

## Chapter 9

# Word of Mouth: Christof Migone's Little Manias

Language, according to Judith Butler, “assumes and alters its power to act upon the real through locutionary acts, which, repeated, become entrenched practices and, ultimately, institutions. . . .”<sup>1</sup> The voice is thus marked by the Law—by the social lexicon of proper speech. It registers, in its audibility, the ideological parameters of a given society through secret inflections, causing speech to tremble or whisper or fail according to a given situation. At the same time, the voice performs such lexicon in an attempt to speak through it, to get past the situational boundaries by appropriating and overspeaking language. In this way, the individual is formed by language and, in turn, forms language through enactment. While important to recognize such a dynamic as oppositional on one level, between what can be called individual speech against the speech of Law, it is just as important to understand the force of language and its outspokenness as forming an integral whole: each necessarily relies and in part creates the other.

This whole though is also a hole: the whole individual is emptied out by the very thing that completes it. That is to say, language brings one into consciousness while deflating individuality by forcing it into its network, by making the “song of myself” accountable on the pages of a social text. The whole then is a hole inside of which individuality is formed, given weight, though lacking and striving to fill such lack through the materiality of language itself: I speak and *respeak* in an attempt to find the words that will lead to a certain plenitude, a certain voluptuous fulfillment.

The voice, or the speaking subject, is thus embroiled in a performative tension whereby speaking is always already enacting an uncertain and tenuous connection to the real—one speaks in and out of oneself, fixed and unfixed at the same instant to the parameters of being, of social interaction, enacting the essential paradox of

the voice, identified by Steven Connor, in which the voice must leave itself in order to return, so as "to move from me to the world, and to move me into the world."<sup>2</sup>

Such paradox can be said to return to the speaking subject, to fill the mouth with hesitation, excess, charm, delight, and difficulty, as found in the work of artist Christof Migone. Performing, voicing, muting, mutating, making noise, Migone stages the difficulties of not so much having a voice, but of having a mouth. Connor's paradox for Migone is already past the initial paradox, the first home of the voice, prior to myself or the world, that paradox of having to speak through the very cavity that chews, spits, sucks, and slurps; that the speaking subject, as an articulating individual, is identified as such through the very conduit that, in turn, sputters, laughs, stutters, and cries, as embodied presence, which is also a lot of hot breath. The oral cavity as primary site of vocalization, as progenitor of the voice where paradox is fixed and unfixated, as a first-stage performance prior to the performance of the self: Connor's paradox is lodged in Migone's throat. To hear Migone's work, to listen to its gurgles, fizzes, and performativities, its sonics, is to enter a theater that is always offstage, behind the scenes, on the wings, for his attention is fixed on the *prior* to voice, the *prior* to narrative, the before the scene is cast, the quiver of the pen, the massaging of the body to unravel its kinks and knots. Migone's is a theater of the minute, before the voice ever comes out.

In contrast to Marina Abramovic and her expenditure of the voice in *Freeing the Voice*, Migone stages *attempts* to find his voice—one could say, his voice is *the finding of the voice* as a process, enacting the grappling with the fact that we speak, fashioning aesthetics out of paradox. Whereas Abramovic believes in the possibility of catharsis, of the enacting of the very tension at the heart of corporeality, in the throat itself, Migone performs the body without ever arriving at release, without transgressing to a point of liberation. Rather, performance is used to reveal, make explicit, to bring to the fore the inability to get past, outlive, or outspoke the voice itself.

### Microphonic Speech

To get inside and arrive past speech in the same instant, the history of technologies must be underlined, for such history coincides with the developments of self-conscious acts of performing the voice found in modern culture. To perform the voice stands against, as a mobilized contrast, to using the voice in performance, as in traditional theater or spoken-word poetry; "performing the voice" stages the voice to speak *about* speech, to enact, through lodging the voice into the electrical devices of recording, the peripheries of individual presence: to amplify the underheard and overlooked, the arrested and the repressed, the eavesdropped and the overheard, and shove it into the center of language. Rather than recite words, deliver up narrative or psychological drama through enacting script, performing the voice plunders language to reinvent the voice—as in Artaud's sacrificial, ritualistic theater that calls forth a primal speech in which death and corporeality merge to form new versions of individual presence—without organs, without

God, without the self. His work gains momentum when it moves off the page and onto magnetic tape, in 1948, with *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, for "sound recording inaugurated a new dimension to all possible forms of necrophilia and necrotopias, resuscitating the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, which manifests the hallucinatory, paranoid, supernatural, or schizophrenic presence of invisible, deceased, ghoulish, demonic, or divine others."<sup>3</sup>

Through its immersion into the prosthetic conduits of electronic technologies and the microphonic, the speaking subject as amplified, as nothing but tongue, underscores the heterogeneity of language articulated by Julia Kristeva in her term "signifiante," which "is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language. . . ."<sup>4</sup> Microphones necessarily multiply the body by emphasizing its location, as corporeal intensity, while displacing it, throwing it beyond the here and now, toward other centers, adding to the "unbounding generating process."

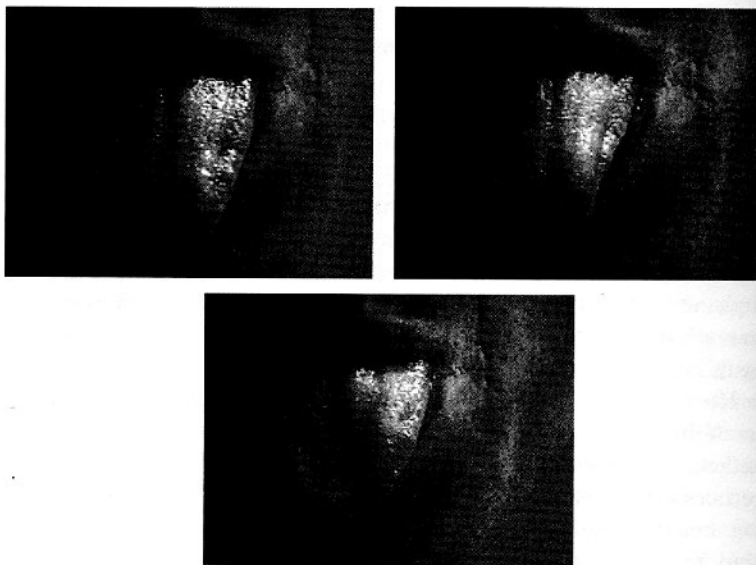
*Signifiante* is the process of practicing, in forms of presence, the movement in, through, and outside the boundaries that inscribe us within language through language itself. It is textual and at the same time, it's fraying. The microphone and recording technologies add something to Kristeva's semiotic formulations, for the drives, impulses, pulsations, and rhythms enacted through and against language in the moments of microphonic speech amplify the unconscious through an excessive orality that may in the end leave language totally behind. However, for Kristeva, Modernist poetry serves as a semantic battleground where the blank page and its linguistic scrawls (of Artaud, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, and Joyce) subvert and implement "structuring and de-structuring practice" of *signifiante* in and through and without language, the microphone and the electrical conduits of amplification, tape machines, and sonic gadgets throw the material of both page and language into the air: sputters, spits, guffaws, hiccups, stutters, regurgitations, lisps, channeled through, processed, manipulated, and cut-up by the microphone, tape machines, and speaker systems. Here, poetic language does not so much expose the seeming unity of the individual, but it already lives inside a performative arena that multiplies and de-centers the individual by inscribing the body, not strictly through a textual experimentation on the page, but in the throes of a sonicity embedded onto recording media and out again, into vibratory air. It is more mouth than voice, more stutter than fluidity, more viscous than vehicular, "where its intelligibility is embodied."<sup>5</sup>

As Henri Chopin articulates, "Sound poetry finds its sources in the very sources of the language and, by the use of electro-magnetics . . . owes nothing to any aesthetic or historical system of poetry."<sup>6</sup> Chopin's sound poetry, as defined in 1967, echoes with Kristeva's theorizing, in so far as it aims to expand the terrain of language beyond traditions of poetic usage, to draw upon language while leaving it behind. Yet, it moves past Kristeva by already leaving the page so as to perform the voice, to practice the "structuring and de-structuring" of semiotic revolutions as vibratory motion, in which "linguistic resources are unfolded in all their richness,

and with the aid of a single instrument—or multi-instrument—the mouth, which is a discerning resonator, capable of offering us several sounds simultaneously as long as these sounds are not restricted by the letter, the phoneme, or by a precise or specified word.”<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the use of recording technology, electronic manipulation, and microphonic devices may exit the field of the symbolic and fulfill what Migone describes as the “remainder remaining entirely beyond control.”<sup>8</sup> The remainder is that addition to language that comes back to haunt it, to stagger its signifier on the way to completion, to intervene with a stutter, which for Migone brings the body up into words, as somatic jag, as communicable glitch, “where communication breaks to communicate its incommunicability.”<sup>9</sup>

### Evading

Migone’s work *Evasion, or how to perform a tongue escape in public*, a performance with the instructions, “stick out your tongue as far as you can for as long as you can,” delves into the viscous materiality of the mouth itself. It does so through a poetic practice that suspends language across the void of sense, as “that prolonged hesitation between sense and sound.”<sup>10</sup> Hesitating on the threshold of sensical communication, prolonging the beginnings of speech, as if the voice were continually starting anew, finding expression along the synaptical charges of consciousness and in the syntactical thrust of orality, *Evasion* exemplifies Migone’s practice: by uncovering an inside that suggests a different outside.



Christof Migone, *Evasion*, 2001

*Evasion*, or how to perform a tongue escape in public—tongue held out, sustained, tiny droplet gathering at the tip, pointed tongue quivering, “this lasts forever, but that’s never long enough. hold still, the trembling gives you away.”<sup>11</sup>

In probing the mouth, *Evasion* implies the voice, “where tongue the fleshy organ is attempting escape from tongue the language.”<sup>12</sup> The work engages orality without ever uttering a word, but by exposing the physical mechanism upon which it relies. Such orality is no longer an index of its speaker, or stitched to the fabric of language, but rather a sonicity whose status straddles the line of life and death, of presence and absence, plenitude and the void, of recognizability and absurdity. The tongue moves the body to tears, exhausting it to a point of drips—of spit and tear, of endured agitation. The tongue quivers, held out of the mouth, exposing its moist muscle to the arid outside, making sounds that never cohere, but rather, uncover the minute tensions on the way to coherence.

Migone performed *Evasion* in 2001 at Beyond Baroque, Los Angeles, presenting the work as both video image and live performance: a prepared video was presented on a monitor showing the artist enacting the work—tongue held out for as long as possible. Alongside the monitor, Migone sat and performed the gesture live, holding a light toward his face, framing the tongue as “tongue twice, same tongue but temporally apart, side to side, trembling differently . . . as a duet.”<sup>13</sup> The audio of the work was heard from the videotape: a soundtrack derived from microphones placed in the mouth, trying to capture the microdetails of spit and tongue. Such a setup brings to life the corporeal fleshiness of the tongue: like Acconci’s libidinal speech, or Lucier’s architectural speech, Migone amplifies his own body, bringing it all too close, in minute detail. He aims for a similar intimacy, by bringing us into his mouth, up against the slick muscle of the mouth, and by revealing its inner sound. The extended tongue speaks another language, for it “heightens presence by presenting it bare, barely there.”<sup>14</sup>

### The Flaking Body—Snow Storm, South Winds, Crackers

Migone’s theater of the innards uncovers the residue, the trace, the indication or instance of exposure: unveiling the mouth behind the word, the tongue behind the mouth, the spit behind the tongue . . . revealing “the multifarious, heterogeneous, and often contradictory processes of consciousness itself,” for the “voice articulates body and language, place and knowledge, self and other, the imaginary and the symbolic, by founding an existential limit that is perpetually transgressed through speech.”<sup>15</sup>

All leaks are universes of signs, to be harnessed for the writing of a different text: one of tactility, intimacy, viscosity, and uncertainty, of jump starts and shortcuts. As in *South Winds*, a series of recordings using farts as their source, which turns flatulence into a production of sonorous accents, inflections of the body: the fart is harnessed and dissected for its inherent sonics, extended, repeated, humorously contorted into an alphabet of the body: vowels of the ass that extend

the capacity for the self to articulate; or *Snow Storm*, a double-video work showing the artist scratching his head with a contact microphone so as to cause dandruff to cascade down across his black trousers. Like *South Winds*, *Snow Storm* brings the body out, producing residues of flakes and sonic texture founded on the itch—dandruff as visual melody sprinkling from a scalp obsessively scratched. Or, another work of Migone's, *Crackers* exposes the body in all its uncanny detail. For the project, Migone recorded participants cracking their bones. Fingers, backs, knees, necks, shoulders, elbows, jaws, toes, and ankles form a symphony of timbral pops, textured volumes of skeletal architecture and sonic secrets, outlining "a kind of map of the internal . . . a lexicon of cracks, an endless vocabulary of tearing apart."<sup>16</sup> As in *South Winds*, *Crackers* amplifies the buried lunacy of the body by making audible its animate presence, as hidden detail.

What falls from the body is given center stage: the fart festival of *South Winds*, the orchestra of bone cracks in *Crackers*, and the dandruff flakes in *Snowstorm*. What stands out in these works is a relational proximity reminiscent of Acconci's performance works where he aimed to stand too close or follow behind. These works usurped and redefined the situational geography of individual presence and others by undoing their convention. By standing too close, by following behind, by making intimate, as in *Seedbed*, that which should be left outside, to other spaces, Acconci remapped and engaged different conditions of relation. For



Christof Migone, *Snow Storm*, 2002

Migone, the proximate means getting inside; the geographic means mapping not the body as object, but the body as parts—its joints, its farts, its dandruff. And the voice is more tongue, more exposure than invitation.

"The body is a noisy place. It emits and transmits, it cannot contain itself, it has no built-in muffler. Its only silencer is willed . . . the orchestral renderings of our innards are rarely appreciated for their musicality"<sup>17</sup>—musicality though not of compositional structuring but of decompositional destructuring—of farts and spits that leak and thus expose an orchestral rendering of corporeal detail. Non-speech, or speaking the unspeakable, letting the unspeakable slip, flatulence, drool, stutter . . . instances of drips and leaks: a language of intimacy . . . of the close-up and the proximate, or the too-proximate, the insides of the innards, "the bud of the bud and the root of the root of the tree called life,"<sup>18</sup> though exposed as sonic detail, as microphonic spittle.

### Radiophonic Dreamland—Fantasies of Geography

In tracking Migone's work, I am interested to extend my investigation of performance, in which the voice and its location form a complex mingling: of situational spaces and psychological uncertainties. In conflating voice with architecture, Acconci and Lucier reveal individual presence as contingent, *in process*, beyond the certainties of completion, phenomenological gestalt, and harmonic integration. The speaking subject makes explicit such a situation by exposing audible tensions.

Moving from the internal behaviors of individual bodies, to one-to-one relations, Migone further amplifies such tensions. Working at CKUT-FM in Montréal, Migone produced the show "Danger in Paradise" between 1987 and 1994. Through the program, he activated radio space by inserting participatory acts (Describe Yourself), telephonic relays (gridpubliclock, Body Map), linguistic and phonic games (Counting Meaning, Dangerous Spelling), and performative actions (Deliberate Inhaling). These projects "evoke the disrupted and degenerate inner voice that so disquietingly haunts our thoughts and our speech"<sup>19</sup> by defining radio as a field of performance: studio, electronics, microphones, broadcast and transmission, telephones and callers, the ether and its random points of contact and reception all feature as an elaborate, diffuse, and dizzying arena from which to create audio work. What results, in turn, is the staging of identity itself, or that "disrupted and degenerate inner voice," as in *Body Map*, where callers were asked to locate themselves on a map of Montreal superimposed with an image of a body:

Caller 1: I'm calling from a pinched nerve just below the left shoulder blade. I think Montréal's muscles are a bit stiff.

Caller 2: I'm calling from a lymph node. Actually, it's kind a embarrassing, lymph nodes are boring.

Caller 3: As I see it, the center of gravity for this body is right smack at the corner of St. Laurent and Crémazie.

Caller 4: Montréal has more than one mouth.<sup>20</sup>

Body on top of body, voice laid over city-body, so to corporealize the urban terrain with "pinched nerves" and "lymph nodes."

The radio voice is devoid of the body—disembodied, fragmented, immaterial, ethereal, psychic, without ground . . . caught in transmission, of loose threads and chuckles, the radio voice is erotic, granular, and strangely proximate: it speaks to strangers by locating itself in their private spaces. The radio voice moves beyond a single room: it is profoundly displaced, a stranger to itself without location, for it dissipates into its own chamber, echoing and trailing out without response. This speech does not return to itself, rather it remains out there, which may add to Connor's "first paradox," a second—that of the radiophonic, for the voice must endlessly leave itself, beyond the acoustic mirror, for it to confirm its presence. This though, for Migone, is catalyst for *using* radio, for it positions voices and bodies in unsettled relations, whereby "each broadcast takes place inside an echo chamber of information, histories, biographies, life stories . . ." resounding with "the most unnerving question of all, the ghost question: Who's there?"<sup>21</sup>

In another program, "gridpubliclock," Migone sought to unravel the ghost question by turning himself, as radio host, into an active body outside the frame of the station. Leaving the station, Migone would request people to call in and take over, acting as host while he left to walk the streets. Walking the city, he would then call in to the station and request further directions from the callers as to where to go: additional callers were asked to call in, adding further instructions to Migone's strange nocturnal journey by directing him through the city to various destinations. Using public telephone boxes, Migone was a traveler, a lost radio body without a home; he became not the originating voice trailing out into the echo chamber, but the echo coming back, returning to the original site, to state: "I, I am out here." He came to embody the siteless radio transmission by occupying random points on the map as a body directed by other voices: he became the acoustic mirror reflecting back, in schizophrenic excitation, his own transmission, adding a twist to Murray Schafer's call for a "phenomenological approach to broadcasting" where the "voice of the announcer be stilled" so as to "present situations as they occur."<sup>22</sup> In removing the host, erasing program with the world, allowing the situation to occur, what comes flooding in is a world punctuated with psychology, giving Schafer's "radical radio" a turn on the dial.

In yet another program, "Describe Yourself," Migone asked callers to do just that: describe themselves. Listening in, overhearing another's self-portrait as a string of adjectives, features of a featureless face, leads to the erasure so exemplary of radio and radiophonic space: that of removing presence, dispersing it—the body, the personality, the face—across a vague, haunting, and multiple terrain, that "fearful void of the universe, for such is the infinite space of radio."<sup>23</sup> That space defined by Weiss,



echoed by Gregory Whitehead when he says, "So radio is certainly most captivating as a place, but a place of constantly shifting borders and multiple identities, a no place where the living can dance with the dead, where voices can gather, mix, become something else, and then disappear into the night—degenerates in dreamland"<sup>24</sup>—that captivating space then performed by Migone: with other voices, of callers and their descriptions—of manic narratives and schizophrenic splits—and of geographic journeys, across the city and its dreamland.

The radiophonic dreamland occupied by ghosts, by the captivating punctuations of a siteless/sightless erotics, finds an alter ego in Matt Rogalsky's radio sampling. Developing original software that extracts gaps found in radio broadcasts, Rogalsky's "S" project eavesdropped on BBC 4 Radio over the course of one day (December 12, 2001, the one-hundred-year anniversary of the first radio transmission across the Atlantic), collating all the silences into twenty-four CDs. Such gaps though are never totally silent, containing instead the clicks, hums, scratches, and fizzes between, for example, words, bulletins, songs, or phone calls—in essence, radio as stream of transmission. Here, radio performs itself, Rogalsky as host to its mistakes, acting as shadow to radio's other software, that of Cash: technology used to filter out all the gaps and pauses before it reaches transmission, thereby increasing a stations advertising abilities. "Time is money" has found no better articulation. For Rogalsky, we might say "money is time," in so far as the artist cashes in on radio's leftovers, its aborted transmissions.

Rogalsky maps silence to trace its messages, as indicated by Whitehead's ghosts or Migone's bodies, outlining another mode of communication, that of the mistake, the break, the extract. He creates a kind of megaphone for all the voices found in radio dreamland—as in his *Perfect Imperfect*, where he mapped the silent spaces of Elveden Hall in Cambridge, UK, by shooting off a starter's pistol throughout the building's three floors. Recording the acoustics through stereo microphones and DAT (digital audio tape), the artist acoustically mapped the building, bringing to life all the buried reverberations of the historical site.

### Beyond Dreamland

Where then does the speaking subject end up? How do we hear, in the sonic effluvia of amplified and modulated speech, across radio lines, the conditions of language? For in Migone's work, the speaking subject is no longer necessarily an identity, fixed by a set of characteristics, named or centered on the page or periphery of language, but a mobile and spasmodic sonics splattered across the field of meaning. Migone buries language to discover the nerve ending of the very drive toward orality: he inserts the microphone just a bit further down, connecting a circuit to the insides of that primary point of approaching utterance: by opening the phone lines to other voices, by generating radiophonic orality, by stimulating speech in and across identity, by problematizing the very ability to speak by stuffing the mouth, spitting up and out, slurping microphones and bracketing the

body to get at its microfissures and outpourings. What then comes out, on the other end of amplification, is not only sound or sense but also the materiality of a physical relation.

In contrast to Kristeva's semiotic belief that Modernist poetry performs a kind of rupture on the field of the symbolic, making an opening onto a periphery of meaning, thereby "revolutionizing" the subject and its integration into social norms, Migone's work seems to perform the failure of not only language but the semiotic potential of peripheral meaning: meaning never recovers itself, solidifying into lexicon. Rather, the speaking subject remains just that: a subject bound to "grapple with the very fact of speech itself."<sup>25</sup> Such grappling parallels what I see in Acconci and Lucier's works, for each probes the complications of the here and now that the voice (and the body) seems to assume by mobilizing a psychic tension in which the voice speaks its inherent incompleteness: Acconci by staging his own pathos, fixating on a self-absorbed desire; Lucier by speaking his stutter into a form of architectural-musicality, making it object through act of recording, which necessarily eliminates his presence; and finally, with Migone, through his use of an orality that never arrives at sense but falls back upon itself, swallows itself, revealed in somatic ticks, agitated tongues, and vocal noise. He turns farts and dandruff into articulations by making language corporeal, and corporeality integral to speech. Such a move adds to or supplements the heterogeneity of Kristeva's signifying practices, by sticking a microphone up his ass, into faces, and against joints, by tuning the radio dial onto geographic space, nocturnal streets haunted by "degenerate voices," the nowhere of radio-land.

Whereas Lucier softens his stutter, by creating a fusion between himself and architecture, Migone accentuates it by forcing it out, as an unresolved intensity; whereas Lucier harmonizes, in a phenomenological fusion, Migone disrupts through corporeal abuse. Each, in marking the voice onto recording media, through processes of performance, occupy the phantasmic spectrum defined by recording technology: Lucier's narcissistic recuperation of himself as fused with the world, inside a nostalgia for the imagined possibility of perfect speech, brings the speaking subject into an erotic commingling with architecture—Lucier sitting in his room realizes his fantasy through unification with recording processes; on the other side, Migone's suppressed utterances, his *performing the voice*, his farts and cracks, break apart any semblance of unity through a glottal orality that can never be recuperated by language: Migone speaks through farts and dandruff. It is my view that each, in turn—and Acconci's speech produced through performative tensions—contributes to an expansion of sound's presence by unearthing and embodying the difficulties of being in the here and now.

### Contextual

I have been pursuing the voice here for a number of reasons: to follow an investigation of art as it develops throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s and how

sound figures in such history, and to uncover an expanded vocabulary of the ways in which sound is relational, through modes of spatiality. Performance art offers a challenge to the developments of Minimalism by explicitly complicating the phenomenological imperative so alive in sculptural installation work, as well as Minimalist music. It does so by, among other things, using the voice as a means to stage the body and the tensions of experience—that is, to incorporate the specifics, rather than the generalizations, of the self, as the locus of perception and experience, within the aesthetic palette. Just as sound is used to get at the heart of perception, as in the work of Fluxus, the voice is used to get at the heart of the body.

I understand the early works of Acconci and Lucier as figuring in relation to historical developments of the time, namely in the wake of Conceptual art in the late 1960s. For Conceptual art, like Minimalism, shifts attention away from the singular object as a totality in itself and instead looks toward the very spaces, information, and conditions surrounding the object, how the art object is an amalgamation of forms, and their functions condensed into a temporal and spatial moment: when we look at the art object, what we see is not so much its form but the situational parameters surrounding it and the structures that make its very presence possible. This is necessarily phenomenological—what I perceive is a set of relationships that determine perception—and important, for Conceptual art, political—what I witness is a situation determined by an ideological, cultural apparatus. Following the works here, we might add the buried and difficult psychologies of subjective narratives and their subsequent social tensions.

Such operations can be understood in relation to the developments of post-modernism and its theoretical frameworks, for postmodernity's general debunking of the mythologies surrounding the artist, in turn, figures in poststructuralism's ontological questioning of the state of the subject. Thus, Kristeva's intersecting social and political ideas with psychoanalytic theory gives fuel to the unconscious as a reservoir for "poetic revolutions" while maintaining a relation to the very structures (of language) such poetics aim to explode. Conceptual art makes possible, by ruling out subjective expression as unquestionably a route to freedom, the reassertion of corporeal art, exemplified in Acconci and the performative surge of the late 1960s.

Conceptual art, as well as the environment of the 1960s and 1970s in general, makes self-conscious the speaking subject by distrusting the excess of presence, its fevers and flows, for such corporeal excess was seen to only reinstate the hegemony of the social order. The deadpan intellectualism of Conceptualism thus replaces the heroic splatterer of paint with the philosophical imperative to interrogate the conditions of meaning; its serial and geometric fabrications dilute the spontaneity of intuitive making; the ephemeral trace and dematerialized object empty out the potential of forms to grant access to a stable signified, insisting instead on the ever-shifting terms of knowing; and the innocence of spatial constructs to simply house and give space to the viewing subject is challenged by critical

appraisal of the very conditions of institutions and architectures. Thus, on every front, Conceptualism and its related strands usurp the plenitude of Modern art, as both formalistic process and revolutionary trickery. Yet, this is not to overlook that such modern heroics does find its place within artistic practices of the 1960s; it could be said to simply shift its register, remake itself, and cast an altogether different glow. Within this glow, one can glimpse a longing for certainty: on the conditions of subjectivity, the assurance of presence, and the relational possibility of incorporation. Thus, Acconci's staging of the male condition is tenuously tied to its own volatile sense of transcendence, as figured in the spectrum of desire and fear in the face of the other; and Lucier's generative articulations of his own speaking voice as a kind of material presence reinforcing itself. To adopt the voice, as a sonic register of the body, and the fevers of presence positions the individual as not only an object of attention, but as a process in action. To follow Acconci and Lucier leads us to the subject *on trial/in process*, not as a cathartic release of heroic potential, but as body searching its own limitations; not as stable object to be seen, but rather as a performing sound to be heard, for sound, by nature, is always *in process*.

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I would like to refer back to the work of John Cage, as well as the work of Fluxus and Minimalism, to attempt to stage an intersection of two opposing views of sound and its acoustical potential. On the one hand, the movements away from musical representation and the arguments of musical messages and toward the phenomenal complexities of the sound world, from found sound to microtonal frequencies, led to a reliance upon the sound object and source by emphasizing the origin from which sound originates: Cage's and Fluxus's projects are theatrical presentations of material processes that generate sounds as by-products: music as open form. Yet, the presence of sound, and the belief in the possibility of its immediacy to lead us to "real" experience, brings with it the problematics of social reality: Cage's extravagant confusion draws in the particulars of sonic viewpoint, and the aesthetic gags of Fluxus refer us to an intensity of real materials and real effects. The interest in the real is given concrete form in Minimalist aesthetic of both music and sculpture, which makes the viewer and listener complicit within the making of a work's meaning: meaning derives not from the object alone, but at the moment of its apprehension and appreciation. Yet, the relational consideration of listener or viewer within a particular space brings with it the sense that such things are stable references: space is a given architectural fixture and the listening subject, a figure moving around whose sensual experience results in immersion and plenitude: La Monte Young's Dream House of sonic excess that bathes the listener inside a space of vibratory bliss. What marks this move is a general distrust of language: Cage's "letting sounds be themselves" moves from metadescription to material insistence; the Fluxus project plays games with language to

arrive at immediate presence; and Minimalism, while discursively active, remains resolutely bound to corporeal experience.

In contrast to this listening experience, I've wanted to pursue the other side of the spectrum by addressing the work of Acconci, Lucier, and Migone, where sound fails to complete the subject, fails to deliver up a plenitude of listening, and instead reveals the intensities of the body as caught between language and its fluidity, between symbolic values and semiotic rushes, between plenitude and deflation. Their works seem to aim not for escape, from language and its inherent social structure, but instead leap into the messy performativity of speaking as a subject. From here, descriptions of sound must contain not only the field of erotic hearing, or corporeal plenitude, of liberated listening, but also the emptying out of presence, a death initiated by the expenditures of the voice.

What these artists enact is their own negotiation with subjectivity as housed within social and architectural environments: Acconci amplifies his state of lack through performing desire and fear, in and against spaces and other people; Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* accentuates subjective experience as inherently *in process*—the compounding of his voice, through recording and rerecording, while opening up the possibility of pure speech, in turn, reveals this as pure fantasy; and Migone's microphonic vocalizations leave language behind by adding too much body, too much spittle and the fine hairs of utterance. Following Kristeva, each artist registers the subject "on trial," caught in the mechanics of language, in the gears of the symbolic and its peripheries. The voice here hints at possible "revolution" while reinforcing the impossibility of fulfillment.

Following the voice, as a performative operation in Performance art, musical composition, and audio art, has led to a recognition that the power of sound, and its ontological status, may be found in its ability to allow for a possible representation of the edges of corporeal presence, where the individual may remain beyond recuperation or liberation. To follow the performing voice points toward the broader possibility of sound as medium for the negotiation of social and psychological pressures, without arriving at resolution, but rather allowing one to remain in and against the network of psychic intensities that relies upon language while straddling its periphery.

## Notes

1. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 148.
2. Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.
3. Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 83.
4. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 17.