The

Sound Studies Reader

Edited by

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THE VOICE THAT KEEPS SILENCE

There is an unfailing complicity here between idealization and speech [voix]. An ideal object is an object whose showing may be repeated indefinitely, whose presence to Zeigen is indefinitely reiterable precisely because, freed from all mundane spatiality, it is a pure noema that I can express without having, at least apparently, to pass through the world. In this sense the phenomenological voice, which seems to accomplish this operation “in time,” does not break with the order of Zeigen but belongs to the same system and carries through its function. The passage to infinity characteristic of the idealization of objects is one with the historical advent of the phônè. This does not mean that we can finally understand what the movement of idealization is on the basis of a determined “function” or “faculty,” concerning which we would in turn know what it is, thanks to our familiarity with experience, the “phenomenology of our body,” or with some objective science (phonetics, phonology, or the physiology of phonation). Quite the contrary, what makes the history of the phônè fully enigmatic is the fact that it is inseparable from the history of idealization, that is, from the “history of mind,” or history as such.

In order to really understand where the power of the voice lies, and how metaphysics, philosophy, and the determination of being as presence constitute the epoch of speech as technical mastery of objective being, to properly understand the unity of technē and phônè, we must think through the objectivity of the object. The ideal object is the most objective of objects; independent of the here-and-now acts and events of the empirical subjectivity which intends it, it can be repeated infinitely while remaining the same. Since its presence to intuition, its being-before the gaze, has no essential dependence on any worldly or empirical synthesis, the re-establishment of its sense in the form of presence becomes a universal and unlimited possibility. But, being nothing outside the world, this ideal being must be constituted, repeated, and expressed in a medium that does not impair the presence and self-presence of the acts that aim at it, a medium which both preserves the presence of the object before
intuition and self-presence, the absolute proximity of the acts to themselves. 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 ("acoustical 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. The subject does not have to pass forth beyond himself to be immediately affected by his expressive activity. My words are "alive" because they seem not to leave me; not to fall outside me outside my breath, at a visible distance; not to cease to belong to me, to be at my disposition "without further props." In any event, the phenomenon of speech, the phenomenological voice, gives itself out in this manner. The objection will perhaps be raised that this interiority belongs to the phenomenological and ideal aspect of every signifier. The ideal form of a written signifier, for example, is not in the world, and the distinction between the grapheme and the empirical body of the corresponding graphic sign separates an inside from an outside, phenomenological consciousness from the world. And this is true for every visual or spatial signifier. And yet every nonphonic signifier involves a spatial reference in its very "phenomenon," in the phenomenological (nonworldly) sphere of experience in which it is given. The sense of being "outside," "in the world," is an essential component of its phenomenon. Apparently there is nothing like this in the phenomenon of speech. In phenomenological interiority, hearing oneself and seeing oneself are two radically different orders of self-relation. Even before a description of this difference is sketched out, we can understand why the hypothesis of the "monologue" could have sanctioned the distinction between indication and expression only by presupposing an essential tie between expression and phonè. Between the phonic element (in the phenomenological sense and not that of a real sound) and expression, taken as the logical character of a signifier that is animated in view of the ideal presence of a Bedeutung (itself related to an object), there must be a necessary bond. Husserl is unable to bracket what in glossematics is called the "substance of expression" without menacing his whole enterprise. The appeal to this substance thus plays a major philosophical role.

Let us try, then, to question the phenomenological value of the voice, its transcendent dignity with regard to every other signifying substance. We think, and will try to show, that this transcendence is only apparent. But this "appearance" is the very essence of consciousness and its history, and it determines an epoch characterized by the philosophical idea of truth and the opposition between truth and appearance, as this opposition still functions in phenomenology. It can therefore not be called "appearance" or be named within the sphere of metaphysical conceptuality. One cannot attempt to deconstruct this transcendence without descending, across the inherited concepts, toward the unnamable.

The "apparent transcendence" of the voice thus results from the fact that the signified, which is always ideal by essence, the "expressed" Bedeutung, is immediately present in the act of expression. This immediate presence results from the fact that the phenomenological "body" of the signifier seems to fade away at the very moment it is produced; it seems already to belong to the element of ideality. It phenomenologically reduces itself, transforming the worldly opacity of its body into pure diaphaneity.

Why is the phonè between sound and idea (Hegel was more attentive to the view of the history of ideas elsewhere.) When I hear myself animated by my breathing, by a living act, the life-giving and transforms itself into the body of a signifier that show the ideal object of ideality outside the internal eye movements (conscious) inseparable from phenomenon continued, the object seems to degenerate into a system which ties phenomenon ever in the voice. The phenomenon animates, this inwardness [parole] is alive, support the present. Such is the phenomenon of speech that the speech phonemes and that he which seem to contract some supplementary object. The hand. He who is deaf's words, whose telos remains.

Considered from an ontological point of view, there is a whole transcendence, as having already been the world. The operation is a kind. On the one hand, as signified therein may be transmissible as the same and affected by this detour, the world, the affection must either not claim any claim to universal region of my body or be the "my own" has already no longer pure. In the
the acts to themselves. The empirical consciousness, can does not have worldly form. sonic signs ("acoustical images" heard "enje" = "heard" plus absolute proximity of their self themselves to be immediately because they seem not to leave able distance; not to cease to her props." In any event, the givens in this manner. interiority belongs to the To the ideal form of a written intension between the grapheme sign separates an inside from an outside. And this is true for every notion (involves a spatial reference worldly) sphere of experience in the world," is an essential unlike this in the phenomenon self and seeing oneself are before a description of the hypothesis of the "monologue" ection and expression only by a phône. Between the phonics (real sound) and expression, and in view of the ideal presence be a necessary bond. Husserl is substance of expression" without a substance thus plays a major logical value of the voice, its paralinguistic substance. We think, and parent. But this "appearance" is and it determines an epoch in the opposition between truth and phenomenology. It can therefore not be a metaphysical conceptuality. presence without descending, across results from the fact that the phenomenon "bedeutung," is immediately presence results from the fact seems to fade away at the very to the element of ideality. worldly opacity of its body into pure diaphaneity. This effacement of the sensible body and its exteriority is for consciousness the very form of the immediate presence of the signified.

Why is the phoneme the most "ideal" of signs? Where does this complicity between sound and ideality, or rather, between voice and ideality, come from? (Hegel was more attentive to this than any other philosopher, and, from the point of view of the history of metaphysics, this is a noteworthy fact, one we will examine elsewhere.) When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I hear myself [je m'entends] at the same time that I speak. The signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention (in Husserl's language, the expression animated by the Bedeutungsintention), is in absolute proximity to me. The living act, the life-giving act, the Lebenszeit, which animates the body of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression, the soul of language, seems not to separate itself from itself, from its own self-presence. It does not risk death in the body of a signifier that is given over to the world and the visibility of space. It can show the ideal object or ideal Bedeutung connected to it without venturing outside ideality outside the interiority of self-present life. The system of Zeigen, the finger and eye movements (concerning which we earlier wondered whether they were not inseparable from phenomenality) are not absent here; but they are interiorized. The phenomenon continues to be an object for the voice; indeed, insofar as the ideality of the object seems to depend on the voice and thus becomes absolutely accessible in it, the system which ties phenomenality to the possibility of Zeigen functions better than ever in the voice. The phoneme is given as the dominated ideality of the phenomenon.

This self-presence of the animating act in the transparent spirituality of what it animates, this inwardness of life with itself, which has always made us say that speech [parole] is alive, supposes, then, that the speaking subject hears himself [s'entends] in the present. Such is the essence or norm of speech. It is implied in the very structure of speech that the speaker hears himself: both that he perceives the sensible form of the phonemes and that he understands his own expressive intention. If accidents occur which seem to contradict this teleological necessity, either they will be overcome by some supplementary operation or there will be no speech. Deaf and dumb go hand in hand. He who is deaf can engage in colloquy only by shaping his acts in the form of words, whose telos requires that they be heard by him who utters them.

Considered from a purely phenomenological point of view, within the reduction, the process of speech has the originality of presenting itself already as pure phenomenon, as having already suspended the natural attitude and the existential thesis of the world. The operation of "hearing oneself speak" is an auto-affection of a unique kind. On the one hand, it operates within the medium of universality; what appears as signified therein must be idealities that are ideality indefinitely repeatable or transmissible as the same. On the other hand, the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not "his own." Every other form of auto-affection must either pass through what is outside the sphere of "ownness" or forego any claim to universality. When I see myself, either because I gaze upon a limited region of my body or because it is reflected in a mirror, what is outside the sphere of "my own" has already entered the field of this auto-affection, with the result that it is no longer pure. In the experience of touching and being touched, the same thing
happens. In both cases, the surface of my body, as something external, must begin by being exposed in the world. But, we could ask, are there not forms of pure auto-affection in the inwardness of one's own body which do not require the intervention of any surface displayed in the world and yet are not of the order of the voice? But then these forms remain purely empirical, for they could not belong to a medium of universal signification. Now, to account for the phenomenological power of the voice, we shall have to specify the concept of pure auto-affection more precisely and describe what, in it, makes it open to universality. As pure auto-affection, the operation of hearing oneself speak seems to reduce even the inward surface of one's own body; in its phenomenal being it seems capable of dispensing with this exteriority within interiority, this interior space in which our experience or image of our own body is spread forth. This is why hearing oneself speak [s'entendre parler] is experienced as an absolutely pure auto-affection, occurring in a self-proximity that would in fact be the absolute reduction of space in general. It is this purity that makes it fit for universality. Requiring the intervention of no determinate surface in the world, being produced in the world as pure auto-affection, it is a signifying substance absolutely at our disposition. For the voice meets no obstacle to its emission in the world precisely because it is produced as pure auto-affection. This auto-affection is no doubt the possibility for what is called subjectivity or the for-itself, but, without it, no world as such would appear. For its basis involves the unity of sound (which is in the world) and phoné (in the phenomenological sense). An objective "worldly" science surely can teach us nothing about the essence of the voice. But the unity of sound and voice, which allows the voice to be produced in the world as pure auto-affection, is the sole case to escape the distinction between what is worldly and what is transcendental; by the same token, it makes that distinction possible.

It is this universality which dictates that, de jure and by virtue of its structure, no consciousness is possible without the voice. The voice is the being which is present to itself in the form of universality, as consciousness; the voice is consciousness. In colloquy, the propagation of signs does not seem to meet any obstacles because it brings together two phenomenological origins of pure auto-affection. To speak to someone is doubtless to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself; but, at the same time, if one is heard by another, to speak is to make him repeat immediately in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I effected it. This immediate repetition is a reproduction of pure auto-affection without the help of anything external. This possibility of reproduction, whose structure is absolutely unique, gives itself out as the phenomenon of a mastery or limitless power over the signifier, since the signifier itself has the form of what is not external. Ideally, in the teleological essence of speech, it would then be possible for the signifier to be in absolute proximity to the signified aimed at in intuition and governing the meaning. The signifier would become perfectly diaphanous due to the absolute proximity to the signified. This proximity is broken when, instead of hearing myself speak, I see myself write or gesture.

This absolute proximity of the signifier to the signified, and its effacement in immediate presence, is the condition for Husserl's being able to consider the medium of expression as "unproductive" and "reflective." Paradoxically, it is also on this condition that he will be able to reduce it without loss and assert that there exists a pre-epistemic "language" by which he himself the rigorous condition of these operations, in order to recover the correlative voice.

How can a "pure" auto-affection, i.e., absolutely without any written language, i.e., without any objects, that is, without a world, be said to be a voice?

First, we should note that it is for a long time that this "essential" auto-affection, of this second order of operations, produces writing. If writing brings together speech and phonetic writing, it is not because it is prepared utterance, but is, on the contrary, indication, a word that is left empty, bears the trace of the first constituting sign, must produce the sign itself to the limit, as the act of writing. By means of language, that is, the act of writing, "forgetting" and "recollection" of the presence of the voice are always the moment of inscription.

Moreover, doing so, analyses, Husserl operates a conceptual system. It is the soul. Writing is inscription. Verbal expression means something; it contains the state of inerligence proper to words, that is, the meaning (bedeutung). But only the Gleichheit is proper to words.

But if Husserl needed no signifier, only the trace, thanks to them, as thanks to the properties of Husserl's language.

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d-expressive stratum of sense. It is again on this condition that Husserl will accord
himself the right to reduce the totality of language, be it indicative or expressive, in
order to recover sense in its primordially.

How can we understand this reduction of language when Husserl, from the
Logical Investigations to The Origin of Geometry, continually thought that scientific truth,
i.e., absolutely ideal objects, can be found only in “statements” and that not only
spoken language but inscription as well was indispensable for the constitution of ideal
objects, that is, objects capable of being transmitted and repeated as the same?

First, we should recognize that the more evident aspect of the movement which,
for a long time under way, terminates in The Origin of Geometry confirms the underlying
limitation of language to a secondary stratum of experience and, in the consideration
of this secondary stratum, confirms the traditional phonologism of metaphysics.

If writing brings the constitution of ideal objects to completion, it does so through
phonetic writing: it proceeds to fix, inscribe, record, and incarnate an already
prepared utterance. To reactivate writing is always to reawaken an expression in an
indication, a word in the body of a letter, which, as a symbol that may always remain
empty, bears the threat of crisis in itself. Already speech was playing the same role by
first constituting the identity of sense in thought. For example, the “protegeometry”
must produce the pure ideality of the pure geometrical object in thought by a passage
to the limit, assuring its transmissibility by speech, and must finally commit it to
writing. By means of this written inscription, one can always repeat the original sense,
that is, the act of pure thought which created the ideality of sense. With the possibility
of progress that such an incarnation allows, there goes the ever growing risk of
“forgetting” and loss of sense. It becomes more and more difficult to reconstitute the
presence of the act buried under historical sedimentations. The moment of crisis is
always the moment of signs.

Moreover, despite the minute detail, the rigor, and the absolute novelty of his
analyses, Husserl always describes all these movements in a metaphysical con-
ceptual system. What governs here is the absolute difference between body and

writing is a body that expresses something only if we actually pronounce the
verbal expression that animates it, if its space is temporalized. The word is a body that
means something only if an actual intention animates it and makes it pass from
the state of inert sonority (Körper) to that of an animated body (Leib). This body
proper to words expresses something only if it is animated (sinnbelebt) by an act of
meaning (bedeuten) which transforms it into a spiritual flesh (geistige Leiblichkeit).
But only the Geistigkeit or Lebendigkeit is independent and primordial. As such, it
needs no signifier to be present to itself. Indeed, it is as much in spite of its signifiers
as thanks to them that it is awakened or maintained in life. Such is the traditional side
of Husserl’s language.

But if Husserl had to recognize the necessity of these “incarnations,” even as
beneficial threats, it is because an underlying motif was disturbing and contesting the
security of these traditional distinctions from within and because the possibility of
writing dwelt within speech, which was itself at work in the inwardness of thought.

And here again we find all the incidences of primordial nonpresence whose
emergence we have already noted on several occasions. Even while repressing
difference by assigning it to the exteriority of the signifiers, Husserl could not fail to
recognize its work at the origin of sense and presence. Taking auto-affection as the exercise of the voice, auto-affection supposed that a pure difference comes to divide self-presence. In this pure difference is rooted the possibility of everything we think we can exclude from auto-affection: space, the outside, the world, the body, etc. As soon as it is admitted that auto-affection is the condition for self-presence, no pure transcendental reduction is possible. But it was necessary to pass through the transcendental reduction in order to grasp this difference in what is closest to it—which cannot mean grasping it in its identity, its purity, or its origin, for it has none. We come closest to it in the movement of difference.¹

This movement of difference is not something that happens to a transcendental subject; it produces a subject. Auto-affection is not a modality of experience that characterizes a being that would already be itself (autos). It produces sameness as self-relation within self-difference; it produces sameness as the nonidentical.

Shall we say that the auto-affection we have been talking about up until now concerns only the operation of the voice? Shall we say that difference concerns only the order of the phonic “signifier” or the “secondary strata” of expression? Can we always hold out for the possibility of a pure and purely self-present identity at the level? Husserl wanted to disengage as a level of pre-expressive experience, that is, the level of sense prior to Bedeutung and expression?

It would be easy to show that such a possibility is excluded at the very root of transcendental experience.

Why, in fact, is the concept of auto-affection incumbent on us? What constitutes the originality of speech, what distinguishes it from every other element of signification, is that its substance seems to be purely temporal. And this temporality does not unfold a sense that would itself be nontemporal; even before being expressed, sense is through and through temporal. According to Husserl, the omnitemporality of ideal objects is but a mode of temporality. And when Husserl describes a sense that seems to escape temporality, he hastens to make it clear that this is only a provisional step in analysis and that he is considering a constituted temporality. However, as soon as one takes the movement of temporalization into account, as it is already analyzed in The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness, the concept of pure auto-affection must be employed as well. This we know is what Heidegger does in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, precisely when he is concerned with the subject of time. The “source point” or “primordial impression,” that out of which the movement of temporalization is produced, is already pure auto-affection. First it is a pure production, since temporality is never the real predicate of a being. The intuition of time itself cannot be empirical; it is a receiving that receives nothing. The absolute novelty of each now is therefore engendered by nothing; it consists in a primordial impression that engenders itself:

This pure spontaneity is an impression; it creates nothing. The new now is not a being, it is not a produced object; and every language fails to describe this pure movement other than by metaphor, that is, by borrowing its concepts from the order of the objects of experience, an order this temporalization makes possible. Husserl continually warns us against these metaphors.⁴

The process by which we come to the present order to be a now of anything empirical, an instantaneous non-now, a past now, a present, a future, is the same only in the same. This auto-affection is not only being affected by nothing, its impression which has nothing determinate being or adrift in the very terms of the adrift in the absolute nothingness, only be primordial and its history of metaphor and dissimulates the “movement of the self” in particular those that the auto-affection or auto-affection (self) or of this difference.

But this pure difference introduces into self (auto) from it. The self is not self and from the possibility of the self cannot be thought to be the self itself; the self of the self is an attribute; we cannot think the pure primordial must be an attribute. The protowriting is at work. Husserl recognized the “movement” of the present is issued forth from the present. And the trace is the intuition of temporality upon exteriority in the moment of temporalization of sensibility as “interval” or different from any absolute inside, the moment which the inside of the being is not “presented.” Space is also the self-relations not overtake time; it is not temporalization. If we suppose the purely pure we have as the theme of a pure writing contradicted by “time,” we are implied in the movement; the subjectivity precisely that all that is excluded by
The process by which the living now, produced by spontaneous generation, must, in order to be a now and to be retained in another now, affect itself without recourse to anything empirical but with a new primordial actuality in which it would become a non-now, a past now—this process is indeed a pure auto-affection in which the same is the same only in being affected by the other, only by becoming the other of the same. This auto-affection must be pure since the primordial impression is here affected by nothing other than itself, by the absolute “novelty” of another primordial impression which is another now. We speak metaphorically as soon as we introduce a determinate being into the description of this “movement”; we talk about “movement” in the very terms that movement makes possible. But we have been always already adrift in ontic metaphor; temporalization here is the root of a metaphor that can only be primordial. The word “time” itself, as it has always been understood in the history of metaphysics, is a metaphor which at the same time both indicates and dissolves the “movement” of this auto-affection. All the concepts of metaphysics— in particular those of activity and passivity, will and nonwill, and therefore those of affection or auto-affection, purity and impurity, etc.—cover up the strange “movement” of this difference.

But this pure difference, which constitutes the self-presence of the living present, introduces into self-presence from the beginning all the impurity putatively excluded from it. The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace. This trace cannot be thought out on the basis of a simple present whose life would be within itself; the self of the living present is primordially a trace. The trace is not an attribute; we cannot say that the self of the living present “primordially” is it. Being-primordial must be thought on the basis of the trace, and not the reverse. This protowriting is at work at the origin of sense. Sense, being temporal in nature, as Husserl recognized, is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the “movement” of the trace, that is, in the order of “signification.” It has always already issued forth from itself into the “expressive stratum” of lived experience. Since the trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not “one’s own,” etc., the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, a “spacing.” As soon as we admit spacing both as “interval” or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the “outside” has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial, which is called “time,” appears, is constituted, is “presented.” Space is “in” time; it is time’s pure leaving-itself; it is the “outside-itself” as the self-relation of time. The externality of space, externality as space, does not overtake time; rather, it opens as pure “outside” “within” the movement of temporalization. If we recall now that the pure inwardness of phonetic auto-affection supposed the purely temporal nature of the “expressive” process, we see that the theme of a pure inwardness of speech, or of the “hearing oneself speak,” is radically contradicted by “time” itself. The going-forth “into the world” is also primordially implied in the movement of temporalization. “Time” cannot be an “absolute subjectivity” precisely because it cannot be conceived on the basis of a present and the self-presence of a present being. Like everything thought under this heading, and like all that is excluded by the most rigorous transcendental reduction, the “world” is
primordially implied in the movement of temporalization. As a relation between an inside and an outside in general, an existent and a nonexistent in general, a constituting and a constituted in general, temporalization is at once the very power and limit of phenomenological reduction. Hearing oneself speak is not the inwardsness of an inside that is closed in upon itself; it is the irreducible openness in the inside; it is the eye and the world within speech. 

Phenomenological reduction is a scene, a theater stage.

Also, just as expression is not added like a "stratum" to the presence of a pre-expressive sense, so, in the same way, the inside of expression does not accidentally happen to be affected by the outside of indication. Their intertwining (Verflechtung) is primordial; it is not a contingent association that could be undone by methodic attention and patient reduction. The analysis, necessary as it is, encounters an absolute limit at this point. If indication is not added to expression, which is not added to sense, we can nonetheless speak in regard to them, of a primordial "supplement": their addition comes to make up for a deficiency, it comes to compensate for a primordial non-self-presence. And if indication—for example, writing in the everyday sense—must necessarily be "added" to speech to complete the constitution of the ideal object, if speech must be "added" to the thought identity of the object, it is because the "presence" of sense and speech had already from the start fallen short of itself.

Notes

1. It is strange that, despite the formalist motif and fidelity to Leibniz affirmed continually in his work, Husserl never placed the problem of writing in the center of his reflection and, in The Origin of Geometry, did not take into account the difference between phonetic and non-phonetic writing.


3. [Derrida introduces a neologism here; from the French "différence" he derives the term "differance." As in the Latin "differere," the French "différer" bears two quite distinct significations. One has a reference to spatiality, as the English "to differ"—to be at variance, to be unlike, apart, dissimilar, distinct in nature or quality from something. This is even more evident in its cognate form, "to differentiate." The other signification has a reference to temporality as in the English "to defer"—to put off action to a future time, to delay or postpone.

I have thus chosen to follow Derrida's employment of differance by rendering it as "differance" in English. This should not be too disconcerting a translation, for it incorporates the common origin of the two relevant English verbs, "to defer" and "to differ," namely the Latin differre.—Translator.]

The primal impress is the absolute beginning of this generation—the primal source, that from which all others are continuously generated. In itself, however, it is not generated; it does not come into existence as that which is generated but through spontaneous generation. It does not grow up (it has no seed); it is primal creation (The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness, Appendix I; ET, p. 131; italics added).

4. See e.g., the admirable § 36 of The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness which proves the absence of a proper noun for this strange "movement," which, furthermore, is not a movement. "For all this," concludes Husserl, "names fail us." We would still have to radicalize Husserl's intention here in a specific direction. For it is not by chance that he still designates this unnamable as an "absolute subjectivity," that is, as a being conceived on the basis of...
presence as substance, \textit{e.g.}, \textit{hypokeimenon}: a self-identical being in self-presence which forms the substance of a subject. What is said to be unnamable in this paragraph is not exactly something we know to be a \textit{present} being in the form of self-presence, a substance modified into a subject, into an absolute subject whose self-presence is pure and does not depend on any external affection, any outside. \textit{All this is present and we can name it, the proof being that its being as absolute subjectivity is not questioned.} What is unnamable, according to Husserl are only the \textit{absolute properties} of this subject; the subject therefore is indeed designated in terms of the classical metaphysical schema which distinguishes substance (present being) from its attributes. Another schema that keeps the incomparable depth of the analysis within the closure of the metaphysics of presence is the subject-object opposition. This being whose \textit{absolute properties} are indescribable is present as \textit{absolute subjectivity}, is an \textit{absolutely present} and \textit{absolutely self-present} being, only in its opposition to the object. The object is relative; what is absolute is the subject; \textit{"We can only say that this flux is something which we name in conformity with what is constituted," but it is nothing temporally \textquoteleft Objective.\textquoteright\ It is absolute subjectivity and has the absolute properties of something to be denoted metaphorically as \textquoteleft flux,\textquoteright as a point of actuality, primal source-point, that from which springs the \textquoteleft now,\textquoteright and so on. In the lived experience of actuality, we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation (Nachhallmomenten). For all this, names are lacking (\textit{ITC}, § 36; \textit{ET}, p. 100; italics added). This determination of \textit{absolute subjectivity} would also have to be crossed out as soon as we conceive the present on the basis of difference, and not the reverse. The concept of \textit{subjectivity} belongs \textit{a priori and in general} to the order of the \textit{constituted}. This holds \textit{a fortiori} for the analogical presentation that constitutes intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is inseparable from temporalization taken as the openness of the present upon an outside of itself, upon another absolute present. This being outside itself proper to time is its \textit{spicing:} it is a \textit{protostage [archi-scène].}\n
This stage, as the relation of one present to another present \textit{as such}, that is, as a nonderived \textit{re-presentation (Vergewöhnung or Repräsentation)}, produces the structure of signs in general as \textit{reference,” as being-for-something (für etwas sein), and radically precludes their reduction. There is no constituting subjectivity. The very concept of constitution itself must be deconstructed.\n
5. Moreover, in the important §§ 124–27 of \textit{Ideas I}, which we shall elsewhere follow step by step, Husserl invites us—while continually speaking of an underlying stratum of pre-expressive experience—not to \textit{hold too hard by the metaphor of stratification (Schichtung); expression is not of the nature of an overlaid varnish or covering garment; it is a mental formation, which exercises new intentional influences on the intentional substratum (Unterschied):\textit{" (\textit{Ideas I}, § 124; \textit{ET}, p. 349).}
Roland Barthes

THE GRAIN OF THE VOICE

LANGUAGE, ACCORDING TO BENVENISTE, is the only semiotic system capable of interpreting another semiotic system (though undoubtedly there exist limit works in the course of which a system feigns self-interpretation — The Art of the Fugue). How, then, does language manage when it has to interpret music? Alas, it seems, very badly. If one looks at the normal practice of music criticism (or, which is often the same thing, of conversations 'on' music), it can readily be seen that a work (or its performance) is only ever translated into the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective. Music, by natural bent, is that which at once receives an adjective. The adjective is inevitable: this music is this, this execution is that. No doubt the moment we turn an art into a subject (for an article, for a conversation) there is nothing left but to give it predicates; in the case of music, however, such predication unfailingly takes the most facile and trivial form, that of the epithet. Naturally, this epithet, to which we are constantly led by weakness or fascination (little parlour game: talk about a piece of music without using a single adjective), has an economic function: the predicate is always the bulwark with which the subject's imaginary protects itself from the loss which threatens it. The man who provides himself or is provided with an adjective is now hurt, now pleased, but always constituted. There is an imaginary in music whose function is to reassure, to constitute the subject hearing it (would it be that music is dangerous — the old Platonic idea that music is an access to jouissance, to loss, as numerous ethnographic and popular examples would tend to show?) and this imaginary immediately comes to language via the adjective. A historical dossier ought to be assembled here, for adjectival criticism (or predicative interpretation) has taken on over the centuries certain institutional aspects. The musical adjective becomes legal whenever an ethos of music is postulated, each time, that is, that music is attributed a regular — natural or magical — mode of signification. Thus with the ancient Greeks, for whom it was the musical language (and not the contingent work) in its denotive structure which was immediately adjectival, each mode being linked to a coded expression (rude, austere, proud, virile, solemn, majestic, warlike, educative, noble, sumptuous, serene, etc.) from Schuman to Mozart: the tempo (allegro, andante, andante semplice, andante con moto, etc.) et discret, etc.

Are we committed to a predicable ontology of music (Rameau, for instance, said of the whole of music: it is a language) or, on the contrary, are we looking for a way of seeing the musical discourse as a field of contact between the signified or, at least, between the signified and the signifier? Are we looking for its liquidation and the non-liquidation of the signifier? I am not in a dilemma.

What I shall search for is the abstract side of music, the acoustic body, and I shall acknowledge that all the diachronic and synchronic relations between the signifier and the signified (paradigmatic, iconic, etc.) are no longer heard. The musical body heard by the first (ethos, temperament, and Fischer-Ives, and Smith, and possibly the second).

Listen to a Rameau, a Mozart, an early Beethoven, and the sound image is the musical expression. Listen to a later Beethoven or Schumann: something is at the end of the sound image and the meaning is produced in the execution: so much so, that the meaning of jazz and the same kind of music is made as much of the cartilages of the sound image as of the sound it expresses itself. We must, I believe, have roughly the same body which has the same sound through it. Above all,
noble, sumptuous, doleful, modest, dissolute, voluptuous); thus with the Romantics, from Schumann to Debussy, who substitute for, or add to, the simple indication of tempo (allegro, presto, andante) poetic, emotive predicates which are increasingly refined and which are given in the national language so as to diminish the mark of the code and develop the ‘free’ character of the predication (sehr kräftig, sehr präcis, spirituel et discret, etc.).

Are we condemned to the adjective? Are we reduced to the dilemma of either the predictable or the ineluctable? To ascertain whether there are (verbal) means for talking about music without adjectives, it would be necessary to look at more or less the whole of music criticism, something which I believe has never been done and which, nevertheless, I have neither the intention nor the means of doing here. This much, however, can be said: it is not by struggling against the adjective (diverting the adjective you find on the tip of the tongue towards some substantive or verbal paraphrase) that one stands a chance of exorcising music commentary and liberating it from the fatality of predication; [rather than trying to change directly the language on music, it would be better to change the musical object itself] as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language.

It is this displacement that I want to outline, not with regard to the whole of music but simply to a part of vocal music (lied or mélodie): the very precise space (genre) of the encounter between a language and a voice. I shall straightaway give a name to this signifier at the level of which, I believe, the temptation of ethos can be liquidated (and thus the adjective banished): the grain, the grain of the voice when the latter is in a dual posture, a dual production – of language and of music.

What I shall attempt to say of the ‘grain’ will, of course, be only the apparently abstract side, the impossible account of an individual thrill that I constantly experience in listening to singing. In order to disengage this ‘grain’ from the acknowledged values of vocal music, I shall use a twofold opposition: theoretical, between the pheno-text and the geno-text (borrowing from Julia Kristeva), and paradigmatic, between two singers, one of whom I like very much (although he is no longer heard), the other very little (although one hears no one but him), Panzer and Fischer-Dieskau (here merely ciphers: I am not deifying the first nor attacking the second).

Listen to a Russian bass (a church bass – opera is a genre in which the voice has gone over in its entirety to dramatic expressivity, a voice with a grain which little signifies): something is there, manifest and stubborn (one hears only that), beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form (the litany), the melisma, and even the style of execution: something which is directly the cantor’s body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages, and from deep down in the Slavonic language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings. The voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul; it is not original (all Russian cantors have roughly the same voice), and at the same time it is individual: it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no ‘personality’, but which is nevertheless a separate body. Above all, this voice bears along directly the symbolic, over the intelligible, the
expressive: here, thrown in front of us like a packet, is the Father, his phallic stature. The ‘grain’ is that: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly *significance*.

Thus we can see in song (pending the extension of this distinction to the whole of music) the two texts described by Julia Kristeva. The *pheno-song* (if the transposition be allowed) covers all the phenomena, all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer’s idiolect, the style of the interpretation: in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything which it is customary to talk about, which forms the tissue of cultural values (the matter of social tastes, of fashions, of critical commentaries), which takes its bearing directly on the ideological alibis of a period (*subjectivity*, *expressivity*, *dramaticism*, *personality* of the artist). The *geno-song* is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate *from within language and in its very materiality*; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language – not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters – where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the diction of the language.

From the point of view of the pheno-song, Fischer-Dieskau is assuredly an artist beyond reproach: everything in the (semantic and lyrical) structure is respected and yet nothing seduces, nothing sways us to *jouissance*. His art is inordinately expressive (the diction is dramatic, the pauses, the checkings and releasings of breath, occur like shudders of passion) and hence never exceeds culture: here it is the soul which accompanies the song, not the body. What is difficult is for the body to accompany the musical diction not with a movement of emotion but with a ‘gesture-support’; all the more so since the whole of musical pedagogy teaches not the culture of the ‘grain’ of the voice but the emotive modes of its delivery – the myth of respiration. How many singing teachers have we not heard prophesying that the art of vocal music rested entirely on the mastery, the correct discipline of breathing! The breath is the *pneuma*, the soul swelling or breaking, and any exclusive art of breathing is likely to be a secretly mystical art (a mysticism levelled down to the measure of the long-playing record). The lung, a stupid organ (lights for cats!), swells but gets no erection; it is in the throat, place where the phonic metal hardens and is segmented, in the mask that *significance* explodes, bringing not the soul but *jouissance*. With FD, I seem only to hear the lungs, never the throat, the gollis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose. All of Panzera’s art, on the contrary, was in the letters, not in the bellows (simple technical feature: you never heard him breathe but only divide up the phrase). An extreme rigour of thought regulated the prosody of the enunciation and the phonic economy of the French language; prejudices (generally stemming from oratorical and ecclesiastical diction) were overthrown. With regard to the consonants, too readily thought to constitute the very armature of our language (which is not, however, a Semitic one) and always prescribed as needing to be ‘articulated’, detached, emphasized in order to fulfill the clarity of meaning, Panzera recommended that in many cases they be left as they are and working on the vowels. Then, in *communication*, the meaning in its *conjugation* (the exposed, helpless one, from Latin), without denying the singing, but in the roll, the paradigmatic brevity of voice action in the space of the voice, the voice work on analogy with what at least held itself against the possible *jouissance*.

It would reign more of the *jouissance* than of everything. If FD’s text is a example of the *rational* culture embedded in mass culture the *rational* culture is clear, borne by the demands of an aural culture, by the listeners and their philosophy of music, provided they are not blank (the ‘meaning’), and in order to be coalescent emotion, a little about it, perhaps the record; moreover, or even simply the record, not exclusively but as an integral part of its inner development. Perhaps, precisely the marginal, mandarin concept of meaning.

The ‘grain’ of the *jouissance* cannot better be found than in something else, say something else (the message). The *jouissance* of the *geno-song* is found in the French *milieu*, in the French *milieu*, the French *milieu*...
cases they be patinated, given the wear of a language that had been living, functioning, and working for ages past, that they be made simply the springboard for the admirable vowels. There lay the ‘truth’ of language – not its functionality (clarity, expressivity, communication) – and the range of vowels received all the significance (which is meaning in its potential voluptuousness): the opposition of é and è (so necessary in conjugation), the purity – almost electronic, so much was its sound tightened, raised, exposed, held – of the most French of vowels, the ľ (a vowel not derived by French from Latin). Similarly, Panzer carried his r’s beyond the norms of the singer – without denying those norms. His r was of course rolled, as in every classic art of singing, but the roll had nothing peasant-like or Canadian about it; it was an artificial roll, the paradoxical state of a letter-sound at once totally abstract (by its metallic brevity of vibration) and totally material (by its manifest deep-rootedness in the action of the throat). This phonetics – am I alone in perceiving it? am I hearing voices within the voice? but isn’t it the truth of the voice to be hallucinated? (isn’t the entire space of the voice an infinite one?) which was doubtless the meaning of Saussure’s work on anagrams – does not exhaust significance (which is inexhaustible) but it does at least hold in check the attempts at expressive reduction operated by a whole culture against the poem and its melody.

It would not be too difficult to date that culture, to define it historically. FD now reigns more or less unchallenged over the recording of vocal music; he has recorded everything. If you like Schubert but not FD, then Schubert is today forbidden you – an example of that passive censorship (censorship by repletion) which characterizes mass culture though it is never criticized. His art – expressive, dramatic, sentimentally clear, borne by a voice lacking in any ‘grain’, in signifying weight, fits well with the demands of an average culture. Such a culture, defined by the number of listeners and the disappearance of practitioners (no more amateurs), wants art, wants music, provided they be clear, that they ‘translate’ an emotion and represent a signified (the ‘meaning’ of a poem); an art that inculcates pleasure (by reducing it to a known, coded emotion) and reconciles the subject to what in music can be said: what is said about it, predicatively, by Institution, Criticism, Opinion. Panzer does not belong to this culture (he could not have done, having sung before the coming of the microgroove record; moreover I doubt whether, were he singing today, his art would be recognized or even simply perceived); his reign, very great between the wars, was that of an exclusively bourgeois art (an art, that is, in no way petit-bourgeois) nearing the end of its inner development and, by a familiar distortion, separated from History. It is perhaps, precisely and less paradoxically than it seems, because this art was already marginal, mandarin, that it was able to bear traces of significance, to escape the tyranny of meaning.

The ‘grain’ of the voice is not – or is not merely – its timbre; the significance it opens cannot better be defined, indeed, than by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message). The song must speak, must write – for what is produced at the level of the geno-song is finally writing. This sung writing of language is, as I see it, what the French mélodie sometimes tried to accomplish. I am well aware that the German lied was intimately bound up with the German language via the Romantic poem, that
the poetical culture of Schumann was immense and that this same Schumann used to say of Schubert that had he lived into old age he would have set the whole of German literature to music, but I think nevertheless that the historical meaning of the lied must be sought in the music (if only because of its popular origins). By contrast, the historical meaning of the mélodie is a certain culture of the French language. As we know, the Romantic poetry of France is more oratorical than textual; what the poetry could not accomplish on its own, however, the mélodie has occasionally accomplished with it, working at the language through the poem. Such a work (in the specificity here acknowledged it) is not to be seen in the general run of the mélodies produced which are too accommodating towards minor poets, the model of the petit-bourgeois romance, and salon usages, but in some few pieces it is indisputable — anthologically (a little by chance) in certain songs by Fauré and Duparc, massively in the later (prosodic) Fauré and the vocal work of Debussy (even if Pelléas is often sung badly — dramatically). What is engaged in these works is, much more than a musical style, a practical reflection (if one may put it like that) on the language; there is a progressive movement from the language to the poem, from the poem to the song and from the song to its performance. This means that the mélodie has little to do with the history of music and much with the theory of the text. Here again, the signifier must be redistributed.

Compare two sung deaths, both of them famous: that of Boris and that of Mélisandre. Whatever Mussorgsky's intentions, the death of Boris is expressive or, if preferred, hysterical; it is overloaded with historical, affective contents. Performances of the death cannot be but dramatic: it is the triumph of the pheno-text, the smothering of significance under the soul as signified. Mélisande, on the contrary, only dies prosodically: Two extremes are joined, woven together: the perfect intelligibility of the denotation and the pure prosodic segmentation of the enunciation; between the two a salutary gap (filled out in Boris) — the pathos, that is to say, according to Aristotle (why not?), passion such as men speak and imagine it, the accepted idea of death, endoxical death. Mélisande dies without any noise (understanding the term in its cybernetic sense): nothing occurs to interfere with the signifier and there is thus no compulsion to redundance; simply, the production of a music-language with the function of preventing the singer from being expressive. As with the Russian bass, the symbolic (the death) is thrown immediately (without mediation) before us (this to forestall the stock idea which has it that what is not expressive can only be cold and intellectual; Mélisande's death is 'moving', which means that it shifts something in the chain of the signifier).

The mélodie disappeared — sank to the bottom — for a good many reasons, or at least the disappearance took on a good many aspects. Doubtless it succumbed to its salon image, this being a little the ridiculous form of its class origin. Mass 'good' music (records, radio) has left it behind, preferring either the more pathetic orchestra (success of Mahler) or less bourgeois instruments than the piano (harpischord, trumpet). Above all, however, the death of the mélodie goes along with a much wider historical phenomenon to a large extent unconnected to the history of music or of musical taste: the French are abandoning their language, not, assuredly, as a normative set of noble values (clarity, elegance, correctness) — or at least this does not bother me very much for these are institutional values — but as a space of pleasure, of thrill,

a site where one can still reflect, one where the singularity of the voice, the prosodic aspects perform. In short, the theoretical mélodie is a purism.

The 'grain' of my theoretical text performs. In the context of theoretical mélodie, a new scheme of things is laid down: I listen to my contemporaries, and I try to see that relation in me which I feel who am in me who is to express something that is not made outside me; something that is made outside me, an anticulture, an ianticulture, an antitext. 'I don't like it', I tell myself, 'I don't like the matter of my existence, my activities, my profession', my being as known, mind, consciousness, as the signifiers (as the signification); the antitext, or popular music, is an antitext between the two, and so on.

While others, the so-called 'grain' — or the thing to which the language to layhold of itself (this is what all belong to the 'grain', the 'brilliance', the 'signature', the image of the music, the image of the body, of the voice, of the inner body, of the body, of the voice, the inner body), that much so that it is grouped in a part of the body, to the calves, the clavicles, the clavicles, the clavicles, it is if on the contrary we are talking of whose 'grain' is more than the pressure of the language, the pressure of the language, the pressure of the technique, which is only a form, a form, a form out of perfection.

This discussion would go on, however, that the whole history of music would be covered. Were we to sum it up, we must at least doubtless we would be able to accomplish by
a site where language works for nothing, that is, in perversion (remember here the singularity – the solitude – of Lois by Philippe Sollers, theatre of the return of the prosodic and metrical work of the language).

The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs. If I perceive the ‘grain’ in a piece of music and accord this ‘grain’ a theoretical value (the emergence of the text in the work), I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way ‘subjective’ (it is not the psychological ‘subject’ in me who is listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce – to express – that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it). The evaluation will be made outside of any law, outplaying not only the law of culture but equally that of anticulture, developing beyond the subject all the value hidden behind ‘I like’ or ‘I don’t like’. Singers especially will be ranged in what may be called, since it is a matter of my choosing without there being any reciprocal choice of me, two prosthetic categories. Thus I shall freely extol such and such a performer, little-known, minor, forgotten, dead perhaps, and turn away from such another, an acknowledged star (let us refrain from examples, no doubt of merely biographical significance); I shall extend my choice across all the genres of vocal music including popular music, where I shall have no difficulty in rediscovering the distinction between the pheno-song and the geno-song (some popular singers have a ‘grain’ while others, however famous, do not). What is more, leaving aside the voice, the ‘grain’ – or the lack of it – persists in instrumental music; if the latter no longer has language to lay open significance in all its volume, at least there is the performer’s body which again forces me to evaluation. I shall not judge a performance according to the rules of interpretation, the constraints of style (anyway highly illusory), which almost all belong to the pheno-song (I shall not wax lyrical concerning the ‘rigour’, the ‘brilliance’, the ‘warmth’, the ‘respect for what is written’, etc.), but according to the image of the body (the figure) given me. I can hear with certainty – the certainty of the body, of thrill – that the harpsichord playing of Wanda Landowska comes from her inner body and not from the petty digital scramble of so many harpsichordists (so much so that it is a different instrument). As for piano music, I know at once which part of the body is playing – if it is the arm, too often, alas, muscled like a dancer’s calves, the clutch of the finger-tips (despite the sweeping flourishes of the wrists), or if on the contrary it is the only erotic part of a pianist’s body, the pad of the fingers whose ‘grain’ is so rarely heard (it is hardly necessary to recall that today, under the pressure of the mass long-playing record, there seems to be a flattening out of technique; which is paradoxical in that the various manners of playing are all flattened out into perfection: nothing is left but pheno-text).

This discussion has been limited to ‘classical music’. It goes without saying, however, that the simple consideration of ‘grain’ in music could lead to a different history of music from the one we know now (which is purely pheno-textual). Were we to succeed in refining a certain ‘aesthetics’ of musical pleasure, then doubtless we would attach less importance to the formidable break in tonality accomplished by modernity.
Note

1. 'This is why the best way to read me is to accompany the reading with certain appropriate bodily movements. Against non-spoken writing, against non-written speech. For the gesture-support.' Philippe Sollers, *Lose*, Paris 1972, p. 108.