lyotard, the “postmodern condition” recognizes that the social bond has always been constructed of competing discursive paradigms, or of what he designated, after
Wittgenstein, as relative “language games” operating as the demarcation of the limits of our knowledge (PC 15). The speaking subject can only produce utterances in accord with the routines and gambits characteristic of the social norm, and inscription replaces originality. Lyotard goes on to distinguish modernism from postmodernism by positing that modernism attempts to “present the fact that the unpresentable exists,” while postmodernism expresses a distrust of the metanarratives that make the unpresentable legitimate (PC xxiv, 78). Since the unpresentable by definition may not be made manifest, and may not even be inferred since metaphor and analogy prove inadequate supplements, only hollow and secondary representations of language systems find expression. Lyotard therefore denies the objective of both Wittgenstein and speech act theorists to transcend the limitations of linguistic structure, since all that may be presented in the long run are the forms of presentation themselves. Lyotard’s distinction provides contemporary theatre criticism with a potent model for critique, as the stage recently became viewed as a locus wherein verbal signification has been discredited.

In light of the corpus of poststructural thought, Derrida and Lacan’s critique of the voice constitutes only a small portion of contemporary views on language and speech. Yet their views still provide a pivotal perspective on the relativity and fallibility of both spoken and written language. Nonetheless, in their application of poststructural theory to performance, critics as various as Johannes Birringer, Herbert Blau, Jill Dolan, Peggy Phelan, and David Savran focus more upon the representations of the body and of dramatic text than the use of the voice. Despite the theatre being, along with music, one discipline wherein the voice should be deemed essential, the negligence of the voice in performance criticism may be appropriate. Given the

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5 The University of Michigan Press’s very successful “Theatre: Theory/Text/Performance” series (Enoch Brater, series editor), with its dozens of titles, might best exemplify the obsession with text in contemporary theatre criticism.
limited (though central) discussion of the voice in poststructuralism, it still falls into disrepute rather than finding viability.

Accordingly, notions of original speech and natural expression, even the constitution of subjectivity, have come under scrutiny in theatre criticism, and no linguistic medium may be thought to communicate from a pure foundational core, free of the contingencies unwittingly promoted by history and tradition. Under the poststructuralism of Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Lyotard, and others, the theatre as an institution becomes associated with the animation and representation of relative social norms and truths. The efficacy of the author, the production of theatrical signs, and the living, gesturing, speaking human being on stage have been subjugated to doubt and suspicion. Oddly, despite the stated humanist and liberal perspective of many theater critics in their handling of poststructuralism, the theatre nonetheless finds itself caught within a particular ontological predicament, as its signifying properties have been invalidated and it is left without a communicable telos. Voices can no longer perform, or be performed, with the assurance of the mooring afforded by traditional practice, and the theatre has to assume another function. Critics tend to look to postmodern practice as offering a response to the challenges to language posed in poststructuralism by opening the elements of theatre to view, literally staging a critique of the stage thought to be in keeping with the tenets of the poststructural endeavor.

Yet individual critics differ on specific definitions of postmodern theatre and on which performers and dramatists may be designated as postmodern. As the discussion in chapter three points out, contemporary criticism evinces three broad perspectives. Elinor Fuchs, relying upon Derrida, posits that postmodern theatre eschews the presence of the modernist theatre and practices a type of deconstruction on both the human subject and dramatic text, which are shown
to be relative constructs of ungrounded linguistic systems. Auslander represents a second view, echoing Jameson and Foucault, which sees postmodernity as signifying a final stage of modernity wherein the pressures of commodity culture shroud the operation of capitalist power through the free play of signifiers and the hegemony of the simulacrum. Accordingly, Auslander interprets “postmodernist” practitioners as embracing the stylistic modalities of postmodernism, namely irony, parody, pastiche, and appropriation, in their politically resistant performances, which still may be construed as modernist given their progressive perspectives. The third critical view, espoused by Josette Féral, Chantal Pontbriand, and Patrice Pavis, argues for a type of nonrepresentational performance that breaks with traditional theatrical practices based in representation, while asserting the modernist endeavor to locate a unified subject and a sense of theatrical presence, likewise echoed in the various discourses of Artaud, Heidegger, and Habermas. Among this last view could be included perspectives less easy to classify. For example, two views betray the humanist desire for the emancipation of the subject: those feminist approaches, both practical and theoretical, that reflect or interpret Foucaultian and Lacanian poststructuralism in performance (Marianne Goldberg, Split Britches), and intercultural performances whose internal tensions reveal postmodern characteristics (Henry David Hwang, Philip Kan Gotanda).

In her summation of the theatrical landscape of the past thirty years, Elinor Fuchs in *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (1996) defines postmodern theatre as breaking with the modernist grounding of the human subject as providing the locus of meaning and presence for the stage event, and she relies upon Derrida for the articulation of her point of view. Fuchs interprets the evolution of the twentieth-century theatre, especially within the avant-garde, as a movement away from the construction of character towards an examination
of representation as a form of textual inscription. She characterizes the deconstructive treatment of character on the postmodern stages of the Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, and Richard Foreman as a “desubstantiation” in which “the interior space of ‘the subject’ [is] no longer an essence, an indwelling human endowment, but flattened into a social construction or marker in language, the unoccupied occupant of the subject position” (3). According to her view, the agency afforded the vocal medium may no longer be thought to attend the speaking subject, since speech on stage can only be interpreted as the reiteration of various and competing discourse regimes.

Fuchs admits that she can apply her definition of postmodern theatre only to a select group of practitioners, since many other theatre stylists and performers embrace postmodern modalities while shying from deconstructive strategies (7). Indeed, the focus on postmodernism as somehow stripping the speaking subject of its communicative agency at first glance seems highly untenable, since the accessibility of the solo performers Lilly Tomlin, Eric Bogosian, Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, Annie Sprinkle, and Laurie Anderson, whether they question their own subjectivity or the operations of the performance medium, depends to a great degree upon the audience recognition of their names and personas, as well as the themes and styles associated with their work. In the case of these individuals, the actorly self and its attendant presence indeed ground their performances, which cannot be thought to escape representation altogether in favor of a confrontation and interrogation of flat, social constructions. Their characteristic voices, in both timbre and delivery, only provide further

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6 In 1972 Michael Kirby referred to the “desubstantiation” of characterization as “nonmatrixed representation.” See Kirby, and Auslander, Liveness 28.

7 Nick Kaye and Janelle Reinelt also see a theoretical premise of the postmodern stage as based in Derridian deconstruction. See Kaye 15, and Reinelt and Roach 114.
access into their performances, dispelling the opacity associated with postmodernism and opening up a “diaphaneity” that so troubled Derrida.

Countering Fuchs’ position, critics like Auslander, Hal Foster, Michael Vanden Heuvel, Nick Kaye, Herman Rapaport, and even Lyotard, recognize, as does Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, that postmodern performance, however “deconstructionist” in intent, cannot escape the representational forms and means of the modernist theatre. If according to deconstruction there can be no such thing as a nonrepresentational theatre—since *différance* demonstrates that all presentation depends on representation for its existence—then no theatre could be viewed as standing outside of the representational forms of modernist theatre in order to be deconstructionist. Hence there arises the view, advanced by Jameson and echoed by Foster and Auslander, that postmodernism designates yet another political strategy whose stylistic characteristics stem from “the cultural logic of late capitalism,” expressive of an age in which the proliferation of meaningless media simulacra and the false promise of upward social mobility mask the totalizing interests of the new ruling class, the corporate lobby. ⁸ Within such a view, the most to which the postmodern performer may aspire, in the guise of a well-intended liberalism, is a resistance to the accepted practices that ultimately support the ideological constraints of Western-style democracy and first-world consumerism. Postmodern theatre practice from this perspective, therefore, has become synonymous with staged subversions, appropriations, and ironic mimicking of dominant theatrical forms, and not with the “desubstantiation” Fuchs associates with a strict application of deconstruction.

It follows that the postmodern and sometimes radical performances of Split Britches, Karen Finley, Forced Entertainment, Vito Acconci, Pina Bausch, and the Blue Man Group, in

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⁸ See Jameson, “Postmodernism.”
their treatment of modernist theatrical forms, cannot be said to differ from the iconoclastic practices of Plautine comedy, *commedia dell’arte*, the European folk theatre of interest to the Prague semioticians, and Brechtian epic stagecraft. To the degree that postmodern performers deliberately disrupt audience expectation, they infuse the aesthetic experience commonly associated with the theatre with critical and political verve. Such performance embraces a Brechtian critical process in which dominant codes and meanings are questioned, “alienated,” or substituted with alternate codes and meanings, a process that the poststructuralism of Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard may make available, but which cannot be thought unique to the given age.

In this respect, the wry humor and social commentary of Laurie Anderson cannot be thought substantially different from that of Will Rogers in the United States earlier in the century, and neither can the “deconstructions” of classical texts staged by the Wooster Group be seen to differ radically from the genre explosions and theatrical disruptions of Tieck’s *Puss In Boots* (1797) and Gogol’s *The Inspector General* (1835) in the early nineteenth century. Like its forbears, as Auslander points out, postmodern performance cannot assume a position outside of discourse, and it therefore always runs the risk of being co-opted by dominant codes or of reifying the practices it aims to disrupt (*PR* 27). (The Blue Man Group particularly illustrates the point, since their gender and eco-conscious themes have been lost in their recent advertising campaign promoting Intel© Pentium Processors.) But as in the deconstructive view of postmodern theatre, Auslander’s view of a postmodern theatre of political resistance disallows a manifestation of presence and an original locus of meaning originating from the speaking subject, since the totalizing nature of discourse undermines all of the stage properties (*PR* 35-51).

Féral, Pontbriand, and Pavis offer a third interpretation of postmodern theatre in which the presentation of performers and a dramatic score avoids an accessibility based on the formalist
structures of linguistic meaning, namely those of narration, plot, and theme. These structures are abandoned altogether in favor of a search for a nonrepresentational Artaudian realm from which emerge intimations of being and meaning that precede or elude language. Such a postmodern theatre broaches the theoretical tenets of poststructuralism both for its denial of the relative truth-claims of discourse and for its denial of the verbal medium in general. As Pavis observes, “The text is maintained as an object of questioning, the workings of codes, rather than a series of situations and allusions to a subtext which the spectator ought to feel” (*TCC* 60). Meanings are not deliberately fashioned but rather given space to float free of the theatrical properties. This postmodern theatre breaks with the operation of signification, as signifiers do not correspond to readable signifieds, and amongst its practitioners Pavis and Féral number Meredith Monk, Heiner Müller, Robert Wilson, Antoine Vitez, and Richard Foreman. But as Pavis also notes, such a postmodern theatre cannot escape completely the confines of tradition, since its praxis relies upon both a cultural heritage of the “fundamental myths of social and symbolic life” as well as a heritage of “vocal, gestural, and intonative practice” (*TCC* 57). In other words, constructed *linguistic* meanings may no longer be sought in the performance, but deliberate and designated *social* meanings still exist within the instituted communal experience transpiring within the performance space.9

Pavis infers that a complete deconstruction of performance cannot take place as long as a performative frame, however loosely defined, can be established. By implication, a theatre aiming for a strict application of poststructural theory cannot succeed as long as any interpretation can be gleaned from its productions. To the degree that postmodern theatre practitioners can formulate the aims and means of their performances, they escape the

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9 See also Féral, *PT*; and Pontbriand. For a discussion of these two texts, see chapter 3.
accusations of nihilism associated with poststructuralism in favor of a teleology in keeping with
the humanism of what Habermas called the unfinished project of modernity. Such a project, in
Habermas’s words, “aims at a differentiated relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis
that still depends on vital energies” (M 107). Such a decidedly modernist project also seeks out
productive agency in the theatre, even within a postmodern arena in which agency has been
negated.

From this third perspective on postmodern theatre, postmodern performers could well be
viewed as seeking and affirming an abiding essence of nature and human being, despite the
contestation of discourse and meaning in postmodernity.10 Yet this perspective clashes with the
interpretations of postmodern theatre offered by Fuchs and Auslander. How to judge the
accuracy and viability of the three different and opposing approaches, especially when they name
the same performances as indicative of their assessments? Since none of these approaches offers
a critique of the voice, how might each evaluate the voice in contemporary performance in light
of poststructural theory? In the face of the contradictions evident in theatre criticism, none of the
three perspectives can serve easily as prescriptive and definitive of the aims and intentions of
postmodern theatre and its practitioners.

Therefore, rather than adopt the analytical strategy of applying theory to practice, the
following discussion of postmodern performance examines the use of the voice in order to
ascertain how it betrays or negates aspects of theory and performance criticism. The following
investigation of the voice in postmodern performance--and not text, mise-en-scène, or the
presentation of the body--reveals that as practitioners negotiate the strictures of poststructural
timey and postmodern performative modalities, they betray an effort to recuperate the human

10 Heuvel reaches a similar assessment of postmodern performance, though he, like Auslander,
disallows a sense of theatrical presence. See PDDP 44-66.
subject from the cultural and linguistic confines that are thought to comprise our contemporary epoch. When postmodern performance uses the voice, it signals an attempt to restore agency to the speaking subject and make meaning present, and such performance finds its ideological validation more within phenomenological and speech act theories of voice and language than in poststructuralism.

The Voice in Postmodern Performance

Robert Wilson

Wilson’s theatre has variously been described as the staging of landscapes, as a theatre of images, and as espousing a presentational aesthetic (Fuchs 97; Marranca x; Wirth 176). The dominant visual metaphors should be noted, since Wilson, with a background in design and architecture, has been associated with a theatre that appeals to the eye while resisting a linear, verbal, and aural narrative. Wilson does not write texts or compose scores. His is not a linguistic medium. He begins with impressions loosely expressed in drawings, and his designs evolve into grand-scale spectacles that exploit the scenic properties of the theatre. He frequently collaborates with other artists who, if they are so disposed, provide texts that become incorporated into the design scheme. But the texts should not be thought of as providing a locus of meaning or interpretation, for in Wilson’s view of the theatrical experience, the actors, authors, director, and audience are all engaged in a process of assimilating and making sense of the production. As Wilson confesses, “We don’t try to say what it is or what it means. So we’re all the same from that point of view. Our theatre is an open-ended form, and the audience has the responsibility to bring an open mind” (Holmberg 455).

But Wilson does use the voice, although not in conventional manners. In the 1974 production A Letter For Queen Victoria, Wilson employed Christopher Knowles, at the time a
teenager clinically diagnosed as autistic, as one of his writers and actors. As part of the production, Wilson and Knowles appeared together on stage in “entr-actes” and engaged in meaningless word-play. As described by Bonnie Marranca in *The Theatre of Images* (1977),

> The two build rhythms by shouting back and forth letters of the alphabet, and by clapping wooden blocks together; they play with certain clusters of letters (“HAP,” “HATH,” “HAT”), and put together words, letters and sentences like building blocks (combinations of “A,” “O,” “OK”). A sequence about “electro wheels” (autistic children are fascinated by circular shapes) builds to an exhilarating crescendo. Grounded in the dynamics of the personal relationship that Wilson and Knowles share, these “musical” duets are completely naturalistic and open, and though they are not improvisational, they often appear so because of their exuberance. (43-44)

Wilson also used Knowles’s taped voice for added effect in other moments of the production, and at other times Knowles entered the stage and repeated or recorded nonsense words, such as “SPUPS” and “PIRUP BIRUP.” Nine other actors filled out the cast, and when they appeared on stage dressed in Victorian era clothing, they spoke in what sounded like fragments of everyday conversation, none of which carried any coherent narrative. As one example, three characters, designated not by name but by number, recited:

1 I THOUGHT YOU WERE NEVER COMING BACK  
2 THEY SAID HE WOULD LIE TO GET WHAT HE WANTS  
3 WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?         HM. (75)  

As Marranca characterizes the production, “Words are used merely for their sound and music value; language is completely ‘throwaway’ and meaningless in content” (41). She also notes that screams, shouts, grunts and shrieks punctuated the soundscape as though complementing the visual tableaux. In Wilson’s production, both the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the voice noted in theatre semiotics were employed, but never for the sake of reason or meaning.

For the 1975 production of the opera *Einstein on the Beach*, Wilson again used text by Knowles, along with texts written by two of the four actors given speaking parts, Lucinda Childs

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11 The text has been reproduced in Marranca and all quotes are taken from that source.
and Samuel M. Johnson (Knowles did not act in Einstein). But more appropriately, the texts should be considered as forming part of the musical score composed and conducted by Philip Glass, who also hired a chorus of twelve members that provided a rich texture of chanted vocals, notably the repetitive counting of numbers that punctuate most of the movements. In the first recitation of text, the actor-dancers Lucinda Childs and Sheryl Sutton repeated and overlapped, in a dry and inflectionless manner, Knowles’s “THESE ARE THE DAYS,” only a portion of which is excerpted here:

Will it get some wind for the sailboat. And it could get for it is. It could get the railroad for these workers. And it could be were it is. It could Franky it could be Franky it could be very fresh and clean. It could be a balloon. Oh these are the days my friends and these are the days my friends. It could get some wind for the sailboat. (14) 12

Again the text served to complement the visual imagery and not to provide a locus of meaning, for there were no sailboats or wind or a character named Franky in the opera. The texts by Childs and Johnson, on the other hand, were not as abstract as those of Knowles, and thematically they seemed to comprise something of a narrative. Johnson offered a meditation on Paris, Childs contemplated bathing caps in a supermarket, and Johnson provided a closing soliloquy on love. But as narratives they existed as tangential to Wilson’s visual images and Glass’s highly repetitive score. They seemed to offer detours for thought, and they did not serve as guideposts of attention. Significantly, the speaking voices registered as highly trained and not casual or amateurish. The actors enunciated clearly and distinctively, and even though their voices were not accompanied by physical character constructions, they lent a classical, operatic aspect to their material.

In describing his aesthetic approach, Wilson admits that he did not seek to illustrate speech with the visuals or accent the visuals with sounds. To do so is to be redundant, and as he

12 All quotations are taken from the liner notes of the sound recording of Einstein on the Beach.
puts it, “What’s the point in painting a white horse white?” (Holmberg 457). Talking about his designs for the 1983 production *Great Day in the Morning*, which featured Jessye Norman singing a collection of American Negro spirituals, Wilson affirms that he sought visuals that were *appropriate* for the music but did not *illustrate* the music. If sight and sound are too closely approximated, he believes, one tends to overshadow the other. Therefore Wilson aims to “make a balance between what you hear and what you see, so that perhaps you can do both at the same time” (Huxley and Witts 385). When he uses a dramatic text as a part of his production, Wilson desires to disrupt one specific meaning and thereby avoid a sense of storytelling or of a psychological foundation. He notes that he appreciates actors who are “able to say the text in a way that one can think about many sorts of things” (Huxley and Witts 388). Wilson admits that his attraction to Heiner Müller, whose *Hamletmachine* (1977) and *Quartet* (1980) he has staged, stems from the *sounds* of the German language, and not from what the texts may or may not be about (Holmberg 457).

Wilson’s productions resemble the type of postmodern theatre that resists thematic interpretation based upon a linear reading of plot and narration. His theatre disrupts the nominalist view of signification, in which every signified finds its expression in a discernible signifier. In this respect, Wilson’s theatre approaches the poststructural theorizing of Derrida, who posits that words do not point to concrete signifieds but refer only to each other in a long trace or chain of endless signification. Likewise in Wilson’s theatre, a signifying gap exists between words and sense. Whether in Knowles’s wordplay, where phonemes and words collide with each other in chaotic associations, or in fragments of dialogue or chunks of narrative that are unmoored from a grounding context, the voice launches into the motions of signification.
without landing in meaning. In this sense, Wilson’s theatre approximates the tenets outlined by Artaud for his theater of cruelty—a theatre of particular interest to Derrida.

Derrida closes *Speech and Phenomena* observing that if a realm of ideality or truth could be adequately defined, not to mention identified or attained, then Western thought must overcome its dependence upon the representative function of the sign (104). In the essays “La parole soufflée” and “The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,” collected in *Writing and Difference* (1967), Derrida points to Artaud as attempting to fulfill such a project. In his desire to establish a theater of cruelty, Artaud aimed to create performance that bypassed the reliance on signs and the unoriginal regurgitation of text that characterizes Western theatre. As Derrida puts it, “Artaud desires a theatre in which repetition is impossible” (*WD* 177). But since repetition infuses all speaking, how may one employ the voice to communicate the primary essence of a theater of cruelty? How can one’s speaking break free of the operation of *différance* inherent in any linguistic discourse? Although Artaud unflaggingly believed in a primordial core prior to language that performance could access, as witnessed in his appreciation of the Balinese theatre, Derrida affirms that there is no escaping the circle of representation, since, in his view, “The origin is always penetrated” (*WD* 248).

Furthermore, in silencing the author and in banishing the text, the theater of cruelty runs the risk of silencing the voice. How may the theatre recuperate “a still unorganized voice”? Is such recuperation possible? As we saw in chapter three, Artaud wanted to relegate the voice to a status equal to that of other stage elements; he wanted to restore to it an ontology designated by its “sonority, intonation, intensity,” and not by the words of another (*WD* 188). By so doing, the voice in Artaud’s theatre would resemble, in Derrida’s words, “the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen,” and its sounds would deliver its audience “to
the borderline of the moment when the word has not yet been born, when articulation is no longer a shout but not yet discourse, when repetition is almost impossible, and along with it, language in general” (WD 240). The voice, along with the other stage elements, would create an environment in which original meanings are allowed to surface.

But of course for Derrida such performance is unrealizable, for no communicable use of the voice may signify without representation. Derrida argues that Artaud’s theater of cruelty does not and could not exist, since in its aspiration to precede signification, his theatre is always self-defeated, for nothing exists prior to signification (WD 248). Yet Wilson’s theatre echoes some of the premises of Artaud’s project. Artaud forbade improvisation, and Wilson does not allow it: all the elements of his theatre are tightly controlled and choreographed. Artaud wanted to banish psychologism yet welcomed the presentation of the dream state. In a similar view, Sainer, in his reviews of Wilson’s The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud (1970), Deafman Glance (1970), and the CIVIL wars (1985), speaks of watching the productions as though high or “sleepy but in a fixed state peering at visions” (454). Likewise Andrzej Wirth characterizes Wilson productions as “luring the spectator into a meditative trance” (180). Wilson’s theatre, like that proposed by Artaud, cannot be said to refer to a reality outside of the production, despite the loose arrangement of elements around stated themes, like Freud, Stalin, Queen Victoria, and Hamlet, since these themes are not developed or exploited. Therefore, like the theater of cruelty, Wilson’s theatre does not represent. The productions demand to be taken on their own terms. As Artaud said and Derrida affirms, there is a pure triumph of mise-en-scène, there is no discernible text, no dialectic, and speech has ceased to govern the stage, even though it is present on it. In its subjugation of dramatic text, Wilson’s theatre employs the voice as one element among many in the total involvement of the theatrical apparatus, sounding with shrieks and cries.
If a theatre can approach the pre-significative state outlined by Derrida and Artaud, then Wilson’s surely must come close. On his stage the elements are not meant to act as signifiers for signifieds existing elsewhere, and speech is not allowed to convey a narrative. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to characterize Wilson’s theatre as mirroring Derrida’s deconstruction. For deconstruction betrays the infiltration of inner narratives, metanarratives, and sublimated political agendas within the intended meanings of all structured discourse. Logically speaking, if no meanings are aimed at in Wilson’s productions, then there should be no obvious inclusions and exclusions. Critics may disagree, as Colin Counsell, from a Marxist perspective, takes Wilson’s reputation for bloated budgets and sheer grandeur to task for the apparent splurge and waste of capital (179-206). From another perspective, Johannes Birringer blames Wilson for “sucking the political thought” out of Müller’s texts by not drawing out the inherent meanings, but by providing disjointed visual and aural imagery instead (62).\(^{13}\)

But Wilson’s aesthetic could still be thought problematic within the frames established by Derrida. For Wilson has stated that he stages the things he does because he finds them beautiful (Knowles’s language, Norman’s voice), and he feels bound to “always fill the auditorium with a presence” (Fuchs and Marranca 92). From whence might this presence come from, and by what is it constituted? If not by signification, than by pure elemental form? The answer cannot be adequately addressed by the investigations provided by Derrida, since he claims that no aesthetic or metaphysics exists in and of itself, but only in the accompaniment of language (\(P\ 57\)). In order to understand Wilson’s intentions, then, we may have to extend the faith that Artaud’s theater of cruelty is indeed tenable. Furthermore, in order to provide a theoretical basis for such a project, we may have to revisit the phenomenology of Heidegger, which posits that art provides the

\(^{13}\)Müller disagrees; see Holmberg.
venue by which meanings and states of being existing outside of discourse may become present. In any event, Wilson’s own view of his theatre likens more to the views of Pavis, Féral, and Pontbriand than to Fuchs and Auslander, and his use of the voice demonstrates its autonomous nature, free of a linguistic, informational, and narrative role in favor of a purely sonorous experience.

**Richard Foreman**

Since in the autumn of 2002 Richard Foreman will be staging his fiftieth production, to speak of the entire Foreman canon would therefore be a bit overambitious and impractical. Hence this section intends to address Foreman’s thoughts about language, speech, and, by implication, the voice as they are expressed in his publications and interviews, particularly in terms of his productions with the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre in the 1970s and early 1980s. Foreman has acknowledged many theoretical influences, from Brecht and Gertrude Stein, to Heidegger, Simone Weil, and contemporary French theorists (Bernstein 126-8), but his use of the voice and interrogation of language best approximates poststructural thought as expressed by Lacan. This section argues that, countering the pure spectacle of Wilson and the nihilism typically associated with poststructuralism, Foreman’s theatre attempts to identify a locus of meaning, however equivocal, be it in ontology, the psyche, or phenomenal experience.

In “Foundations for a Theatre,” the essay that opens his collection *Unbalancing Acts* (1992), Foreman writes, “My plays are an attempt to suggest through example that you can break open the interpretations of life that simplify and suppress the infinite range of inner human energies; that life can be lived according to a different rhythm, seen through changed eyes” (*UA* 4). His sentiments reflect a dominant theme of poststructuralism, that as social beings we are all conditioned, and to a certain extent held captive, by the discourses that shape our culture. But
rather than parrot the suspicion of all notions of individuality and natural essence characteristic of contemporary thought, Foreman, more like Artaud and Grotowski than poststructuralists, believes that a “deep truth” of the human being may be identified in the “impulses” that erupt in our interiors. As he says, “The impulse is the vibrating, lively thing that you really are. And that is what I want to return to: the very thing you really are” (UA 4). Foreman therefore thinks of himself as a religious writer, and as he confesses to Charles Bernstein, “I always maintained that basically, the subject of my plays was paradise” (UA 119). But for Foreman, paradise is to be found once human beings divested themselves of their social inscriptions and linguistic encodings. In a reflection of Lacan, Foreman believes that the core of human essence is to be found beneath and prior to the fictions that comprise “the circumstantial ‘I’” (UA 6). Foreman’s theatre aims to explore the interstices of this linguistic symbolization, and the ramifications it holds for the constitution of the speaking subject.

One of Foreman’s goals in the first production of the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, Angelface (1968), was to present “real people” on stage, instead of actors who tend to work towards winning audience empathy and creating psychological connections inside the theatre. Foreman hoped that by using non-actors, a certain distance would permeate the stage, and the audience would be forced to attend to the awkward, wooden, and amateurish behavior of his cast, unversed in, and therefore uninscribed by, the “language” of performance. Foreman also hoped to spare his non-actors the memorization of text, so he recorded all of the dialogue during rehearsals and played back the tapes during performance (UA 33). The practice of taping dialogue and orchestrating productions accordingly quickly became a trademark of Foreman productions, but what began as a practically conceived device also served to further Foreman’s themes and preoccupations. With the non-actors and the taped dialogue, Foreman was attempting
to question the authenticity of human life in a manufactured and linguistic environment, and he mirrored Lacan’s concern with the linguistic encoding of the subject.

After his third production with the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, *Total Recall* (1970), Foreman began to write his plays without noting stage directions or, at times, indicating who was speaking. He came to view the dialogue as “a nonending river of talk” that had no relation to the constructions of the personas that appeared on his stage (*UA* 15). Breaking with traditional dramaturgy, Foreman believed that the actor/character was not necessarily defined by what he or she said. Beginning with his second production, *Ida-Eyed* (1969), Foreman felt the necessity to use professional actors, since the emphasis shifted: instead of exploring the awkwardness of “real people” confronting theatrical inscription, Foreman wanted to investigate the continual river of talk that comprised the theatrical text. Since he differentiated between script and person, he sought out “performers whose skill enables the audience to look through them to see into the text itself” (*UA* 37). He admitted that the style of acting he was looking for resembled Brecht’s epic stagecraft, wherein performers are distanced from the psychological and emotional fictions the traditional stage and script foster. Like Brecht, who admired Charlie Chaplin, Foreman confessed to being attracted to the “‘silent movie’ style of acting” for its heightened and exaggerated sense of gesture, and one, I might add, in which the voice does not offer a running commentary on the action.

But in these early productions, the actors’ voices continued to be replayed on tape, accompanied by Foreman’s own taped and live voice. The imposition of his director’s voice further served to fragment and disrupt the assumed seamlessness of traditional theatrical presentation and narrative, and in the process highlighted the sense of life as dictated by

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14 Foreman says he gave up the practice altogether about the time of *The Book of Splendors* (1976). See Bernstein 105.
linguistic inscription. The entanglement of taped voice, director’s voice, and live actor mirrored the entanglement of language and self as viewed by Lacan. In the essay “Directing the Actors, Mostly,” Foreman describes the technique used in several plays beginning with *Pandering to the Masses* (1975):

All the lines on tape were recorded by as many as four voices, alternating word by word. During the performance the tape was played back from loudspeakers located in the four corners of the performance space, so each sentence of dialogue would seem to circle the audience: they’d hear one word coming from the left side of the stage, then the next word from the right, and so on. We’d do it for the whole evening. The actors would slowly and softly repeat the lines of the character they were playing in counterpoint to the tape. Since the actors would speak at a slower rate than the tape they were cued by, it meant that they were soon overlapping each other as well as the tape. This would continue for a few lines, then a loud thud would interrupt, and a moment of silence would follow, clearing the air. Then the whole process would begin again. (*UA* 34)

The actors’ speech was devoid of inflection or emotional content. Foreman wanted the words to be heard as words, and not as a reflection of, or stemming from, the actor’s or character’s consciousness. When the dialogue was replayed over speakers in performance, the actors would move in ways that attempted to reveal the various physical impulses and sensations that occurred in the speech event. For in Foreman’s view, a person’s speech only betrays one aspect of the interior life that is oftentimes made up of contradictory impulses. He therefore desired to stage what he called the “counterelements” of lived experience (*UA* 20, 51). Foreman also emphasized that he was not attempting to get inside the heads of the characters, but that he was staging what transpired in his own life as he wrote the fragments that came to comprise his texts, as well as what came into his head as he worked with the material in rehearsal (*UA* 20). Bonnie Marranca characterizes the actors not as “speakers” but as “demonstrators” of Foreman’s ideas (4), and her observation indicates that Foreman did not completely disassociate himself from the notion of representation.
Foreman wanted his plays to expose the “structure of language,” and, hopefully, the concomitant structure of consciousness and thought (Davy 143). Foreman readily acknowledged his affinity with Peter Handke’s *Sprechstücke* and the play *Kaspar* (1967) and their reflection of the dominant role of language in human life (*UA* 67-8). Yet Foreman’s stated intentions were to offer the audience alternatives to habitual manners of viewing the world. He aimed to disassemble the linguistic paradigms frequently employed in Western society and replace them with alternative visions of reality (*UA* 25). The chosen technique was not through representation or verbal discourse, but through the bombardment of visual and aural imagery that enacted an inchoate yet “inevitable drift toward coherence” (*UA* 24). Foreman drew his inspiration from Lacan’s reading of Freud and their view of speaking as an approximation and reflection of the interior state of the speaker, but not as a clear and discernible linguistic expression. Rather than employing language at face value, Foreman was attempting to stage a type of speaking and listening that attended to undercurrents and primal urges. He was trying to lay bare a sense of freedom from linguistic inscription and cultural determination. As he puts it,

> We all tend to forget that our monolithic self is the product of a learned perceptual system, in which the constraints of convention and habit pile up to deaden our ability to scan those freedom-giving contradictions of our impulsive life. These contradictions are really doors; doors to understanding that the monoliths you perceive as blocking your path to happiness are, in fact, clouds of language and impulse in continual circulation; and you can enter inside these clouds, and dance with these elements. (*UA* 29-30)

Foreman did not aim to communicate a meaning with his productions, but rather to open up a sense of possibility that many meanings might exist (*UA* 31).

In the thirty-four years of the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre (to date), Foreman’s preoccupations have shifted considerably, and it would be a mistake to focus on the early works and surmise that the actor and character are completely under erasure in Foreman’s work. Since Foreman continually used Kate Manheim as a principle performer in his plays over a twenty-year
period, audiences familiar with his work were able to identify with the “Rhoda” character she came to embody, though a coherent sense of “character” in the traditional sense was never intended (Kaye 55). Likewise, Foreman collaborated on two productions in 1985 and 1988 with the Wooster Group (Miss Universal Happiness and Symphony of Rats, respectively), whose performers had already developed critical acclaim and a cult following in downtown New York since their inception in 1975. Despite deliberate interruptions and an opaque text, Foreman leaves venues of access by which an audience may enter into an engagement with his work.

Elinor Fuchs correctly posits that Foreman’s theatre does not simply “deconstruct” or “decenter” text, but subordinates it to “a higher text and a higher presence”--an odd assertion, given her concerted negation of presence in postmodern performance (81). Nonetheless she isolates Lava (1989), the one play that ascribes to Foreman’s omnipresent Voice nearly seventy percent of the dialogue, as indicative of Foreman’s treatment of stage dialogue and quest for a state of being that escapes “the prison-house of language” (82-5).15 Since Foreman intended his voice to act as the voice of “author, director, boss, and God” (UA 310) of the production, he no doubt desired to explore the themes of linguistic hegemony that so preoccupy contemporary theorists. But whereas Fuchs reads Foreman as stating that we as individuals and social beings can never pass beyond language to what he calls the essential “invisible ground from which everything we know arises” (315), he, to the contrary, affirms the opposite: “Art is one of the ways to unlock in each man and woman an awareness of that flowing source” (UA 315).

In Foreman’s theatre, presence and being do not necessarily have to be deferred, even though deferral is a problem Foreman continually struggles with and stages. According to the definitions that Lyotard offers, Foreman’s aspirations resemble the modernist quest to reveal the

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15 In fairness, Fuchs admits that Lava is an “unusual” Foreman play (82), but her choice indicates the thrust of her argument, which I feel does not adequately portray Foreman’s work.
unpresentable, rather than the postmodern affirmation that the unpresentable can never be disclosed or that it does not exist. Again, like Wilson’s, Foreman’s theatre may be viewed more appropriately through the phenomenology of Heidegger than as a corroboration of the deconstructive project. For Foreman does not embrace fully Lacan’s thinking that the subject is completely composed of linguistic inscription. On the contrary, he believes that some essential element of human being precedes language. While his art may engage the contemporary problems of linguistic hegemony and consciousness, it nonetheless strives to reveal a means by which we may transcend our imposed limitations. His staging of the human voice in specific speech events particularly illustrates his abiding belief that it may still communicate, though maybe not linguistically and informationally, an autonomous core of human being.

**The Wooster Group**

The Wooster Group, with Elizabeth LeCompte as its principal director, has been heralded as practically the only “deconstructive” theatre collective for its appropriations and unorthodox treatments of such noteworthy dramatic staples as T. S. Eliot’s *The Cocktail Party* (1949), Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* (1938), Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953), and Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* (1901), among others. But whereas theatre critics such as David Savran, Philip Auslander, and Arnold Aronson view the Wooster Group as a postmodern theatre company whose productions aim to expose the closed-circuit hegemonic discourses implicit in the Western theatrical canon and traditional stage practice, other critics such as Bethany Haye and Michael Vanden Heuvel, as well as members of the mainstream press, tend to see the Wooster Group as juxtaposing disparate texts, dramatic and otherwise, in order for more hidden themes or issues relevant to contemporary society to surface. The latter position more aptly describes LeCompte’s stated intentions when approaching a production. Inspired in part by
Wilson, LeCompte wants the meaning of a piece to be located in the piece itself, however relatively interpreted by the individual audience member, and not imposed from a particular ideological stance or evolving from analytical strategies (Huxley and Witts 231). But unlike Wilson, the use of the voice on the Wooster Group stage, whether delivered live or recorded, using appropriated texts or original scripts, provides access into the possible linguistic meanings that may be gleaned, for the voice provides a verbal medium through which thematic concerns may be stated or inferred.

The Wooster Group’s third production, Nayatt School (1978), was their first to incorporate images and dialogue from other sources, in this case Eliot’s The Cocktail Party, as well as the recorded radio horror plays “A Day at the Dentist” and “Drop Dead.” Through The Cocktail Party’s lead character, Celia, who searches for meaning and fears her own sanity, Eliot’s play provided a thematic analogy for group member Spalding Gray’s contemplation of his mother’s suicide from his perspective as an adult. Through a monologue delivered at the start, Gray grounded the production within his own need to integrate his art with his life. Savran describes this monologue as establishing that the play serves “as a meditation on performance and the phenomenology of the subject” (WG 111). In the second part, actors began to work with scenes from the play. As they delivered lines from Eliot’s text, Gray and actress Joan Jonas employed Brechtian alienation techniques to distance themselves from the characters and from an accessible psychological interpretation. Gray narrated the scene while he played a role in it, and both he and Jonas delivered their lines dispassionately. Haye claims that through such devices, Gray provided the locus of interpretation for the characters and subtext of Nayatt School.
(175).\(^\text{16}\) Even though other sections, using images and texts less easy to place thematically, transpired between four sections based on *The Cocktail Party*, they all seemed to be linked to Gray, giving the audience access to meanings that might be gleaned.

But maybe most important, at least in terms of this study, Gray confessed that *Nayatt School* personally represented for him a religious or shamanistic ritual that served as a therapeutic process, and it helped him come to terms with the death of his mother. The production, through its experimental treatments of *The Cocktail Party* and other found texts, became for him a “celebration after the mourning” of the loss of his mother (Savran, *WG* 102). Because stated meanings were not presented through traditional theatrical renderings—and the Group has therefore been labeled deconstructive--thematic concerns were still tangible. Hence, the production could be said to reflect the aims of Artaud’s theater of cruelty, wherein more essential and primal meanings surface through the destruction of the Western canon. The comparison to Artaud highlights the Group’s relationship to the theatre collective from which it grew, Richard Schechner’s Performance Group. Having trained under Schechner, LeCompte and Gray confess to an appreciation for his desire to use the theatre as a forum for metaphysical inquiry and spiritual growth, as well as for his penchant for experimenting with disparate texts and autobiography (Savran *WG* 3). Whereas the Wooster Group may not have duplicated the overt sense of ritual noted in the productions of the Performance Group, it nonetheless betrays an ideological debt to the essentialism Schechner inherited from Grotowski and Artaud.

In the productions that followed, the Wooster Group continued to juxtapose classic texts with other material. For example, *Route 1 & 9 (the Last Act)* (1981) incorporated *Our Town* and a Pigmeat Markham vaudeville routine; *L.S.D. (…Just the High Points…)* (1984) contrasted

\(^{16}\) See also Shewey, who draws a connection between Gray’s “out-front persona” in *Nayatt School* and his career as a solo monologist.
scenes from *The Crucible* with a debate between Timothy Leary and G. Gordon Liddy; and *Brace Up!* (1991) punctuated *Three Sisters* with Japanese dance and film. None of the texts were used in their entirety, and none of the Wooster Group productions presented a discernible narrative. LeCompte has spoken of her work as collages, wherein the elements are thrown together by chance in a process that she calls “layering,” and the resulting patterns become the forms within which she works (Savran, WG 106; Sterritt, P; Haye 175, 179). Like Wilson, she has a background in the visual arts, and rather than being attracted to telling stories, she prefers to think of her theatre pieces as choreographies, structured like music and dance (Arratia 135).

As described by Don Shewey,

> Miss LeCompte’s technique as a director is to develop strong, emotionally charged images—through words or images or movements suggested by the actors—and then to juxtapose them with other highly charged elements. The result is not like a linear play at all but a kind of mixed-media collage, something unique in the theatre; like a Bosch or Dali canvas come to life. Multiple stories and themes emerge and resonate against one another only to circle back on themselves rather than being neatly resolved. (WG)

Words are used as one element among many, in a fashion championed by Artaud. All of the stage properties carry equal weight in the creation of the Wooster Group’s theatrical sensorium. But speech, language, and the use of the voice, in variance with Artaud, still function linguistically. They serve to present, even if ironically or in parody, the themes and meanings under consideration.

For example, *Route 1 & 9* began with a battery of television monitors that played a videotape of actor Ron Vawter delivering a lecture on the play *Our Town*. Critic Mel Gussow describes Vawter as portraying a stuffy and alienating instructor, pointing out the play’s symbolism, cracking stupid jokes, and coming across as “drily amusing” (“The Stage: *Route 1 & 9*”). The segment illustrated that *Our Town* has become a fossilized staple of high school and college curricula, and set up the critique that followed in the rest of the production. Likewise, in
the first section of *L.S.D.*, performers read from books associated with the drug and Beat culture of the United States in the 50s and 60s, specifically texts by Aldous Huxley, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg. In the second section, parts of *The Crucible* (before Miller forced the show to close) were played in a fashion resembling the interviews of the House Un-American Activities Committee. The actors employed different acting styles: some played naturally, Kate Valk played the characters Tituba and Mary Warren in black face with a caricatured vocal delivery, and sometimes the dialogue was delivered fast and practically unintelligibly. Notably, although the various appropriated texts fell under critique, the performances used the forms of modernist theatre, including the use of voice and speech. The Wooster Group exemplifies Pavis’s view that postmodern theatre still transpires within a solid tradition established by both classical and avant-garde theatres.

Critics like David Sterritt agree that the meanings of Wooster Group productions, despite the deliberate sense of free-play in the staging, were nonetheless clear. In his view, *L.S.D.* highlighted Miller’s intention in writing *The Crucible* as an indictment of the anti-communist witchhunts in the 40s and 50s, yet updated the witchhunt metaphor for a contemporary application (WG). Aronson comments that meanings and messages of the Group’s productions seem obvious, even self-indulgent (WG 72). But Sterritt and Aronson’s opinions may represent two of many possible perspectives. Their literal interpretations better support Auslander’s political view than Fuchs’ deconstructivist interpretation; they also contrast with Haye’s suggestion that LeCompte’s layering techniques cull interpretations from the audience member’s personal associations, not from universally read symbols typically afforded by linear narrative.

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17 See also Gussow, “The Stage: Wooster Group.”
Haye proposes that “The purpose is to create a space between the text and the performance piece in which leaps of recognition can be made, rather than construct rigid parallels” (178-9).

Michael Vanden Heuvel offers another interpretation of the strategies employed by the Wooster Group. Heuvel hesitates to label the Group as simply “postmodern” or “deconstructive,” for he recognizes that when artists attempt to destabilize or disempower the ideological assumptions of conventional, closed-circuit performance texts, they risk shifting the balance of power from the text to the performer. By assuming a place of privilege in relation to the audience, they fall into the trap of promoting a practice that deconstruction decries. Critics like Jameson, Foster, and Auslander concur, noting that postmodern political art can never position itself outside of the representational means of all other cultural expression, and likewise cannot place itself outside of the object of its critique (PR 23). Therefore, rather than viewing the Group as deconstructive for its opening up of classic dramatic texts through processes of free-play and improvisation, Heuvel sees the Group as “productive” in its creation of potential meanings. He calls the Wooster Group indicative of an “intertextual” performance strategy, one that “theatricalizes the interplay between order (presence, being, something) and disorder (absence, becoming, nothing) as they collaborate to form human meanings” (WT 60).

The Wooster Group, through its layering and juxtaposing of texts, performance styles, and media, constantly subverts its potential to claim an authoritative position within the production. Its intertextual theatre freely uses the same representational means as modernist forms of performance, including voice, speech, and text, but it neither moves towards the sense of complete closure and presence that traditional theatre attempts to offer, nor towards the “ultimately self-referential absence of an endless abîme” that différence signifies (Heuvel, WT 60). Hence, within the intertextual theatre of the Wooster Group, the voice operates as a
significative medium, using the same representational means as the voice in traditional and modernist performance, only it is not afforded a foundation in authorial meaning typically associated with modernist theatre. Nonetheless, the Group’s productions still strive for the revelation of human truths denied by the poststructuralism of Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard. They reflect an epistemology that follows Habermas’s view of a modernist project that attempts to create something new, not meaningless. In his qualified admittance of theatrical presence and meaning, Heuvel situates the Wooster Group firmly within the modernist perspective of Pavis, Féral, and Pontbriand, who still maintain a foregrounding of *communitas* and human emancipation.

**Karen Finley**

Were we to take Karen Finley’s description of her performance process as a reflection of an established performance tradition, then we would have to situate her work within the phenomenological methods espoused by Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook. For in her interviews with Marc Robinson and Richard Schechner, she states that she avoids rehearsing and consciously strives to attain a trance-like state while she works on-stage, so that every performance may be viewed as an original creation, and “all the different voices going on inside [her] head may be heard” (Jones 44). She affirms,

> I do go into somewhat of a trance because when I perform I want it to be different than acting. I hope this doesn’t sound too dorky or trite--I’m really interested in being a medium, and I have done a lot of psychic type of work. I put myself into a state, for some reason it’s important, so that things come in and out of me, I’m almost like a vehicle. And so when I’m talking it’s just coming through me. (Robinson 154)

As far as Finley is concerned, the voices she channels are both hers and not hers. Critics comment that she appears schizophrenic in performance, at one moment talking amiably with the audience about events backstage, then abruptly adopting the demeanor and speech of a wife
abuser, an alcoholic mother, or a violent, adolescent male (Jones 42; Koenenn; Herman). Like Grotowski, Finley seems to be searching out the most primal vocal expressions available to the human being. But unlike Artaud and Brook, her language is definitely comprehensible and culture specific. Indeed, of all the performers discussed in this study, Finley depends most upon her vocal delivery in order to communicate meaning, despite the overwhelming attention paid to what she does with her body.

Yet Finley’s use of multiple voices has been deemed postmodern in theatre criticism for its appropriation and transgression of accepted performative norms. For the voices give utterance to what has been called the confrontational, threatening, vulgar, and sadistic language of her texts, which challenge notions of propriety and acceptability. Furthermore, the voices are thought to obscure Finley’s own position in relation to the material, thereby undermining her subjectivity, confusing her representations of gender, and alienating the typical actor-audience relationship of complicity in the construction of meaning. Characteristic of the critical regard of Finley’s work, Jeanie Forte writes:

The myriad, usually perverse forms of sexuality are described in first person but from different personae, including male teenagers, small girls, old men, etc.—the effect of which is to put “Karen Finley” under erasure, deconstructing the problematics of representation and throwing into question the spectator’s relationship to desire. (257)

Espousing the language of Foucault and Derrida, critics like Johannes Birringer and Jon Erikson situate Finley within postmodern performative strategies that attempt to expose both the ideological assumptions inherent in definitions of gender and sexuality, and the repression of the biological in contemporary technocratic society. Lynda Hart and Maria T. Pramaggiore particularly invoke Lacan in order to interpret Finley’s 1987 solo work, *The Constant State of Desire*, as a feminist exposition of the patriarchal linguistic structures that constitute notions of

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18 See Birringer 226; Erikson 227; Forte 257; Hart 127; Kaye 128-132; and Pramaggiore 270.
female subjectivity. The view from the academy therefore attests to an odd reversal of Derrida’s critique of the phonologic tradition evident in Finley’s work. Rather than falling under erasure as the object of deconstruction, Finley’s voice acts to deconstruct patriarchal discourse. Instead of allowing her voice to fall silent in the face of the myriad and conflicting discourses that serve to encode and enslave the female subject, Finley reappropriates the notion of voice by its radical permutations into the voices of others, wresting subjectivity from its linguistic confines, placing the voice instead on public view, giving it a public hearing.

Therefore, as with any performer designated as postmodern, Finley cannot be thought to transcend the representational means of the traditional theatre. As noted above in the discussion of the Wooster Group, every artist, however abstract or “deconstructionist,” has to be situated within an ideological discourse of one kind or another. The most that one can aspire to is a position counter to cultural and political trends. Tellingly, Auslander hesitates to label Finley as postmodern, preferring to view her work as betraying an “expressionism” that differs from the pastiche and parody of other contemporary solo performers like Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, and Eric Bogosian (PR 1,127). Finley’s discussion of her work corroborates his view, for she admits that she spends a lot of time writing her scripts (many of which she has published), a process that inevitably affords a structure and foundation--despite the seemingly improvisational nature of her trance-induced delivery--while at the same time attempting to break down structures of “theatrical time and formality” during performance (Robinson 43). Like the Expressionists a century before her, Finley aims to present the “inner world” of her psyche through highly personal, even nightmarish, images (Robinson 45).

Rather than being thrown off-kilter, like the spectators who have walked out of Wilson and Foreman performances, confounded by a lack of a narrative thread, audiences to Finley
performances understand precisely what she attempts to communicate. If the popular press is any indication, Finley’s monologues might even be faulted for being accessible to the point of being redundant, boring, and unoriginal. Kenneth Herman of the *Los Angeles Times* (“Finley Attacks Her ‘Victims’ with Zeal of a Prophet”) thought her themes of incest and abuse hearkened to television documentaries, and Mercelle Clements of *The New York Times* (“Karen Finley’s Rage, Pain, Hate and Hope”) found the written texts “predictable” and evocative of “60s progressive rhetoric.” One particular text, the “We Are the Oven” episode of *We Keep Our Victims Ready* (1989), drew consistent criticism for equating the contemporary United States with Nazi Germany for its slow response to the AIDS crisis (Koenenn, Herman, Kelly):

> What is our form of 1938 Nazism? Who are our zealots with evil ways? Our Christian holymen preach as if all homosexuals will burn in hell. Our politicians allow the homeless to rot on the pavement. Many believe HIV carriers should be branded like those in concentration camps. Many believe that by giving IV drug users clean needles we are giving them the wrong message. **WE KILL BY NOT DOING ANYTHING AND ALLOW DEATH FOR NO APPARENT REASON.** We have our own SS--the 700 Club. We have our own Himmler, our own Goebbels--William Buckley, Patrick Buchanan. *(ST 123-4)*

Instead of being evasive or ironic, Finley intends her pieces to be taken at face value. As she confesses to Scheckner, she wants to shake the audience from positions of passivity and awaken a sense of responsibility (153). Hers is a teleology indebted more to the existentialism of Sartre than the suspicion of Foucault, for she undoubtedly stakes a truth claim in her political points of view, and her performances stand as committed testimony to her beliefs. In performance as well as on the printed page, Karen Finley uses her voice to communicate precise and intentional meanings. Her voice can be--and has been--clearly defined within semiotic frames and Searle’s speech act theory, which take into account both structured significations and
the behavior of the speaker. Her performances may be described as postmodern for the unorthodox approach to character, but her subversions rely upon an established modernist tradition of resistant performance art. Rather than finding their ideological support in poststructural theory, Karen Finley’s performances have been made available through the stylistic modalities of postmodernity, which nonetheless support a progressive modernist politics.

**Laurie Anderson**

Anderson, through her multi-media format and electronic gadgets, presents a stark example of an artist labeled as postmodern for her appropriation of the tools of technological culture. As many critics note, she uses those tools in order to investigate and ruminate upon the ideologies and discourses inherent in that culture. Her work bears close affinity with the performers discussed above--the grand spectacle of Wilson, the mediatization of the Wooster Group, the solo monologues of Finley--yet she differs from them in that she has become recognized within the popular mainstream, having graduated from the obscurity of the avant-garde with the aid of a multi-record deal with Warner Brothers, mass marketed videos and books, and appearances on *Saturday Night Live* and *The David Letterman Show*. Unlike other postmodern performers, Anderson’s work relies on narratives that point to, without necessarily stating, specific themes, and she provides an accessibility and presence afforded by a charming stage persona, cultivated by her characteristic spiky hair, dimpled smile, and soothing, conversational tone of voice. Still, Anderson has earned the postmodern label for the deconstructive tendencies apparent in her work--the ironic delivery, the ability to let meanings float free of signification through the juxtaposition of images, and her habitual questioning of her own subjectivity.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{19}\) See Hood; Rapaport, “‘Can You Say Hello?’”, and Auslander, *PR* 105-124.
Although Anderson, like Wilson and LeCompte, received her training in the visual arts, and her performances indeed capitalize on her many talents as photographer, sculptor, and musician, she admits in interviews and in her publication *Stories from the Nerve Bible* (1994) that she thinks of herself as a storyteller, and that words and their declamation consistently form the basis of her work (Anderson 6; Sterritt LA; Rockwell; Harrington). Resisting the homogeneity and insularity of the art world, Anderson strives to make her pieces accessible, what she calls “fiddling and stories and film, and everyone could relate to it” (Sterritt, LAC).

When she began performing in the 1970s, her texts consisted of first-person narrative, and they were mostly autobiographical, such as the opening monologue from *As:If* (1974): “My voice is usually soft and sometimes when I’m nervous, I stammer. I’ve cut out most of the flat midwestern ‘a’ from my speech but I still sometimes say ‘rough’ for ‘roof,’ and ‘hood’ for ‘hood,’ and ‘warsh’ for ‘wash’ (*NB* 29).” She decided to use the monologue format because, as she says, in corroboration both with Husserl and with speech act theorists, words carry additional meanings when they are spoken than when they are written and read.

> I decided it was silly just to print [the narratives], because you’d be missing half the effect: the tone of voice. I felt if I wanted to use words, I should say them. It’s the difference between getting a letter and a phone call. They may say the same thing, but you get so much more from hearing the words. (Sterritt LAC)

The genesis of Anderson’s work therefore was based upon a phenomenological view of the voice in which meanings are synonymous with both voice, text, and the constitution of a unified self, wherein accent, timbre, and tone accompany the linguistic signifiers of language in the transmission of sense.

Some of Anderson’s more noteworthy stage devices, however, served to put the speaking voice and our means of listening into question. Her “Tape Bow Violin,” invented in 1977, had an audio head mounted in the body, over which was played bows strung with recorded audiotape.
By playing the recordings of other instruments, fragments of foreign languages that might sound like English when played backwards, and nonsense sentences such as “I dreamed I had to take a test in a Dairy Queen on Another Planet,” Anderson manipulated notions of voice, sound, music, communication, and authorship. By using a device known as a vocoder in her four-part *United States* (1979-1983), Anderson was able to lower her voice one octave, allowing her to create what she called “The Voice of Authority,” a male voice that she used to lecture the audience in a parody of patriarchal power. Likewise, by putting a small audio speaker in her mouth, she was able to literally “give voice” to other (recorded) voices. Still, the performances did not slip into unintelligibility or resist interpretation, for, as Meiling Cheng states, Anderson’s characteristic “whimsicality” provided accessibility (409).

As Anderson’s performances grew in size and complexity, the personal nature of her texts evolved to include observations of American culture at large. Her narratives in the 1980s were no longer vividly autobiographical, and the texts, which she calls “descriptive,” became more distant and abstract, though never didactic. The four parts of *United States*, for example, had four themes loosely related to the United States: transportation, politics, money, and love. But as a unifying theme, Anderson states that the work was about “what happens to people in a highly technologized society” (Harrington). Through electronic mediatization, Anderson creates different stage personas and voices, and she avoids an overtly personal involvement with her subjects. Rather, through the adoption of a neutral position and the assumption of a more quizzical stance, she inhabits multiple points of view while maintaining a critical distance. As Cheng notes in a review of *The Nerve Bible* (1992-1995), “The shifting voices in her stories . . . reinforce her non-committal attitude, which curiously aligns her more with the performance’s ingenious gadgets than with human beholders” (410). Besides Anderson’s voice, the electronic
media certainly figure as central elements to her performances, prompting Mark Dery to call her work “virtual vaudeville” and “cybercabaret” (786). Auslander argues that her performances mimic the structure of television viewing, wherein the juxtaposition of commercials, newscasts, and variety shows obscure thematic continuity and corporeal human subjectivity (PR 57-81). To a degree Anderson does disappear into the hi-tech machinery that litters her stage, mirroring the stated themes of her work.

But as Woodrow Hood points out, Anderson’s performances are not contextualized as television, but as theatre, with Anderson occupying center stage.

Laurie Anderson takes television flow into a space that normally presents works as discrete units (self-contained, with no interruptions). Since television flow is inserted into a different context, it has a different effect. Instead of the negative criterion of flow (unengaged audiences), Anderson uses flow in a positive manner, to engage audiences. Anderson uses technology to maintain audience attention while she uses content to engage the audiences critically. (162-3)

Therefore, while Anderson’s performances may indeed be deconstructive to the extent that they question discourse and the manufacture of knowledge, and whereas her work resists the linear structure of traditional theatre, Anderson as performer acts, in Scott Cummings words, as “tour guide, shaman, troubador, babe-in-the-woods, prankster, and master of ceremonies” (251).

Anderson provides a bridge between the audience and the work, articulating meanings even if those meanings are essentially calls to question messages, ideologies, and the authority of the performer. Anderson accomplishes a connection with her audience not through a dazzling display of technology, but simply through talk.

Cheng notes a particularly ironic moment in The Nerve Bible, when Anderson appeared alone on-stage without any technological gadgets or mediated effects. Cheng characterizes it as a “moment of public confession,” during which Anderson explained why so many of the stories she told that evening were obsessed with death. Cheng writes, “A recent pilgrimage to Tibet, she
confesses, brought her to the verge of death, but she was kept alive because her carrier/guide kept talking to her. The sound of a person’s voice is all you need, she concludes” (411). The contrast of the statement “The sound of a person’s voice is all you need” against Anderson’s chosen forms of presentation highlights in a reflexive gesture what her work basically aims to point out. The isolated moment in performance reiterates in forthright fashion Anderson’s perceived difficulty of communication in a modern, technological society, a theme implied by the 1977 piece “New York Social Life,” with its repetitive, meaningless voices parroting empty conversational speech:

And I go to a party and
Everyone’s sitting around
Wearing party hats
And it’s really awkward
And no one can think of
Anything to say.
So we all move around--fast--
And it’s:
Hi! How are you?
Where’ve you been?
Nice to see you.
Listen, I’m sorry
I missed your thing
Last week, but we should really
Get together, you know,
Maybe next week.
I’ll call you.
I’ll see you.
Bye bye. (NB 63)

Despite what amounted to over thirty tons of electrical equipment for the Nerve Bible tour (Hood 163), Anderson seems to be saying that the gadgets are all a smoke screen for the essential element of her performance, an attempt to touch and communicate. Even though Anderson deliberately disguises and distorts her voice, it still surfaces as the primary conduit of meaning in her work.
Again, through postmodern modalities, Anderson’s modernist political concerns come to the fore. As in the performances of the Wooster Group and Karen Finley, the voice acts as a medium whereby meanings may be communicated, and it illustrates the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger as opposed to Derridian deconstruction. Her voice may also be read according to the parameters outlined by speech act theorists and theatre semiotics, wherein the voice betrays autonomous and informational aspects, understood through both linguistic structures and intentional behaviors.

**Conclusion**

A paradox exists in the relationship between poststructural theory and postmodern theatre practice. Even though Derrida’s critique of the voice plays a significant role in his deconstruction of the Western philosophic and phono-logocentric traditions, the voice persists as a significant site of signification in contemporary performance. And even though Lacan testifies to the constitution of the speaking subject by language, postmodern performance still attempts to identify a viable and pre-linguistic ontological locus for the speaking human being.

If the practices of such performers as Richard Foreman, the Wooster Group, Karen Finley, and Laurie Anderson are any indication, postmodern performance should be viewed as a movement that aims, through the assimilation of various deconstructive and political strategies, to restore to the human subject a dignity and independence free of all ideological restraint, while foregoing an allegiance with the nihilism and paralysis fostered by a strict application of poststructural theory. These performers unintentionally support the view of critics such as Walter Ong, Stephen A. Tyler, Jürgen Habermas, and Ihab Hassan, who have come to identify postmodernity not as the advent of a new historical epoch, but as the continuation of the Enlightenment endeavor to safeguard a universal ethics for the individual and social human
being. Auslander, despite his seeming affinity with Jameson’s Marxism, affirms as much when he posits that postmodernism as an iconoclastic cultural movement may have been “dead” as early as 1990, but that “postmodernist aesthetic strategies” still were being appropriated by artists later in the decade in order to advance their own political concerns (*PR* 1-2).

This chapter’s analysis of the voice in postmodern stage practice reveals that an interest in the essential nature of human being persists despite the obstacles and arguments presented by poststructural theory. Even though contemporary practice embraces aspects of postmodernity, the voice triggers phenomenological associations of being and selfhood that restore the speaking subject to a primary position within the dialectic between stage and audience. Robert Wilson may be a notable exception, since his productions deliberately aim to obscure the efficacy of speech, though not without retaining an appreciation for the aesthetic presentation of the human voice as a point of contact. But the critical assessment of his work betrays that he has not been easily accommodated within theatrical and performative models. On the contrary, Wilson’s productions have been more readily compared to opera, the visual arts, and the concert format, venues of presentation in which the displacement of the human for the abstract has grown customary. In contrast to Wilson’s work, the representation of the human being in a theatrical context, especially when the human being has something to say, opens venues of diaphaneity and presence that counter the poststructural critique of the speaking subject, and affords the audience points of reference and identification.

Therefore, despite the displacement of the *cogito* in structural and poststructural thought in favor of a foregrounding of language, and despite the seeming displacement of speech and text in the theatres of Wilson, Foreman, and the Wooster Group, the sounds of the voice affirm the persistence of the proactive human being. Language and ideology may indeed present formidable
challenges to the constitution of an original and independent identity, and postmodern theatre may explore the linguistic constructions of the relatively perceived life-worlds we are given to inhabit, but the vocal utterance indicates the desire to insert the intentional self into the never-ending stream of talk, and possibly even to aid in shaping the discourse, thereby marking a position. In its recuperation of agency, contemporary performance owes less to Derrida and Lacan, and more to the theoretical premises of Heidegger and speech act theorists, who gauge the value of being through a productive use of language, and who value language for its ability to present being, remembering that the point of contact between language and being is the voice.

Yet, finally, how to account for the apparent disregard of the voice in poststructural theory and contemporary criticism? If the voice indeed maintains autonomy and communicative traction on the postmodern stage, may the theatre academy actually be misinterpreting the pertinent value and creative significance of postmodern performance? If postmodernism is a movement forward, why the backward glance to the phenomenology of Heidegger in order to explain it? And are the attempts to force deconstructive or political readings upon the theaters of Forman, Finley, and the Wooster Group simply rhetorical exercises in keeping with passing theoretical trends, or is something else at work in the performances that critics have yet to notice, disinclined as they are to admit some Artaudian thrust to postmodernity? For a critical view of this problem I turn to postmodernity’s twin sibling, technology, and the theorizing in media studies and the philosophy of technology, in order to address some of the blind spots evident in contemporary theatre criticism, and to offer yet another view of the postmodern stage.
CHAPTER 6

THE VOICE IN MEDIA AND SECONDARY ORALITY

Despite the erasure of the voice staged in deconstruction, the previous chapters demonstrate that an understanding of the voice depends upon the anatomical properties of interest to paleoanthropologists, the semiotic properties studied by structural linguistics, and the intent and behavior of concern to speech act theorists. Mediation further reveals that an understanding of the voice in a twentieth-century context also depends upon its presentation either as live, recorded, or transmitted via electronic means. Beginning with the turn of the century inventions of the gramophone, radio, and telephone, the voice could be heard as a disembodied entity, associated with a unified speaking subject through the semiotic properties of phonation and timbre, yet extended beyond boundaries of time and space. In a contemporary context, the separation of voice and body reflects a preoccupation of postmodern theorizing, that of the fracture of the human subject because of linguistic and technological intervention. Within both modern and postmodern contexts, therefore, the presentation of the voice in communication technology introduces concomitant changes in how it is perceived. This last chapter concerns the degree to which technology may resuscitate a hearing of the voice within the postmodern arena, wherein the voice has been thought to be handicapped and muted.

This chapter turns to the philosophies of technology and media studies to aid an investigation of the theoretical assessment of the voice in technologized performance. In the first half of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger were quick to comment upon the changes that technology and media introduced. Their theorizing would open venues for later theorists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Jean Baudrillard, as well as for the contemporary theatre critics Chantal Pontbriand, Josette Féral, Philip Auslander,
and Matthew Causey. Two themes resurface in the body of work. The first concerns the technological advances in the manufacture and dissemination of ideology and information, and whether they herald positive or negative consequences for the human subject and its sense of linguistic agency. The second concerns the potential for technology either to open hitherto unknown perceptual and intellectual spheres, and thereby positively engage the environment and society in service to human being, or, in a negative light, to close off any meaningful communicative exchange, and thereby hasten the demise of human community within the isolating forces of technocracy and the hegemony of the simulacrum. Within the theatre, these themes find resonance with practitioners and critics alike, who tend either to bemoan the perceived loss of the live and organic in place of the mediated and manufactured, or to applaud the technological as a harbinger of new and exciting performative arenas.

The discussion proceeds in two sections. The first investigates the philosophies of technology as expressed by four highly influential twentieth-century figures, Heidegger, Benjamin, Sartre, and Baudrillard. Since their theories regularly recur in the analyses of technologized performance, a critique of their views serves to clarify their positions in light of each other, as well as in terms of their hearing of the voice in technology. This section argues that the degree to which each offers positive or negative assessments of technology directly informs the positive or negative views of the voice and the speaking subject in the criticism of technologized performance. But this section also argues that the philosophies of technology and the related performance criticism inadequately account for the status of the voice and the speaking subject in technologized postmodern performance. Therefore the second section follows another line of argument altogether by investigating the theorizing of the voice undertaken in the studies of McLuhan and Ong. Through a discussion of McLuhan and Ong’s
theories of acoustic space and secondary orality, this section argues that the voice, as the primary means of linguistic communication, abides as a consistent entity through various technological permutations, affording accessibility, understanding, and a sense of human relation, even in the face of the perceived fractures of postmodernity. Furthermore, the theories not only revive a hearing of the human voice within a cultural milieu seemingly dominated by the alienating forces of technology and postmodernity, but they also account for the silencing of the voice staged in poststructuralism and contemporary theatre criticism.

The Voice in Technology and Media

The writing of Heidegger, Benjamin, Sartre, and Baudrillard serves to inform analyses of both modern and postmodern performance, yet their theories stand at odds with one another. Therefore a critique of their theories in light of each other helps to illuminate their particular strengths and weaknesses, particularly as applied to the postmodern stage, which the earlier writers clearly anticipated, though they wrote from the vantage of first half of the century. This section also puts their theories in dialogue with performance criticism, in an attempt to reveal how the theories address the concerns of this study, namely the efficacy of the human voice and the agency of the speaking subject. This section questions whether the philosophies of technology adequately account for the status of the voice within the technologized postmodern arena.

Martin Heidegger recognized human beings as essentially technological, believing that the creation and manipulation of tools defines a fundamental aspect of human life (BW 287-8). In this view, corroborated by paleoanthropology, technology shares an ontological position with human being, and therefore Heidegger could not interpret technology as a neutral entity, valued simply for its utility in meeting human needs. Since the conscious use of technology, along with
language, uniquely distinguishes human being from the rest of the animal kingdom, Heidegger considered that there was a “right relation” with technology that we could adopt, beyond the mere desire to master it. For Heidegger, the more sensible and challenging aspect of technology lies in its ability to reveal a deeper essence of existence, which in turn facilitates the revelation of a more primal truth concerning the nature of being. The essay “The Question Concerning Technology” (1949/53) therefore reflects Heidegger’s larger concern with the investigation of the nature of being within the frame of his existential phenomenology. While not treating the voice per se, Heidegger iterates an essentialist view of technology as inherently beneficial and, in loose terms, even related to the logocentric tradition, a position that theorists have worked against, specifically within poststructuralism.¹

As in Being and Time (1927) and the later essays on language, Heidegger relies upon an interpretation of Greek terms and concepts in order to arrive at a definition of technology. In a brief passage, Heidegger relates the Greek term for technology to those of bringing-forth and revealing:

_Technikon_ means that which belongs to _technē_. We must observe two things with respect to the meaning of this word. One is that _technē_ is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. _Technē_ belongs to bringing-forth, to _poiēsis_; it is something poetic.

The other thing that we should observe with regard to _technē_ is even more important. From earliest times until Plato the word _technē_ is linked with the word _epistēmē_. Both words are terms for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing. (BW 294-5)

With technology, either in terms of the simplest handicraft or the latest research in micro-computing, the artist, craftsman, and scientist does not “manufacture” so much as bring something into its “essence.” In other words, technology, like the _logos_, makes present and

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¹ See for example Derrida, _Margins of Philosophy_ and “The Retrait of Metaphor.”
reveals what was previously unknown, be it in the physical properties of the cosmos, or in the perceptual sphere of human intelligence and intuition. In Heidegger’s words, in the process of unconcealment, “alētheia, truth, happens” (BW 295). In his view, the ability of technology to bring forth in revealing finds proof in more recent developments that depend upon older technologies for the creation of advanced technologies. Working according to formulas revealed through exact sciences, technologies now deduce facts about the cosmos, the organism, and the atom not even imagined one hundred years ago, and the possibilities for innovation in such diverse areas as genetics and pharmaceuticals have begun to increase exponentially in only the past few decades.

In a manner of thinking reminiscent of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” (1935/6) Heidegger fashions his meditation on technology within the reaffirmation that technē and poiēsis were once related in the practice of the ancient Greek arts. Technology should be considered a form of art in that it fulfills the role of poiēsis, that of revealing truth and bringing it into presence (BW 317). In his extension of technology as poiēsis, Heidegger positions the promise of technology within a heritage of classical, humanist, and modernist thinking that promotes human activity as situated within a teleology of progress and positive fulfillment. As an extension of such sensory operations as sight, touch, and hearing, technology magnifies and multiplies the human potential of material exploration and the manipulation of the environment in which a revealing might take place. By extension, the phenomenal, revelatory voice detected in Heidegger’s existential thought on being and language (discussed in chapter 3) could well be seen to exist within the realm of the technological.

In his critique of Beckett’s radio and television dramas, Martin Esslin complements Heidegger with his affirmation that the playwright exploited the distinct qualities of each
medium in order to express fully his concern with “the process of human consciousness as an incessant verbal flow” (135). In Esslin’s estimation, Beckett realized the expressive potential of technology to reveal aspects of the drama that the live stage could not (125-54). In particular, Esslin views the radio as ideally suited to reveal the interior psychological spaces of the characters in the radio plays, wherein voices articulate the verbal elements and music the non-verbal elements. In reference to the two pieces *Rough for Radio I* and *Rough for Radio II* (first published 1976), Esslin actually equates the voice with the radio apparatus, since “voices emerging from the depths, from unseen and mysterious sources, play an immense part in Beckett’s imagination” (146). Likewise, with reference to Beckett’s three scripts originally conceived for television, *Eh Joe* (1966), *Ghost Trio* (1977), and *... but the clouds ...* (1977), Esslin remarks that their visual images ideally suit the smaller medium of the television, not the film. Most notably, the speaking voices are never synchronized with speakers as they are on a live stage. Nonetheless, the voices in various manners identify the themes of the pieces and communicate Beckett’s intentions (151-153). Esslin therefore mirrors Heidegger’s concern with technology as a form of *poiēsis*, one that reveals aspects of performance formerly unrealized without technological intervention.

Media theorists Adelaide Morris and Douglas Kahn follow suit, exploring the ways artists such as James Joyce, H.D., Ezra Pound, John Cage, and William Burroughs juxtaposed traditional art forms with sound technologies and thereby challenged and broadened the boundaries of their respective artistic media. As testimony, one does not read *Finnegan’s Wake* (1939) so much as hear it. As the essays collected in Morris’s edition *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies* (1997) attest, a line of thought posits that a positive significative potential of sound technology, and by implication the voice in technology, exceeds
the significative properties of text and live performance. While not necessarily negating poststructural theorizing against the phono-logocentric, Morris’s work deliberately aims to problematize the tenets of a literary criticism based solely upon an ocular regard for the written word and to contest the “phonophobic” trend of contemporary theories deaf to the auditory dimensions of the verbal (6). By doing so, Morris and Kahn grant agency and great signifying potential to the voice in technology.

In “Sound Technologies and the Modernist Epic: H.D. on the Air,” Morris argues that one reason the early twentieth-century poets Pound, Eliot, H.D., and Williams revived the epic as a literary genre was because the technologies of radio and recording created a listening audience similar to the ancient audiences (36). With particular attention to H.D.’s audio recording of Helen in Egypt (1961), Morris claims that “sound is the scenery” and infers that the piece “has the potential to engage a more profound layer of the psyche and generate a trance--and enchantment--which opens into myth, dream, and the unconscious” (45,46). Bert States concurs in his discussions of the ancient Greeks and Shakespeare. In their plays the spoken language serves to establish scenery upon a stage that is essentially blank (53). The worlds of those plays come alive and become present in the spoken word. Yet rather than advance a phenomenology of technology, Morris simply suggests that as technology engages more sensory material than just the eye, more perceptual experiences are allowed to register that poststructuralism cannot address because of its relativizing differentiation of the phonic signifier. In terms of the suspicion of the voice thought to characterize postmodern performance, therefore, the question arises why the technologized voice might not be able to paint a world.

Benjamin attempts an answer in his address of the “aura” of a work of art. Contra to Heidegger’s notion of poiēsis and Morris’s “enchantment,” Benjamin divests technology of any
seemingly phenomenal or metaphysical function and situates it within the temporal and material. In the highly influential “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Benjamin posits the destruction of the “aura” of a work of art through its reproducibility, a destruction that likewise heralds the deconstruction of metaphysics and presence in poststructuralism. Benjamin argues that the notion of artistic authenticity should be considered misleading since most artworks in any medium are reproducible, and that technologies of reproduction have been in use for thousands of years (218). Nonetheless, the concept of the original, whether a painting, sculpture, or written manuscript, has cultivated a respect for the authentic that Benjamin characterizes as imparting an illusory sense of aura, which he defines as “uniqueness,” and which Pontbriand equates with theatrical presence (Pontbriand 155). The introduction of new mechanical forms of artistic reproduction, specifically photography and the film, erases a sense of originality since multiple copies can be manufactured from the same negative. These arts are distinguished by their very reproducibility, not by their uniqueness or originality (224). This observation led Benjamin to proclaim, “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (221). Benjamin greets the displacement of art from its aura as a positive gesture, since art likewise becomes displaced from “a domain of tradition” in keeping with what he envisaged as a Marxist empowering of the proletariat over the forces of capitalist control.

Benjamin applauds the sound film as a powerful tool in service to the masses, since as an art form and a means of information, vis-à-vis the documentary or historical film, it can provide the proletariat with a means to cast off the unwanted “cultural heritage” it had unwittingly inherited from a dominating bourgeois elite. The film, through its reproducibility, divests art of its traditional values of originality and beauty, liberating it from its ritual function, a function
which Benjamin describes as resulting from the marriage of the aura with the mysterious or “unapproachable” (243n5). In its destruction of aura and the ritual function, new mechanical art forms acquire a new function, that of the political (224). Benjamin believes that when an audience attends a movie, it can resist getting carried away by the fiction and characterizations portrayed by adopting critical attitudes towards the film’s subject matter (228).

Influenced by Brecht’s hypothesizing of a critical audience, Benjamin believes that the reproducibility of the film divests it of sentimentality, thereby leaving the viewers with little emotional leverage by which they may cathect with the images and sounds projected. He feels that since film does not present the live speech and behavior of the actors, a palpable and reciprocal relationship cannot exist between the screen and auditorium. Filmed actors, as opposed to live, are likewise unable to tailor their performances to the individual responses of differing audiences. The filmic context, in his view, breaks the complicity established between speaker and auditor central to the operation of phonologism. His focus on the sound film proves ironic in the face of contemporary film criticism, which holds as axiomatic that sound, specifically the human voice, completes the visual image found previously in the silent film, and thereby fulfills the sense of theatrical presence. Whereas the silent film maintains a critical distance in that audience members has to work to supply an imaginative sound track--a characteristic early practitioners valued as the unique aesthetic challenge of the medium--the sound film completes the illusion of reality for them. Charles Affron equates the presence of the voice in film as reifying the phonologic that Derrida’s deconstruction critiques (104), and Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, and Amy Lawrence interpret the cinematic voice not as affording

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2 See for example the essays collected in *Yale French Studies* no. 60 (1980), a special edition on sound and cinema edited by Rick Altman.
critical distance, but as inscribing the Lacanian inheritance of lack and desire introduced with language (43-6; 6-10; 25-29).³

Yet even though Benjamin intimates that the reality and aura of an actor cannot be communicated through the film, he nonetheless recognizes a problem in the means of filmic presentation, for he realizes that the movie-going public fell under the “spell of the personality.” He therefore attributes the “cult of the movie star” to the capitalist endeavor to promote personalities through public relations and advertising, practices that commodify the film and strip it of its revolutionary potential (231). In Benjamin’s opinion, “the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations” (232). As technology breaks the aura of the live event, capitalism works to foster its tranquilizing qualities in other areas, and thereby blunt the liberating impulses implicit in the film.

Benjamin’s analysis points out a critical polemic concerning the technological medium. Capitalists and fascists, in his view, attempt to commandeer technological advances in the guise of aesthetics in order to corral the masses in service to material gain. Communists, Benjamin included, attempt to reveal the liberating aspects of mechanical reproduction by creating a critical and politically aware mass populace (242). However media may be exploited, Benjamin, like Brecht, still places great stock in the agency of the performer. They both desire to refocus its signifying potential away from illusion promoting spectacles and towards political issues. Yet Benjamin’s position, as Doane, Silverman, and Lawrence argue, has not been born out in practice. The filmic image and its attendant sounds do not foster a Brechtian critical distance, since the image may be interpreted as an aesthetic value also, and still communicate a sense of...

³ Doane particularly addresses Benjamin (36).
“aura” or presence. Féral recognizes as much when she claims that in contemporary performance, Brechtian alienating devices have become so commonplace that spectators no longer react to them as critical devices, but as “aesthetic forms” (ATMP 469). As exemplified in a reproducible sound recording like H.D.’s Helen in Egypt, technology can certainly maintain a sense of “originality” in that in the recording only H.D.’s idiosyncratic voice can be heard, imparting her own unique interpretation of the text as well as a palpable sense of presence, no matter how many reproduced copies may be in circulation. As Morris attests, something enchanting about the recording defies the critical confines outlined by Benjamin. As both phenomenologists and speech act theorists attest, something about the signifying potential of the voice exceeds its structural confines.

Nonetheless, the value of Benjamin’s argument lies, first, in his recognition of the technologized medium as presenting the same content as the live event differently, and second, his interpretation of aura as a variable element in the reception of art. Whereas Benjamin numbers among those who relegate aura and presence solely to the live event, he celebrates the mechanical and the reproducible for its ability to divest art of the traditional associations with aesthetics and the mysterium, rather than disdain technology for its perceived potential to dissolve community. Benjamin remains optimistic towards technology with a hopeful consideration of its revolutionary potential. The speaking of a recorded voice, and the listening of that voice by a mass population, intentionally communicates meanings of specific social value.

Benjamin’s political position has been taken up by Michael Davidson in his essay “Technologies of Presence: Orality and the Tapevoice of Contemporary Poetics.” Davidson

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\[\text{\cite{Davidson}}\]
argues that the Beat poets and artists Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs countered the anxiety generated by what he calls the “surveillance culture” of the Cold War by reappropriating sound technologies in the creation of their resistant works. The notorious bugging devices used by the intelligence wings of Western and Eastern Block nations were fodder for parody in such works as Burroughs’s *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and Ginsberg’s *The Fall of America* (1966). Davidson characterizes the recorded media voices found in Ginsberg and Burroughs as “defamiliarized,” exposed as reifying the voice of political hegemony (104). In echo of Benjamin, the technologized media are neutral and variable in the hands of differing producers, but still maintain great political potential for the prescient artist.

Pontbriand also uses Benjamin in her critique of the experimental performances of the 1960s and 70s. By incorporating technology into the theatrical proscenium, she believes that performers like Richard Foreman created a critical distance between the performed subject and the audience, whereby the performance could “show the real without mystification” (157). Rather than foster illusion, she argues, the fragmentation of the subject in technology motivates the spectator to focus on what actually surfaces in the performance space. Interestingly, however, the language of her essay does not lean towards the political emphasis of Benjamin, but broaches the phenomenology of Heidegger. She says of Foreman, he “wants the spectator not to concentrate on the thing, but to look between and among things, and to listen in order to hear what is between the works” (160). Technology, in her opinion, allows the spectator to do this, and she locates productive agency within the performance space.

In their own ways, Heidegger and Benjamin express a modernist, positive view of technology, given its potential to reveal and disseminate identified truths about the nature of being. They differ in that Heidegger accords technology a phenomenal relation, whereas
Benjamin sees it more as a potential political tool.\(^5\) Furthermore, Benjamin anticipates the poststructural critique of language and presence with his view of aura as manipulable and not pointing to entities or values outside of political systems. Neither Heidegger nor Benjamin specifically treat the mediated voice, since their interests lie with technology as a medium. Yet their arguments converge on the positive perspective that technology serves to amplify its subject matter. Critics like Esslin, Morris, and Pontbriand follow, recognizing performance technology for its expressive potential. Heidegger and Benjamin also bestow a sense of agency to the performer and the performed subject in technologized media. Accordingly, Pontbriand and Féral locate agency in postmodern performance, granting even the persistence of aesthetics and a “demystified” presence, despite the poststructural arguments to the contrary. After Heidegger and Benjamin, however, Sartre would adopt a less optimistic view, seeing the fracture that technology introduces between the human and its presentation as enacting a fracture in social intercourse. Sartre’s critique holds direct consequences for a hearing of the voice, particularly in the postmodern theorizing of Baudrillard.

Within the Marxist frame of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), Sartre considers the communicative limitations of the radio and its unwitting participation in hegemonic control. The themes of “presence” and “absence” figure largely in his discussion. Sartre does not define presence as aura (uniqueness) or even live, physical proximity, since he observes that people on crowded city streets are oftentimes oblivious of the lives of the people around them. Rather, Sartre believes that presence implies the potential for reciprocity between individuals. Within

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\(^5\) “Phenomenal” may not be the best word, but neither is “metaphysical.” Critical to an understanding of Heidegger is his attempt to disassociate his thought regarding *technē, lōgos,* and *poiēsis* from a metaphysical function. Though this chapter is not the place for such a discussion, for clarification see the section on Heidegger in chapter 3, as well as Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings.*
this view of presence, two individuals talking on the telephone can experience the presence of
the other through the reciprocity of their conversation, just as the pilot of a commercial jet can be
present to ground support through two-way radio (270). Likewise he believes that the one-way
radio receiver (and by extension we could add the television and film), because of the lack of a
transmitter, joins listeners not through presence but by absence. The radio listener does not have
the means or opportunity to respond, either to the broadcaster or to other listeners, in the same
fashion as an audience member at a political rally or theatrical event. Reciprocity does not exist
in the operations of commercial radio. In Sartre’s words, the listeners are “determined in
separation,” and their communication transpires “in alterity” (271). Listeners are forced to
occupy a position of impotence in relation to the content of the programming, despite whether
they enjoy it or disapprove of it.

Within radio, in Sartre’s view, the voice undergoes refraction. On one level the radio
voice is certainly produced by and recognized as a human voice, and in its constitution the
broadcaster’s voice “is based on the reciprocity of discourse, and therefore on a human relation.”
But it also exists on another level of what Sartre calls “a reifying relation in which the voice is
given as praxis and constitutes the listener as the object of praxis” (272). The listener relates to
the radio voice as a passive object subjected to an active agent. The discourse transpires
unidirectionally. In the absence of reciprocity, the radio voice acquires the force of the
dominating ideology, immune to argument or dissent. The fact that one can turn off the radio or
change stations does not affect the radio voice, since it will continue to be heard elsewhere in a
superior relation to other listeners. In an ontological shift, now that electronic media have
become the primary means of information dissemination, when the individual turns off the radio,
the radio voice is not silenced or negated; only the self is negated “as an individual member of
the gathering” (272). After turning off the radio, the individual now exists in isolation, but the
unnamed and unseen group of listening others still remain joined in their absence. They comprise
an indirect gathering, equally impotent in their relative isolation, still held in abeyance by the
hegemonic voice.

Sartre calls the radio voice “vertiginous” and disembodied, no longer a broadcaster’s
voice but that which produces individuals and groups in isolation, holding sway over everyone
since it exists as “the social result of a political praxis” (274). Sartre therefore regards the
mediated voice with anxiety and, like critics Jameson and Foucault, sees in the institutionalized
forms of media technology the commodification and proliferation of dominant and oppressive
ideologies. The radio, in Sartre’s view, has become a coercive tool in the service of governing
powers, which use the public means of dissemination to enact an agenda of control (274-5). The
listeners forever after exist in a state divested of all agency, unable to organize with other
listeners as a collective. Their voices have been preempted by the voice of power localized
within the radio. Sartre even intimates that the voice of the radio inhabits the thinking and
behavior of the listener, since the listener becomes accustomed to responding to the voice while
in isolation. A discourse, instituted and maintained entirely by the radio voice, transpires in the
listener’s head, but without any meaningful creative or social outlet (275). In this manner Sartre
corroborates the poststructural perspective of Foucault by interpreting the loss of individual
linguistic agency within the totalizing influences of institutionalized discourse.

Given Sartre’s success with the drama in the French resistance, one might begin to
understand why he does not equate the hegemonic effect of technology with the live theatre. On
the other hand, as many critics have noted, the radio broadcast voices of Hitler and Mussolini,
which Sartre must have heard, left a lasting and chilling effect on listeners, even in Canada.⁶ In this light Sartre reflects the bleak view of media expressed in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), which describes a social milieu entirely at the mercy of power operating through media technology. The “telescreen,” present in every home, office, and public space, pretends to serve the masses through its dissemination of information, but everyone knows that its true design is to serve the “thought police,” ominous intelligence agents who use the telescreen to monitor the population. Behind the images presented, the thought police can observe while remaining unseen. As Sartre’s radio voice transmits without reciprocity, the telescreen observes without reciprocity. Given that the surveillance aspect of the telescreen has not been kept secret, but operates openly, the telescreen operates with public compliance. No real need for secrecy exists, for in its being watched, the telescreen watches others, and every trace of reciprocity and agency has been efficiently and effectively abolished. In the Orwellian world, the populace has been numbed into submission to the unlocalized other existing completely within the realm of the technological. Individuals may no longer be present to each other since they are primarily related to the absent other in the telescreen.⁷

Although Sartre’s negative view contrasts with Davidson’s positive reading of the reappropriation of media seen to occur in the work of Ginsberg and Burroughs, Sartre’s view also finds currency in contemporary criticism and practice. As discussed in chapter four, Handke’s mediated voices of the prompters in *Kaspar* attest to the supposed depersonalization of communication in a world increasingly dominated by technology. As noted earlier, Doane, Silverman, and Lawrence, while advancing the most sustained critique of the voice in


⁷ For a list of other works that reflect the surveillance culture of the Cold War, see Davidson 102.
performance criticism, adopt a feminist perspective, indebted to Lacanian psychoanalysis, that interprets the cinematic voice, either male or female, heard in voice-over, narration, or dialogue, as reproducing the patrimony of Western andro-centrism.\(^8\) Likewise Cheris Kamaarae, with her edition of essays *Technology and Women’s Voices* (1988), argues that the development of communication technologies such as amplifiers, radio, and television, worked to disenfranchise women from the public discourses on politics and gender.\(^9\) However, while these critics problematize the notion of communicative agency, they do not view technology as inherently poised against the human and the communal as does Sartre, but rather as neutral entities that tend to be co-opted by dominant ideologies. Instead, their assessment duplicates the suspicion expressed previously by Benjamin, who also felt that technologies could be exploited for negative as well as positive ends.

Jean Baudrillard vacillates between a Marxist position, similar to Sartre’s, that sees media as an instrument of ideological control, and a postmodern perspective that sees in media the devaluing of communication and meaning in favor of a celebration of contentless imagery. In the oft-cited essay “Requiem for the Media” (1971), Baudrillard calls mass media a “speech without response,” opposed to the very mediation to which it aspires since it forbids exchange (*SW* 207). Baudrillard suggests that media simply fabricate the illusion of reciprocity, and that the force of hegemonic control lies in the ability of media to maintain itself as a unilateral form of communication (*SW* 207). But whereas mass media impose a “forced silence of the masses,” however, Baudrillard also believes that the availability of media to the very same masses threatened by disenfranchisement undermines the control media tends to garner. Rather than embrace Benjamin’s modernist optimism concerning the creation of an empowered proletariat,

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\(^8\) For more on the male cast of the cinematic voice, see Bonitzer; Nichols; and Kozloff.
therefore, Baudrillard sees postmodernity erupting through the ironic and antagonistic engagement of the masses with the stultifying effects of media (SW 208).

Baudrillard polarizes two possible interpretations. Media either enact “the strategy of power,” which contributes to mystifying the masses in favor of capitalist gain, or media reflect “the strategic territory of the ruses of the masses,” which serves to frustrate the dicta of the ruling class. He tends to side with the latter, believing that “now the media are nothing else than a marvelous instrument for destabilizing the real and the true, all historical or political truth” (SW 217). Following a line of thinking reminiscent of the Frankfort school of critical theory, Baudrillard views the masses as having been afforded no concrete outlet for rebellion. The desire for free expression has likewise been perverted into a form of anarchic posturing, the only course of resistance being the destruction of meaning (SW 217). On the surface, the structures of media aim to favor the exchange of information and “to maximize speech,” but in actuality, the postmodern arena puts meaning under assault, refusing and silencing all productive discourse (SW 219). Baudrillard reiterates a pessimistic view of technology as serving to distance the speaking subject from meaningful exchange. Through technology, communication no longer transpires since impersonal electronic media replace communion with a hollow semblance of contact (RC 68). As in Sartre’s view of the radio, technology for Baudrillard denies neutrality in its relation to humanity, since its ontology cannot but interrupt the direct flow of communication that can only exist in the unmediated present.

A strain of contemporary theatre criticism echoes Baudrillard’s pessimistic perspective. Philip Auslander, in Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture (1999), contends that theatre critics Patrice Pavis and Peggy Phelan typify a negative view of mediation current in performance criticism, promoting in turn an essentialist view that only the live event can resist,
as he puts it, “the market and the media, the dominant culture they represent, and the regime of cultural production that supports them” (L 7). Acknowledging Benjamin’s view of reproduction, however, Auslander counters that much of what we consider to be live has already been infiltrated by reproduction and mediatization, and not only in a contemporary postmodern context. The entire twentieth century attests to the welcome incursion of microphones, loudspeakers, video, and audio recording into so-called “live” theatre, sporting events, concerts, and dance. The live and the mediated have by now become completely intertwined, nullifying any attempt to value, or even distinguish, one against the other (L 24).

Acknowledging such a view, Féral does not reflect the antinomy expressed by Pavis and Phelan; instead she recognizes the perceptual challenges that technology in performance offers. Echoing Baudrillard, she cautions,

More than any other visual form, the media authorize an almost absolute proximity between stage and reality. For this very reason, reality is practically abolished. . . . An enterprise that allows the media to proliferate unchecked upon the stage ends by swallowing its object, thereby substituting itself for that object. (ATMP 470)

Féral fears that both the human subject and an objective reality may be lost altogether were media allowed to consume and dominate the performative arena. She also unwittingly echoes Foucault’s poststructuralism, which strips the speaking subject of agency within institutionalized discourse. But rather than submit to the dread attendant in Baudrillard, and the nihilism which has been accorded Foucault, Féral remains hopeful, asserting that the unified performer on stage integrates the elements of technologized performance into a comprehensible whole. She fails to address, however, the issues of TV and the movies, two unchecked media multiplying without the unifying presence of the live performer (just as she neglects to clarify why media present visual forms, and not aural as well).

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10 See Pavis, TCC 99-135; and Phelan, 146-9. See also Auslander, Liveness 38-54.
Auslander provides a response, stating, “I doubt very strongly that any cultural discourse can actually stand outside the ideologies of capital and reproduction that define a mediatized culture or should be expected to do so, even to assume an oppositional stance” (40). Therefore, rather than view the live and the mediated as oppositional, or the technological in constant need of human discipline, Auslander argues that the only productive response considers the live and the mediated as dependent upon and informing one another according to specific cultural contexts (54). Ironically, then, we find ourselves back where we started, with Heidegger’s view of technology as ontologically bound with human being. What remains to be considered, however, is whether the technological--and not Féral’s view of the live with the technological--can actually serve to return the sense of agency and intentionality perceived to be lost within postmodernity. For even Auslander, despite his welcome realignment of perspective in terms of the live and the mediated, still tends to view the notions of an empirical reality and of a unified subject embraced in modernity as ungrounded and adrift in the commodification of the postmodern age.

Matthew Causey, in his article “Televisual Performance: ‘openness to the mystery,’” (1994) counters the negativity of Sartre and Baudrillard by questioning whether Heidegger’s definition of the essence of technology as an act of bringing forth and revealing might indeed apply to a postmodern era “wherein critique and transgression are voided in a hyper-commodification, where unconcealment would be impossible” (69). Causey on one hand challenges the Heideggerian concept of *logos* that believes itself capable of revealing anything prior to the equivocal constructs of language, agreeing that the incursion of the technological into the performative indicates a postmodern transformation of the means by which we “represent and look at narrativity, subjectivity, and spatial and temporal things” (65). Yet, as though in
response to Auslander, he also wonders whether the ramifications that such a transformation holds for our systems of thought, instead of hearkening back to traditional and modernist epistemologies, actually look forward to profound and as yet unrealized revelations promised by Heidegger.

Causey does not venture an answer, but rather supplies the observation that the performative strategies of such techno-savvy and postmodern artists as Laurie Anderson and the Wooster Group manipulate technology in such a way that their presence is made palpable in both live and mediated forms. Their work, in Causey’s view, can be characterized as enacting a “telepresence,” which he defines as a secondary presence at a distance, or a presence in two simultaneous locations (65). In their work the live can no longer stake out a privileged position, but rather “the videated image, being alterable, contains the ability to oscillate realities within the technological,” and the mediated therefore stands to advantage over the live (69). The performed subject transforms--for the positive--in the performative realm of the technological.

Causey leaves open a consideration of the degree to which such a postmodern transformation can find meaning within our contemporary cultural context, besides simply challenging traditional conceptions of knowing and being. But Causey’s query serves to focus attention on the critical issue of the constitution of the sights and sounds encountered in performative technologies, and their relevance for the contemporary social context. In light of the theorists discussed above, presence remains an equivocal issue, especially in the absence of the live performer. What actually becomes present, therefore, in media technologies? Likewise the issue of the ontology of Sartre’s technologized Other remains unresolved. Do technologies simply and easily co-opt the live speaking subject in service to the hegemonic? Since the responses from the philosophies of technology and performance criticism stand at odds, for
another perspective I turn to the theories of acoustic space and secondary orality offered by Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong. These theories propose that technology as a medium does not so much alter the means of presentation, or even alter the medium’s content; rather they propose that technology actually alters our abilities of perception and cognition. Of direct relevance to the scope of this study, McLuhan and Ong argue that as we attend to technology, we engage a type of listening that approximates in various manners the listening to the voice once embraced in ancient, oral traditions.

**The Voice as Medium**

With *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan stimulated an intellectual field of inquiry into the ways in which human beings perceive and comprehend through, and are consequently cognitively shaped by, the technologies of speech, writing, print, and electronic media. Taking a cue from Aristotle’s view of spoken words acting as the symbols of mental experience, and written words acting as the symbols of spoken words, McLuhan postulates that all new media have prior media as their content. By extension, the computer has the television and typewriter as its content, the television has film and theatre as its content, the typewriter has print-setting and writing as its content, and so on. McLuhan deliberately chooses the word “content,” and not “model” or “basis,” for in his view, media do not primarily present a *substance* so much as reify the *forms* of older technologies. As we attend to new media, we do not necessarily attend to new content, since content--that is, the thoughts, ideas, and “metal experiences” identified by Aristotle--stays relatively the same through subsequent media. Rather, as we attend to new media, we attend to how their forms differ from, alter, and integrate previous forms, particularly in the manner in which they play
upon our perceptions and capitalize upon differing sensory stimuli. In other words, the content stays the same; how we perceive it and handle it, on the other hand, changes.

When McLuhan phrased his famous dictum, “the medium is the message,” he was emphasizing that the importance of media lay in its potential to shape consciousness. As psychology and neurology demonstrate, consciousness to some degree stems from an awareness of the information supplied by the senses of sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing. Differing communication technologies like the telephone and microscope act as extensions to differing senses, just as technology in general acts as an extension of the physical body into the environment. Yet McLuhan believes that through a medium’s emphasis of a particular sense, it alters the balance of sensory awareness, and likewise alters the conscious ability to rationally interpret the life-world. As McLuhan clarifies, “What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns [of media] as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (UM 24). McLuhan therefore approaches the empirical and structuralist perspective that posits the existence of an a priori objective reality, the perception of which becomes greatly conditioned by our linguistic, and in McLuhan’s case, technological, systems.

In answer to Causey, then, McLuhan offers that technology makes present not so much a change in content as much as a change in our own manner of viewing the world and our social milieu. This is not to say that advanced technologies promise the modernist fulfillment of an empirical grasp of reality, rather that advanced technologies offer revelations of new interpretations of reality, however contingent upon linguistic media. Looking back, McLuhan notices that as differing eras relied upon differing media technology to communicate and share
information, such as through speech, print, or electronics, those ages likewise became marked by the cognitive and perceptual changes that their technologies introduced. Therefore, as evolving media technologies shape and take hold within our contemporary culture, we should expect new perceptual realities to challenge our recently held evaluations of the modern era and the transitional postmodern moment.

Furthermore, an argument crucial to the scope of this study posits that a trace of the voice exists in all communication technologies. Accepting McLuhan’s postulates that all subsequent media have previous media as their content, and the first medium of human communication was the voice, it follows that the voice permeates all of our communication media, from writing to TV to the computer. Likewise, a trace of the voice should be found to exist in all future media as well.

McLuhan’s theories did not surface in a vacuum. Long before psychology in the nineteenth century brought to light the debt human consciousness owes to the senses, Aristotle had contemplated the relative merits of each sense, concluding that “above all we value sight . . . because sight is the principle source of knowledge and reveals many differences between one subject and another.”\(^\text{11}\) Aristotle’s evaluation receives great validation from the empirical sciences with their reliance upon visually oriented meters and gauges, designed to give optical proof of phenomena, even the phenomenon of sound, as evidenced in devices used to picture invisible sound waves. But a strain of recent theorizing questions whether the visualist orientation in Western thought should be afforded pride of place over the orientation of other senses. Such theorizing follows Ong’s research in orality.

\(^{11}\) *Metaphysics* 51, qtd. in Ihde 7.
Ong credits Milman Perry with the discovery, outlined in Perry’s doctoral dissertation of 1928, that “virtually every distinctive feature of Homeric poetry is due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition,” including plot structure, characterization, and rhyme scheme, as well as descriptive and stylistic tropes (OL 21). Elaborating upon Perry, Ong interprets orality as imposing total sensory and noetic structures upon pre-scriptural societies that are completely foreign and lost to those of us who have been living under the dominant structures afforded by typography and vision. These later structures have been evident certainly since the invention of the printing press, but probably since the alphabet introduced noetic changes upon Socratic thought, perceptible in Aristotle’s observation about sight. Two decades after Perry, Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) attempted to integrate the entire body as an instrument of perception and reclaim the role of the senses neglected by the emphasis on vision in Western thought. As he states,

> Synaesthete perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and, generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what we are to see, hear, and feel. (229)

For Merleau-Ponty, science bases its knowledge on what may be perceived optically, and Western society follows the sciences’ lead. Likewise, in his eloquent meditation on the role of speech, *Speaking (La Parole)* (1952), Georges Gusdorf posits that the inventions of writing and the printing press introduced radical alterations of the human systems of knowledge. Gone was the age of oratory, spiritualism, and custom, replaced instead with measurement, industry, and the “authority of the letter” (108, 111, 113).

Yet in contemporary thought, critics who attend to the ear, like Ong, Merleau-Ponty, and Gusdorf, have been overshadowed by those who attend to the eye. As the recent vogue for poststructuralism demonstrates, the voice and systems of thought indebted to phonologism have
been negated in favor of critical approaches that foreground the visualist notions of the *arche-writing* and prior *inscriptions* detected in all verbal utterance. Derrida’s critique of the voice equates speech with writing, as though both function according to similar structural rules. Indeed, both structuralism and poststructuralism attempt to subjugate the phonic and nongrammatical aspects of *la parole* to the written and codified dictates of *la langue* (see chapter four). Their approaches attempt to make speech visible, just as the semiotic concept of the “linguistic sign” finds its basis in what can be seen. As an end result, the voice falls into disrepute in contemporary theory, just as it falls from the purview of theatre scholars. As an alternative, the media theories of McLuhan and Ong refute the dominance of writing and the eye in the formulation of Western epistemologies, and look towards oral systems of knowledge and communication, and by extension the voice, as better suited to negotiate the relationship of human beings with their environments.

McLuhan argues that before writing, pre-literate peoples understood their environment through the conglomeration of all their senses, a total sensorium of what he labeled *acoustic space*. Acoustic space differs from the *visual space* of typography and sight by attending to the omnidirectional flow of perceptual events, be they by sight, taste, smell, touch, or hearing. The analogy stems from the observation that sound waves travel in all directions whereas light is unidirectional. Acoustic space, of which vision is but one component, remains open to a greater wealth of sensory information, but it also engages all of the perceptual potential of the human organism. The term acoustic space refers on one hand to the surroundability and penetrability of sound, but it also pays homage to the fundamental means by which we as social animals make sense of our environment: through language which is experienced primarily by audible speech. Based in the voice, the first order of expression for acoustic sensibilities therefore finds its form
in orality. As early humans cognitively extended themselves into the environment, McLuhan argues, “the mind’s ear gradually dominated the mind’s eye,” and knowledge became stored and expressed in speech. Peoples dwelling within acoustic space developed noetic systems relying upon what they could remember and retell, rather than upon visual proofs of observation and measurement (GV 56). These acoustically oriented systems provided the epistemologies that consequently gave shape to the oral, and phonological, traditions.

McLuhan’s theory finds corroboration in paleoanthropological theories that see vocal language as erupting from the need for human beings to respond to all of the physical variables of the environment (see chapter two). Likewise, Ong believes that spoken language as a conduit of knowledge appeals to pre-scriptural peoples as a “way of life.” Accordingly, in his view, in oral societies one does not sign contracts but takes oaths; one swears and gives one’s word as a bond; and above all one does not lie. Identity and the spoken word are intimately bound, just as the timbre of the voice identifies the owner of a voice. Members of oral cultures therefore perceive the spoken word as it has been defined in phenomenology: as a living entity, as an extension of the self, and as an action that occurs as an event, emerging from within the living organism and penetrating the interior of another (OL 24). Spoken words, contrary to the visualism of Aristotle’s thought, are not simply the symbols of mental experience, but a mode of action, an ongoing part of ongoing existence. In Ong’s words, “Oral utterance thus encourages a sense of continuity with life, a sense of participation” (IW 21).

In oral societies, the development of the voice plays a crucial role in one’s personal growth, and the centrality of the discipline of rhetoric in ancient social discourse becomes more comprehensible. Within oral traditions, individuals are still immature and do not become whole persons until they learn to speak, as evidenced by the Latin roots of the word “infant”: in fans
means *not speaking* (*IW* 23). One cannot know anything until one has laid hold of facts with the voice, as revealed by a competence of speech. Individuals enter into full existence when they enter into conversation with each other and share a communal interpretation of the world, brought about by the unity of language, which ravels together the speaker, the auditor, and the subject matter into a kind of whole (*IW* 282). As Don Ihde points out, the English word “person” descends from the Latin “persona,” designating the stage mask worn by actors, meaning that identity was once comprehended *per sona* or *by sound*, not by sight (15). Oral cultures are therefore marked by unity, and participate in an “open system paradigm” of information exchange, which Ong characterizes as “interactional, transactional, developmental, [and] process-oriented” (*IW* 312, 329). In oral cultures, a response always greets the voice, and participants are kept open to discontinuities and mysteries, being rooted in tradition, not the empiricism of visual space.

Likewise the phono-logocentric tradition of Western philosophy follows from the oral sensibilities reflected in pre-Socratic thought, wherein authority was invested in the voice. But by foregrounding orality as the first epistemological system, McLuhan and Ong do not argue that orality somehow accesses an ideal realm of truth implicit in the logocentrism indebted to Heraclitus and Plato. McLuhan and Ong’s studies serve to clarify a proposition articulated by Nietzsche at the close of the nineteenth century, that Western society has more than one means to interpret the world, the cosmos, and the interior spaces of the psyche, besides the means imposed by Western sciences and philosophies. On the other hand, McLuhan and Ong certainly may be challenged for placing greater value on the oral over the visual. Both support their position from a rather Romantic supposition that the integration of all the senses, rather than a reliance on one, enhances a fuller engagement with the natural order, however arbitrated by language.
Nonetheless, in this respect their thinking finds validation in paleoanthropological theories that interpret the human psyche as evolving within a balance of biology, community, and language. By tracing the effects of scripturalism on Western society, McLuhan and Ong note the incursion of the mediated uses of language on the biological (sensory), and by extension on the social. In other words, McLuhan and Ong note that as differing media emphasize differing senses, concomitant changes take place in perception (the biological), and likewise in the interpretation of perception and outward manifestation (the social).

Ong looks to Eric Havelock’s *Preface to Plato* (1963) as pointing out that the introduction of writing, and particularly the invention of the alphabet, caused a momentous epistemological shift. Whereas Socrates and Plato lived in an overwhelmingly oral culture, the growing influence of alphabetical writing impressed upon them the ability to fix, categorize and analyze knowledge. The text could codify reality in a “closed system” paradigm in a seemingly impermeable fashion that speech could not dislodge. Although favoring writing, Plato in *Phaedrus* professes a preference for speech simply because he observed that textually bound reality appeared somewhat repugnant and foreign, alienated as it was from lived experience.12 On the other hand, in *The Republic* Plato expresses his disdain for the poet and the actor, aware that the oral transmission of fictions held the potential to carry away an audience in flights of dangerous imaginary whimsy (Bruns 116). The ambivalence of his thought reflects the schism writing had introduced.13

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12 See also Ong, *IW* 278-9, 282; and Havelock, *PP* 197-233.

13 For a differing view on Plato and writing, see Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination*, particularly 149: “The conclusion of *Phaedrus* is less a condemnation of writing in the name of present speech than a preference for one sort of writing over another, for the fertile trace over the sterile trace, for a seed that engenders because it is planted inside over a seed scattered wastefully outside: at the risk of dissemination.”

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Martin Jay, in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993), faults Ong for not recognizing that the Greeks were highly visual in their orientation as opposed to oral/aural (22-3). But Jay misses the specific focus of Ong’s hypothesis. Of course the Greeks had a highly developed visual sense of aesthetics, as represented in their sculpture and architecture, but theirs was a culture caught within the transition from an oral to scriptural form of information sharing, as evidenced by two examples relevant to the voice. In the first, noted by Bert States, the Greek drama was evolving from a purely vocal form of delivery patterned on the tradition of epic recitation, to a textual base in which the large chorus of fifty could now be fractured into separate characters and definite points of view. A once solely vocal and lyrical form was now incorporating visual gesture and movement, actions that could be presented and read, not simply spoken or sung (142). In the second, the Sophists were threatening to derail the philosophically orthodox task of elucidating truth through discourse by co-opting discourse in the service of personal gain. Truth as a rhetorical pursuit was threatened by the very relative discursiveness of orality. In the end, Plato’s textual perspective would ensure the place of orthodoxy, at least until the time of Nietzsche, by replacing the voice with the alphabet.14

McLuhan and Ong believe that with the introduction and adoption of writing six thousand years ago, and later print in the Renaissance, the West became conditioned by the visual and linear ontology of the alphabet, and gradually came to understand itself through the limited scope of visual space. Our Western languages reflect the notion of history as something that occurs upon a linear time line and we “see” ideas, for example. The greatest detriment of the

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14 Julian Jaynes argues that the tension between writing and orality may be best noted in the Old Testament, wherein the imposition of written law can be seen to gradually transplant the oral traditions of prophecy. See Jaynes 293-313.
alphabet has been its prioritizing of the visual, and visual organizations of reality, over the other senses and their workings. As McLuhan notes, “The fact has nothing to do with the content of the alphabetized words; it is the result of the sudden breach between the auditory and visual experience of man” (UM 86). McLuhan sees in the dependence upon the alphabet and linear writing an ordering of the individual psyche that suffers from a disunity of sensory perception, an ordering that has a social corollary in the disunity of the individual from society. As an example, McLuhan believes that the Enlightenment ontologies of individualism and nationalism were made possible by a printing press that was able to distinguish the person from the group, as well as bind a people by the canonization of their own language (UM 34). The individual, civilized human being was no longer defined by the workings of family, tribe and community, but on the self and the State. A proof of this argument lies in the opposite view towards Asian societies that, however developed in a modern sense, still maintain a social cohesion lost in the West as a result of their adoption of ideograms (or thought-pictures) as forms of writing. McLuhan states,

The fact that this does not happen in cultures such as the Chinese, which use nonphonetic scripts, enables them to retain a rich state of inclusive perception in depth of experience that tends to become eroded in civilized cultures of the phonetic alphabet. For the ideogram is an inclusive gestalt, not an analytic dissociation of sense and functions like phonetic writing. (UM 87)

Cultures without writing or cultures under the epistemological domains of ideograms exist in a magical and traditional world, open to the input of all the senses, whereas the alphabet thrusts people into a neutral, visual world.15

In a similar vein as McLuhan, Ong traces the effects of writing on Western sensibilities and offers pertinent observations on the use-value of the voice in theatre and performance. From

15 If McLuhan is right, with the proliferation of the computer, given its attendant reliance on an alphabetic keyboard (even for the transliteration of ideograms), then Asian societies will soon suffer the effects of visual space to some degree. As an example, educated Chinese must learn Pinyin, or the Roman alphabetized version of Mandarin characters, in order to use computers.
classical times down through the Renaissance, Western cultures began a slow transition from orality to scripturalism, and the voice would no longer be heard so much as read. Throughout the Middle Ages, Ong observes, written texts from stories to sermons were meant for public recitation. The practice of oral recitation would continue right up to the time of radio and television, as reading aloud in a family environment was a common pastime (OL 157). But after the Renaissance, public performances became less participatory and quieter as solitary reading overtook oral information exchange (IW 277). As an example, Voltaire’s attempts to reform the French theatre intended to convert an unruly social event into a controlled staged event. Paris in 1720 saw a royal decree addressing disruptive behavior, followed by bans on whistling. In 1759 the stage was finally cleared of spectators, and the 1760s saw a push to seat the parterre, or the standing, moving, talking, and eating groundlings (Howarth 412, 584, 586-7). Houselights were dimmed to focus attention on the stage, not the audience. Improvisation gave way to text, and tight narrative structures with carefully outlined plots replaced quick episodic structures, as witnessed by the slow demise of the theatres dedicated to the commedia dell’arte, particularly after the careers of Gozzi and Goldoni (IW 89).

Since Shakespeare navigated the transition brought about by the printing press, Ong believes his highly literate works, which borrow from other printed texts in circulation, also betray a noticeable residue of oral and rhetorical tropes. Ong argues that Shakespeare’s quotability stems from his texts consisting of so many appropriated quotes, designed for the easy recall of orally transmitted information (IW 48, 186). Eventually, however, the Romantic era witnessed the complete division between the voice and print. The printed word finally had become separated from lived reality, and art no longer imitated nature, but replaced it in a transition from mimesis to poesis. Unsurprisingly, the Romantic age for the first time noticed
nature as something separate from human experience and as an ideal worthy of emulation. By the
nineteenth century, the text and the director had come to dominate theatre practice, thereby
initiating the modern era with its “closed system” modes of thinking (IW 331). Dramaturgy
likewise surfaces as a practice, as directors and theorists from Lessing and Goethe to Wagner,
Saxe-Meiningen, and Stanislavski, attempted to codify the operations of the stage.

With the advent of electronic media in the past century and a half, from the telegraph up
to the computer, however, the dominance of visual space upon Western society has weakened.
Whereas writing and print conditioned a linear evaluation of reality, electronic media now
provide a “concentric” intuition of the environment, making possible what McLuhan terms the
“striking and iconoclastic” art forms of Paul Klee, Picasso, Braque, Eisenstein, the Marx
and the Experience of Radio” concurs, believing that “Like Samuel Beckett with the tape
recorder or William Butler Yeats with radio, Joyce was attuned to the technologies around him.
First in Ulysses and then in Finnegans Wake he reformulated the language of advertising and
the structure of technology and reset them in an older form, the novel” (18). Ong agrees,
believing that the influence of electronic media prepared the way for the drama of Pirandello, the
theatre of the absurd, and later the American radical theatres, which collapsed the boundaries of
performance, broke with notions of linear time and an adherence to the sanctity of the text, and
ended the scripturalist practice of isolating and codifying the parameters of reality (IW 312-3). In
a reversal of the historical trend, a favored mode of late twentieth-century performance invites
audience participation, and thereby hearkens back to a pre-scriptural, oral, and dialogical
theatrical experience.
I would add at this point that the influence of electronic media also made possible McLuhan and Ong’s theories of orality and acoustic space, since only in the twentieth century, with the notable exception of Nietzsche, have critics become aware of the previous reliance on writing and print. Likewise a theorist like Merleau-Ponty would have intuited the alterations already registered in the arts in his call for an appreciation for synesthetic sensibilities. Like him, particularly in terms of the uncanny operation of language and the arts as a revealing, Heidegger anticipated the rupture between acoustic and visual space, which unsurprisingly may account for his resurfacing in Causey’s contemporary theorizing, and finding reflection also in Féral and Pontbriand’s early criticism of postmodern theatre. For as was discussed in chapter three, Heidegger’s concern with language resists classification within traditional Western philosophical discourses as well as in positivism and structuralism, both of which Gerald Bruns situates within the Enlightenment “ideology of transparency” that attempts to make language clear and comprehensible (54). For according to Heidegger, “Language speaks” (PLT 197), meaning that something about the constitution and sounding of language exceed the intention of the speaker and the significative properties of phonation. Language slips; language makes available the hearing of other words and meanings; language leaves impressions that its words cannot account for. And these impressions do not register in the eye, which in the visualist tradition looks for definition and clarity, but in the ear and in the interior chambers of the one who listens, even in the one who reads, which is a form of sounding words to one’s self. As Bruns interprets

16 See Féral and Pontbriand’s 1982 publications in Modern Drama 25, no. 1; see also the discussion of these essays in chapter 3.

17 See Stewart for the hypothesis that in the process of silent reading, the anatomical properties of speech are put in motion.
Heidegger, “We need to situate ourselves dialogically with the text rather than analytically against it, in the mode of listening rather than reading” (68).

In this light, Heidegger’s “destruction” of the Western philosophical heritage simply reflects a call to stop looking and to start listening. Heidegger echoes Nietzsche who characterized modernity as resulting from the “stylistic opposition” between the acoustically oriented “Dionysiac poetry of the chorus” and the visually oriented “Apollonian dream world of the scene” (BT 58). After Socrates, the Western philosophic tradition followed the ocular Apollonian orientation, which attempts to harness and codify the cosmic mysteries, whereas the pre-Socratics enjoyed a richer engagement with the cosmos given their Dionysian appreciation for the aural. Granted, the two perspectives represent two differing ways of organizing the world, but McLuhan and Ong posit that the acoustic offers greater perceptual depth and possibility.

Situated within an ocular orientation, however, the traditions of the philosophies and sciences have not been poised to comprehend Heidegger, and the visualist cast of structuralism and poststructuralism superceded his thought. Nonetheless, the imposition of acoustic space would continue to exert pressure on Western noetics, and fissures would soon become evident. In one example, the imposition of acoustic space may explain the recent turn to chaos theory in literary studies (as well as in economics and psychology) as a welcome alternative to the nihilism afforded by critical theories based in deconstruction. Likewise in the theatre, Causey points to an experience of technology that resists a visualist reading because of its beckoning of the acoustic sensibility, and he looks to Heidegger to offer an explanation. His linking of Heidegger with the postmodern complements a strain of contemporary thought that views Nietzsche and Heidegger as outlining the precepts for postmodernity, not Derrida and Baudrillard.  

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18 See, for example, Gregory Bruce Smith.
In similar fashion, McLuhan posits that much of what we perceive to be the transition of a modern to postmodern society is in essence our experience of the effects of acoustic space reasserting itself into our consciousness through electronic media. Therefore, rather than a product of the failings of the modernist endeavor to create a temporal utopia based upon universally heralded conceptions of truth, justice, and individual sovereignty, postmodernism simply expresses the epistemological schism resulting from the imposition of acoustic space upon the stranglehold of visual space and scripturalism, firmly embedded in Western philosophy since Plato and Aristotle (GV 14). Whereas, in the semiotic tradition, Derrida interprets all verbal expression as infused with an arché-writing that precedes articulation, McLuhan, like Heidegger, characterizes the writing of visual space as having attempted to infiltrate and transplant all traces of orality. Prior to 1967, McLuhan had already anticipated and refuted Derrida’s contention that speech was not superior to writing based on its assumed metaphysical association with truth, arguing instead that while Western thought believed it exalted speech, in reality it was slavishly bound to the alphabet and its written, visual epistemology. Indebted to the scripturalism of visual space, however, Western philosophy was more disposed to accept the deconstruction of Derrida, while McLuhan’s thought was relegated to the emergent yet second-class status of media studies, where it still slumbers. Likewise the voice slips from contemporary theatre criticism because the idea of its permanence negates the graphocentrism of both the Western academic heritage and the recent poststructural cast of theatre criticism.

Ong concurs, arguing that Saussure and the structuralists mistakenly attempt to account for the oral nature of language through analytical strategies based upon linearity and writing, strategies indebted to the eye and not the ear. In Ong’s view, the denigration of the voice espoused by poststructuralism reflects the inevitable result of epistemologies that disregard the
role of orality in the constitution of human knowledge and communication. Ong reaches a similar assessment of structural thought as McLuhan, believing it naive in assuming that language could be represented as a closed system and perfectly consistent with itself. He faults structuralism for exhibiting no awareness of the “phenomenology of orality” and of “the ways in which chirographic and typographic thought processes and discourse have grown out of and away from oral noetics” (OL 169, IW 310). Ong, like McLuhan, accuses scripturalism of helping to bring about a “certain kind of alienation within the human lifeworld” and “creating new interior distances within the psyche” (IW 17), characteristics commonly thought representative of the postmodern condition, and presaged in the work of Beckett and Burroughs.

With his 1974 text The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau emerged as an adamant critic of the scripturalist enterprise in general, and by inference its confluence into poststructural thought. He thereby follows Merleau-Ponty in attempting to restore a sensual engagement of the human body with its known reality, and he reintroduces the phenomenology of embodiment into continental thought. De Certeau characterizes the visualist Western tradition as an “epic of the eye” that produces modern society as a “text” in the name of progress, dedicated to ridding the world of ambiguities and mysteries through scripturalism. He echoes the sentiments of Nietzsche, Heidegger, McLuhan, and Ong, believing that the human psyche and human society have suffered the loss of a wealth of potential perceptual awareness. As he puts it, “The ‘scriptural’ is that which separates itself from the magical world of voices and tradition. . . . There is a disappearance of the places established by a spoken word, a loss of the identities that people believed when they received from a spoken word” (134, 137).

De Certeau’s project invigorates an undercurrent of thought that aims to restore orality and the voice as potential contributors to contemporary epistemologies. Having coined the oft-
quoted phrase “scriptural economy” to describe in shorthand the limited scope of Western visualist society, de Certeau considers the voice a significant threat to the tenuous balance of power wielded by writing. Whereas poststructuralist thought first reveled in the discovery that a deconstruction of the phonologic tradition revealed the hegemonic and totalizing effects of discourse, de Certeau challenges the false, deconstructive focus on arche-writing as the end of the philosophic endeavor. He writes, “In scriptural economies the voice resurfaces as a threat (from the savage, the madman, the child, even woman). The place from which we speak is outside the scriptural enterprise” (158). In de Certeau’s view, the voice, like Saussure’s la parole, has been excluded from the sciences in favor of a view towards the supremacy of la langue and its written equivalent (158). Like media theorists and speech act theorists wary of the semiotic enterprise, he believes that the reduction of all expression to a system of signs is impossible, and that writing can never stand in the place of the spoken word (161-2).

Contemporary language philosopher Stephen A. Tyler likewise sees a shortcoming of semiotics in its attempt to make all aspects of language visible. In The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World (1983) he writes, “‘Sound image,’ this oxymoron, with its confusion of the oral and the visual, tells the whole tale of linguistics, of its desire to transform the oral into the visual and the resistance of the oral residue to its reduction to writing, to speech made visible by marks” (29). Tyler interprets postmodernism in a vein similar to McLuhan, as a clash between oral and visual sensibilities, and he holds out the belief that the supremacy of writing will give way to “the restoration and recuperation of the commonsense world incarnated for us not in language or representation but in speech and communication in the carnival of the mundane and quotidian talk of everyday life” (xi-xii). Tyler notes that oral discourse has no grammatical conventions, and therefore cannot submit to a transcription into
writing for analysis (104-6). Roland Barthes agrees, noting, “there exists no locutive grammar,” meaning that speech does not obey any consistent rule like writing is supposed to (PT 50). The voice and speech occupy their own ontological berth, and must be understood according to the nature of their being.

The present era witnesses the reversal of visualist trends, as it begins to free itself with the acoustic sensibilities of technologized media. McLuhan and Ong look to emergent electronic media as enacting a recuperation of orality--what they call secondary orality--over the dominance that writing and print have held in the West for the past two thousand years. Yet they acknowledge that today the return to a completely pre-literate, oral cultural awareness is of course impossible, given the evolution of communication technology. But their theory of acoustic space still promises a reconstitution of a mode of being in which operates a fullness, not a fragmenting, of sensual perception. Acoustic space describes not only the world of orality, but may signify the world of the post-alphabetic cultures of technology, already manifest in the mediatized postmodern performances of the Wooster Group and Laurie Anderson, and recognized by Causey and Féral. On the other hand, media critic Paul Levinson believes that secondary orality may be anticipated best in the on-line capabilities of the computer, for in the computer, “information emerges not from fixed positions but anywhere and everywhere. It is the world of music, myth, total immersion” (45).

Using McLuhan as a springboard, Levinson formulated what he calls the “anthropotropic” theory of media evolution, which interprets media as evolving within a Darwinian model of selection. Media develops in response to our collective desire to “extend our communications beyond the biological boundaries of naked seeing and hearing,” while at the same time reappropriating elements of communication that were lost or diminished in earlier
technological advances (52). In other words, Levinson posits that through our technologies we attempt to register the full presence of the voice and the speaking subject. In this light the quick transition from the telegraph to the radio to the television follows the reintegration first of the ear and then the eye in a technological medium (tele-graph) that first duplicated writing. Levinson’s theory elaborates McLuhan’s belief that contemporary humans aim to recover dimensions of primary orality that they once inhabited before the advent of the alphabet, since the limited media of writing, radio, and TV present impoverished images compared to synesthetic experience. What the electronic media of the radio and TV still lack, for example, is the immediate response or reciprocity of the audience. Levinson believes that the on-line capabilities of the computer have the potential to introduce a synesthetic realm that restores a sense of immediacy and full sensory engagement lost in other technologies. I would add, after Heidegger, that an even greater attraction lies in the promise that the computer offers a richer sensory engagement than the non-technologized body can access, both in reality and especially in the new frontier of cyberspace.

Levinson elaborates that the computer distinguishes itself from the TV in that user has the ability to respond to the flow of information through E-mail, chat-rooms, bulletin boards, and the creation of web-pages. At the present rate of expansion, very soon the “videophone,” a staple of news broadcasts from the 2001-2002 United States war on terrorism, will be a commonplace domestic feature, just as teleconferences figure into those corporate boardrooms willing to pay for the technology. Countering Sartre’s critique of the radio, Levinson argues that the computer offers reciprocation, and therefore erases the alterity Sartre saw in technology. Still, as McLuhan and Ong attest, a drawback still exists in that the secondary orality of technology cannot completely duplicate the primary orality of pre-scriptural societies given the very presence of
technological media. Whereas the computer appears to reappropriate senses and abilities lost in TV, radio, and telephone, it still follows a linear orientation in that the user and programmer are bound to the alphabetic keyboard and the visual monitor, despite the addition of speakers and the physical sensations provided by virtual reality headgears and operator pilot seats. Secondary orality at the moment still inhibits to some degree the immediacy of the live and the full presence of the other, and accepts a trace of visual space.

Nonetheless, McLuhan’s arguments serve to point out that as the computer continues to be integrated into our social fabric, we should anticipate seismic changes in the way we think, perceive, and express ourselves, just as we can see in hindsight that the integration of writing, print, and the TV have in their own way greatly altered human noetic systems, and not necessarily to the detriment of the human community. In this sense, McLuhan supports Heidegger’s belief that technology has the capacity to reveal human truths hitherto unknown. In answer to Causey, the revelations and changes we might already witness in technologized postmodern performance could signal a cognitive intuition of reality that resembles, though certainly does not duplicate, that of pre-scriptural peoples reliant upon long lost oral and synesthetic modes of communication and intuition.19

Stephen Speilberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) intimates such a future reordering of thought and experience. In the story, told in visual, linear fashion, extra-terrestrial aliens have learned how to travel outside of the confines of time and how to communicate with humans, not through verbal language, but through the manifestation of visions and tonal patterns. Notably, some humans, like children and misfits such as the character Richard Dreyfus plays, have the capacity to intuit this non-verbal communication, but others, particularly the scientists,

19 A comparison to another essay by Causey, “The Screen Test of the Double,” reveals that Causey’s thinking still prioritizes the visual over the acoustic.
do not. Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) outdoes Speilberg by presenting a non-verbal interaction between humans and extra-terrestrials without a reliance on a linear narrative. Instead, the end of *2001* spins off into an aural and visual collage of disassociated images and sounds, literally replicating a breakdown in visual space in favor of an experience of acoustic space. *Close Encounters* stages the kind of listening Heidegger advocates; *2001* actually forces it.

Possibly with the advent of interactive performances on-line and in new virtual spaces, such Heideggerian changes in sensory perception indicated in forms of technologized performance will take place, and the collision of rapidly advancing technologies may bring these changes more to our attention. The on-line user-performer-audience might eventually recognize the difference between visual and acoustic space, and learn to appreciate the ways in which differing media expand the experience of self, other, and environment. Until now, the postmodern stage has signaled that changes have been underway. With the proliferation of cyber technology, we may witness an epistemological revolution in which the acoustic and synesthetic become a way of life, fulfilling Gusdorf’s prophetic anticipation of the day in which “learning how to read and write is no longer necessary” (116). Most important, such a way of life will depend upon our ability to register the voice in our speaking, listening, and evolving forms of communication.

**Conclusion**

This chapter addresses the problem of the perceived fracture of the human speaking subject in the technological realm of postmodernity, and the negligence of the voice found in contemporary theatre criticism. First, drawing upon the theories of acoustic space and secondary orality advanced by McLuhan and Ong, this chapter offers an alternate reading of technologized
performance iterated in the performance criticism found in film, theatre, and media studies. Second, this chapter also offers an explanation for why the voice falls from the purview of theatre critics, who, like their colleagues in music, could be thought to have some investment in the voice, despite the recent vogue for poststructuralism--and its deconstruction of the voice--in theatre criticism.

Given that the early communication technologies of radio, telephone, and sound synchronized film were viewed, and continue to be viewed, as momentous enhancements to twentieth-century life, the voice in technology garners much more attention in film and media studies than it does in any other academic discipline. As this chapter demonstrates, the consideration of the voice in film and media studies tends to corroborate the influential theories formulated by four recognized philosophers and critics, Heidegger, Benjamin, Sartre, and Baudrillard. Even though Heidegger, Benjamin, and Sartre were writing from particularly modernist positions, their work anticipates in various ways critical views of postmodernity and postmodern performance, and not just the passive and hopeless attitude expressed by Baudrillard. From one perspective, Heidegger and Benjamin embrace positive perspectives on technology--Heidegger’s in keeping with his existential phenomenology of language as a revealing, and Benjamin from a Brechtian perspective that sees technology as potentially beneficent for its political uses. Sartre and Baudrillard, on the other hand, offer negative assessments. Sartre regards the radio with apprehension, viewing it as a tool for hegemonic forces. Baudrillard concurs, but he believes that the hyper-commodification of the postmodern era has blurred the distinctions between the real and the manufactured, disabling the public of any purposeful engagement.
Like the criticism in film and media studies, theatre criticism of technologized performance, even postmodern technologized performance, tends to find validation in the theories provided by the philosophies of technology. In keeping with the trend of contemporary theatre criticism, however, the voice does not figure in the analysis. Only by inference may the voice find validation in the modernist discourses reflected by Esslin and Morris, who tend to support a phonologic interpretation of the voice in mediated performance, reflecting the theories of Heidegger. The issue of the voice in postmodern performance becomes problematized, however, given the conflicting interpretations of technology in postmodernity. In one respect, critics like Pavis and Phelan, like Sartre, favor a nostalgic view of performance occurring as a live event with the immediate reciprocity of a live audience. On another, Pontbriand, drawing upon Benjamin, sees performance as potentially liberating in its effecting critical distance. Lastly, however, Auslander, echoing Baudrillard (though not with the same degree of passivity and apprehension), sees the mediated and the live as so entangled that a distinction between the two becomes impossible. In light of the differing assessments, how to justify the agency of the voice and the speaking subject, except to weave a position like Féral’s in which the live performer serves to tame the technological and interpret its manifestations? Despite her optimism, her perspective still fails to explain the presence of the human subject in the unharnessed media of TV, film, and computer.

McLuhan and Ong offer a different response to the questions confronting technology in the postmodern era with their theories of acoustic space and secondary orality. McLuhan and Ong, like theorists de Certeau and Tyler, interpret the modern era as foregrounded upon epistemologies reflective of the ontologies of the alphabet, writing, and print. These communicative media, in their view, shaped the linear and rational cast of Western thought,
lately reflected in the graphocentrism of structuralism and poststructuralism. The graphocentrism of contemporary thought also explains the negligence of the voice in recent theatre criticism. Theories of orality posit that the scripturalist enterprise limits the noetic potential available to the human organism through a synesthetic integration of all the senses, once reflected in oral societies. Electronic media have recently opened perceptual spaces once closed by the media of writing and print, instigating an era of secondary orality that begins to attend once again to acoustic, not visual, space.

Postmodernity, in this view, does not betray a hopeless condition wherein traditional foundations have been lost, but rather a new and challenging epoch in which human being confronts hitherto unknown noetic spheres, made available through new and evolving forms of media. Whereas the early postmodern performance criticism of Féraul and Pontbriand intimated the phenomenological implications of secondary orality in performance, Causey recently draws the inference to Heidegger in his postulate of a non-rational, nonrepresentational revelation of meaning and being opening in the realm of the technological. Accordingly, this chapter argues that the presentation of the subject in technologized postmodern performance does not reflect the relativizing influences of poststructuralism or the politically vacuous free-play evident in Baudrillard. Rather, technologized postmodern performance signals the advent of new performative realms that will only become more complex as electronic media, specifically computerized on-line media, proliferate. Such performance introduces a synesthetic realm in which the linear and the visual give way to types of communication that appeal to differing senses in an acoustic space that hearkens to a phenomenal listening to the voice once heard in orality.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation sprang from the perception that the voice has fallen from the purview of theatre scholars in the past several decades. Although the voice remains an important component of actor training pedagogy, no serious theorizing about the voice has been undertaken in theatre studies. This study offers two views that account for the apparent lack of criticism. The first posits that during the twentieth century, when structural and poststructural views of language were in ascendance, the voice and the speaking subject as autonomous and intentional signifying agents fell under critique and disrepute. The second corroborates the first, proposing that the negligence of the voice reflects the final result of Western noetics reliant upon visual forms of language media, specifically writing and print. However, rather than accept the opinion of critics like Jacqueline Martin, who believe that on the contemporary, postmodern stage the voice serves to indicate the impossibility of communication, this dissertation looks to various theories of the voice in other disciplines in order to argue for its permanence and to recuperate the voice as an essential signifying element in performance.

The disciplines discussed in this study have been divided into five broad categories that make up the five chapters of the body of the dissertation. The first compares the paleoanthropological theories of voice and language origins in human evolution, arguing that while the theories vary greatly in their emphasis, they all point to the fundamental notion that the development of mature human being, with its flowering of culture and the sciences, depended primarily on vocalized language. The second investigates phenomenological theories of voice, first in order to review the premises of contemporary views of phonologism against which deconstruction was formulated, but also to point out the phenomenological tenets that underlie strains of modern and postmodern performance. The third contrasts structural views of language
and culture with ordinary language philosophy, speech act theory, and theatre semiotics in order to distinguish between theories that focus on the fixed nature of language as both a linguistic and noetic field, and those theories that appreciate speech as affording speakers creative freedom in the face of limiting structures. The fourth investigates poststructural theories of voice in comparison with the uses of the voice on the postmodern stage, arguing that contemporary performance owes more to modernist humanism and phenomenology than to poststructuralism and deconstruction. The fifth looks to the philosophies of technology and media studies in order to account for the various views of the role of the mediated voice in contemporary life and technologized postmodern performance. This fifth chapter argues against the negative views of technology in strains of contemporary thought for a generous view that regards technology for its ability to wrest human consciousness from the constraints of visualism, and for its ability to communicate an aural and synesthetic experience of the human life-world.

By approaching the voice from the vantage of various disciplines and points of view, this dissertation aims to put the silencing of the voice staged in poststructuralism and contemporary performance criticism in perspective. For as an overview of the multiple disciplines concerned with the communicative nature of human being demonstrates, theorists in other fields tend to denigrate the deconstructive assessment that the differential phonetic gap in the signifiers of language raises serious issues for considerations of meaning and understanding. Opposing views from the sciences, media studies, and the humanities corroborate the argument Bert States advances in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (1985), that the semiotic obsession with the sign may explain how language works--since, after all, that’s what semiotics aims to do--but it hardly serves as a foundational tenet for a philosophical response to the human condition (6-7). Too many variables need to be taken into account that a
critique of the sign cannot embrace, with practical, embodied, and lived experience being one--and disembodied, technologized experience being another--of the most glaring, untidy, and irresolvable. Yet the irony still persists that theatre studies could so efficiently duplicate the silencing of the voice staged in poststructuralism, despite the assumption that of all the disciplines, save music and speech therapy, it should be thought to have some interest in the voice, especially in the context of embodied experience. In response, this dissertation offers the novel strategy of looking specifically at the voice, a keystone element of deconstructive and poststructural theory, in order to gauge its importance as a necessary property, not only in performance, but also in the dense web of human interaction.

This study traverses immense terrain in its overview of the voice, and, oddly, finds justification for the voice in what could be construed as opposing perspectives and theoretical movements. First, the empiricism of paleoanthropology stands at odds with the rational procedures of phenomenology, yet the modernism of both the sciences and phenomenology combine to offer arguments against the postmodern perspective of poststructuralism. Second, the positive assessment of postmodernism found in the theories of acoustic space and secondary orality counter the negative view of the speaking subject found in the postmodernism of poststructural theory. But third, theories of acoustic space also counter the modernist efforts of the sciences in their quest to offer visual proofs and explanations for phenomena, while at the same time justifying the synesthetic perspective of phenomenology. How can a viable resuscitation of the voice be found without the various arguments invalidating each other? In light of the difficulties such clashes of perspective present, I wish to point out that a positive approach to the voice unifies the various and competing positions against the negative view of poststructuralism.
In the first case, empirical views of vocalized language do not simply corroborate the nomalist view expressed in logical positivism at the end of the nineteenth century. Paleoanthropological theories highlighting the cognitive nature of language may on one hand support the visualist endeavor, against phenomenology, of establishing optical proofs of the physical constitution of the world and the cosmos. But Harry Jerison’s cognitive model does not completely lend credence to the positivist perspective that language serves to offer a perspicuous reflection of reality. Rather, the cognitive model accepts that language acts as an intermediary with reality, serving to some degree to interpret the various and subjective inputs of all the senses, not just the visual. On the other hand, the paleoanthropological theories of the social origins of language interpret language as growing in response to the many variables that the human community presents. Within the social model, language arose from the need to process all of the stimuli that human relationships offer, including sights and sounds, intuitions, guesses, and the myriad emotions that arise in experience. Furthermore, both the cognitive and social theories account for the need to create performances that appeal not only to differing senses, but also to differing needs within the community. Empirical methods adopted by psychology, anthropology, and sociology may aim to make sense of all of the social operations and human needs, but the disciplines accept that vocalized language finds use in practically every endeavor, and not always capitalizing on the significative nature of speech. In both the arts and in personal life, the voice does not sound only to represent thoughts and expressions, but to present both expression and sound of its own accord. The empirical conclusions of paleoanthropology therefore corroborate perspectives offered in phenomenology, speech act theory, theatre semiotics, and theories of acoustic space.
In terms of phenomenology, Husserl certainly hearkens back to traditional notions of phonologism, particularly in the reflection of Platonism found in his early work. But even Husserl recognized the difficulty in locating a dimension of the metaphysical in the sounds afforded by the vocal apparatus. He therefore helped to move the discussion of voice and language towards the issue of whether an element of consciousness precedes linguistic intervention, and he opened venues of thought for Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Whereas poststructuralism discounts phenomenology as based in a phono-logocentric discourse that ignores the relative and differential nature of language, phenomenology nonetheless shares tenets with paleoanthropology, speech act theory, and theories of acoustic space. First, phenomenology accepts the necessary element of embodiment for the completion of discourse. As speech act theory argues, language and speech do not operate in the abstract according solely to semiotic principles, but they transpire within the contingencies of human relationship and experience, open to such variables as deceit, elusion, and irony. Second, phenomenology recognizes that language sprang from the human need to make sense of the physical and social world in response to sensory inputs from various, and sometimes intangible, sources. Third, contesting the structural view of language as a fixed linguistic and noetic field that limits the thought and expression of speaking subjects, phenomenology grants language the ability to open outwards, beyond the dictates of structure, towards new thoughts, concepts, and expressions.

Along this last line, Heidegger may have been the most prescient phenomenologist in his anticipation of the postmodern turn. On one hand, his thought lends credence to the theatrical endeavors of Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, and the revolutionary theatres of the United States in the 1960s in their attempt to return expression to a primordial core of human experience, without a reliance upon rationalist discourse or representation. But on another hand, Heidegger also offers
credence for the theories of McLuhan and Ong, and for the views of theatre critics Chantal Pontbriand, Josette Féral, and Matthew Causey, who interpret postmodernity as turning away from the constraints of the visualist cast of Western rationalist thought, towards an appreciation of the acoustic and synesthetic experience made particularly acute in electronic media and technologized performance.

Lest the union of the “primordial” and the “technological” expressed in both Heidegger and the theories of secondary orality be thought mutually exclusive and therefore untenable, it should be kept in mind that paleoanthropology defines human being as essentially linguistic and technological in its engagement of the environment. In this light, the quest for contemporary critics to identify something essentially human within technologized performance should not seem so surprising. Neither should the desire for the on-line user-performer to encounter the cybernetic image be thought out of the ordinary or a perversion of the fundamentally live and unmediated nature of human existence. This study therefore brings together three seemingly extreme poles of thought: the paleoanthropological, the phenomenological, and the technological. In combination with ordinary language philosophy and speech act theory, these various disciplines serve to foreground vocalized language as an essential element in service to human beings, regardless of the media through which language finds expression.

Lastly, however, the negligence of the voice in contemporary theatre criticism may pose the most beguiling problem. Certainly the interpretations of poststructuralism and postmodernity do not find consensus in theatre studies. In one perspective, performances by Richard Foreman and the Wooster Group may be thought deconstructive for their unorthodox approaches to text that point out the constructed nature of discourse. But an investigation into the stated aims of so-called postmodern performers, particularly in terms of their use of the voice and speech, betrays
decidedly modernist and humanist attitudes towards their work. In a second perspective, performers like Karen Finley and Laurie Anderson may be thought postmodernist for their appropriation of modalities and vocal styles characteristic of postmodernity, but they might be viewed more appropriately, as Philip Auslander argues, as advancing modernist political agendas in reference to such subjects as sexuality and corporate capitalism. Yet, in a view towards a third perspective, how to account for the persistence of theatrical presence in so much postmodern performance, especially in performances staged by Robert Wilson, which seem to aim neither for political messages, rationalist narratives, nor even deconstruction? Are contemporary audiences simply nostalgic for the *communitas* traditionally afforded the stage, as Patrice Pavis intimates, or does something actually become “present” in postmodern performance that has yet to be explained or recognized? Regardless of perspective, however, theatre semiotics points out that the voice in postmodern performance still functions according to both informational and autonomous means, with the second bypassing a reliance on signs altogether. Something about the autonomous nature of the voice always exceeds the semiotic properties of central importance to poststructuralism.

Still, despite contemporary theatre critics standing at odds in terms of their interpretations of the theoretical premises of postmodern performance, their differences do not account for their silence towards the voice. Furthermore, by adhering to their theoretical interpretations, critics altogether miss the significative value that the voice brings to performance, as well as the potential enlightenment that the voice offers performance criticism. One answer for the negligence of the voice comes from the media studies of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong. They posit that the poststructural critique of the voice stands as the final gambit of Western rational and empirical discourses that aim to reduce all phenomena to optical comprehensibility.
Holding to poststructural and deconstructive interpretations of the stage, critics attempt to define its properties according to visualist (that is, semiotic) tenets, deaf to the operations of the voice. By extension, critics such as Baudrillard, Jameson, and to an extent Auslander, interpret postmodernity as alienated and unmoored from traditional conceptions of reality and community, because their modernist thinking has been conditioned by visualist media unattuned to the phenomenal operation of the voice and orality.

In response, the theories of acoustic space and secondary orality posit that postmodernity signals a rejuvenation of synesthetic sensibilities, brought about as a result of the growing incursion of electronic media technologies in the twentieth century. The visual sensibilities of rationalist thought interpret postmodernity as reflecting the alienation and fracture of the human subject, since such visually bound thought cannot perceive that postmodern expression no longer relies solely on the eye, but also on the ear and the other senses. Likewise, the technologized postmodern performances of the Wooster Group, Laurie Anderson, CD-ROM, and on-line gaming herald the performative changes that will take place in decades to come, no longer bound to a live stage and reliant upon a textual narrative.

Twentieth-century views from paleoanthropology, phenomenology, speech act theory, theatre semiotics, and media studies do much to restore a hearing of the voice against the nullifying effects of poststructuralism. But the theories of acoustic space and secondary orality drive a wedge between the theoretical erasure of the voice in poststructuralism and the re-sounding of the voice heard to take place in the technologized atmosphere of postmodernity. In particular, secondary orality posits a strong resurgence of the voice through the technologized media of computer and telecommunications, such that it could very well threaten rational and empirical epistemologies in currency in the West for over two thousand years. In conclusion, therefore, this
dissertation proposes that if the discipline of theatre studies desires to remain relevant for the performative challenges of the twenty-first century, then it must quickly reevaluate its current attitude towards the sounds of the voice in social and performative contexts. In a precise summary of the theme of this dissertation, poet Dylan Thomas, acknowledged wordsmith of the printed page, still valued the voice for its ability to transcend text, proclaiming, “It’s the sound of meaning that I like.”
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VITA

Andrew Kimbrough received his Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Wake Forest University in 1984. From 1984 to 1986, he taught English as a second language in Sri Lanka as a Peace Corps volunteer. From 1986 to 1996, Kimbrough worked as a free-lance filmmaker and actor in Los Angeles, California. Kimbrough received his Master of Fine Arts degree in acting from Carnegie Mellon University and the Moscow Art Theatre School in 1997, and in 1998 he received a Board of Regents Fellowship to pursue the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in theatre at Louisiana State University.