

The Show with the Voice: An [Au]/-[o]-tophonographic Parody

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Abstract: According to my claim that voice as a phenomenon cannot be materialised or located, neither in the (voice organ of the) self nor in the (ear of the) other, I coined the term *[au]/[o]-tophonography* for my examination of the possibilities of performing subjectivity in writing and in sound productions. Drawing on the theory of performativity in its deconstructive senses (see BUTLER, 1993, 1997, 1999/1990; DERRIDA, 1988/1972, 1997/1967, 2002/1981; SMITH, 1995) my performative epistemology reaches beyond the theoretical, including the practical and the aesthetic, aiming at questioning notions of "self", "audience", "voice", "writing" and "communication". [The show with the voice](#) is an example of this practice. It parodies the medico-scientific approach to the human voice by presenting some of its possible appearances (the "normal", the "disordered", the "homosexual" and the "transsexual" voice) in an audio collage that takes the shape of a mock tutorial. Through re-contextualising and re-compiling voice samples from different sources that are usually kept apart (e.g. the lecturer's voice, the researcher's voice, the artist's voice, the autobiographer's voice) I open a space for a multidisciplinary and creative perspective to the examination of voice.

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1. On the Predicaments of a Creative Writer, Sound Performer and Critical Theorist Who Works in a Voice Clinic Specialised in the Assessment and Treatment of "the Transsexual Voice"

In human communication sciences and public discourses more generally it is common practice to locate the voice in the "body", which is itself conceived as an unchallenged extra-discursive reality. As an organ, the voice is understood as coming in two genders whose characteristics are believed to be stable and generalisable in their dichotomy: the female/male voice is made up of female/male vocal folds, coupled with a female/male vocal tract (see e.g. COLEMAN, 1983). As an effect of binary-sexed bodies, the voice is presented as if it could carry the gendered self of the voice producer to the listener who is seen as being capable of detecting "our size, height, weight, physique, sex, age and occupation, often even sexual orientation" (KARPF, 2006, p.10) from the sound. As part of the assessment routine in voice clinics voices are captured in sound recordings, which are then cut into those pieces that can be measured easily. As

sounds are severed from words, voice quality from pitch, breathiness from roughness, and their acoustical and perceptual characteristics are compared to normative values, the pieces of evidence for the available diagnoses are produced and categories of voices created: the "normal", the "disordered", the "male", the "female", the "homosexual" and the "transsexual" voice. Following the assessment, a treatment programme is designed in order to address those aspects of the voice that have been detected as deviating from the norm with the purpose of restoring the very function of the voice: to transport "not only linguistic meaning, but also personality traits and discrete emotions" (TANNER, 2006, p.181) from the speaker to the listener. [1]

Working as a clinical educator in a student voice clinic that is specialised in the assessment and treatment of "the transsexual voice", the practical consequences of a rigid adherence to a gender binary biological essentialism and to a positivist approach to communication, research and clinical practice have become perceptible to me. Too often I find us approaching our work in a way that asks the clients to focus on the imitation of acoustical norms instead of allowing them the space to experiment with their voices in personally meaningful ways. We seem to concentrate on the observation of those behaviours that fit our assessment templates, our treatment regimes and our report writing schemes in order to use the available resources as efficiently as possible. I feel at times that my workplace should thus better be relabelled "normative school of opposite-sex-ideal-imitation for people with deviant genitals", or "school of pure impersonation of biological essentialism" or "school of speech pathologization for sufferers from 'the matrix of coherent gender norms' " (BUTLER, 1999, p.23). [2]

As there seems to be a sense in communication clinics that "communication" is too complex an activity as to be observable or treatable as a whole, the communication scientist is liberated from the burden of dealing with the intricacies of a "holistic" perspective, and is instead asked to focus on the finer categorisations. Under the pretext of providing a higher degree of specificity of service the complicated whole is excluded from consideration and instead replaced by small-scale, almost experimental, analyses and interventions that require an impressive amount of specialist skills and equipment, which make the clinician appear rather as a laboratory engineer than as a "conversation partner". Thus, while indulging in analyses and calculations of various kinds, I am constantly at risk of losing track of the bigger picture, the context, the reason why a person came to see me in the first place. I would even go so far as to say that "human communication science", in its obsession with objectivity, seems to be an activity that could do without the personal encounter with the client. I contend further that my profession, due to its sole focus on the client, falls short of appropriately addressing the "exchange" aspect of communication: not only is the clinician's contribution to the meaning-making procedures in a clinical encounter (in the shape of activities of production, reception, interpretation and attribution) entirely neglected but we seem also to feel immune to the client turning our tools against us and starting to read our disorders, (gender) identity, emotions and (sexual) preferences from our voices. [3]

If I gave up my "objective" stance and had a look at myself for a while, I would find that I couldn't be regarded as the pure impersonation of a health scientist. Rather, like everybody else, while pursuing my everyday life within the discursive frame that has been available to me I have been assembling various subject positions whose frictions, collisions and coactions continuously effect countless scenarios of messiness, contradiction, ambivalence and challenge. The double mode of my creative practice, which consists deliberately of script and sound recordings, pushes me into the conflicting roles of "writer" and "sound performer". In my role as voice researcher I am taking my stand in a debate around the notion of "communication" in a way that dismisses attempts of other voice researchers to argue in favour of its commonsense, scientific conceptualisation, or not to argue at all, but rather to take it for granted as a common ground on which all further knowledge production could build. By arguing, against the grain, in favour of a notion of voice as "performative" (as I will below) I produce another dissonance with a discourse where voice is so primarily anchored in the sexed body of the voice producer. [4]

An understanding of "the show with the voice" as an instance of what BAKHTIN calls "double-voiced discourse" (ACZEL, 1998, p.480), of which "parody" is one variety, doesn't necessarily decrease the intricacies in which I am entangled. According to this perspective, a parody is a text in which "the speaking voice occupying another's discourse deliberately misbehaves with the intended semantic direction of that discourse" (ibid.). As an advocate of deconstruction¹ it has become important to me to emphasise the general inaccessibility of those intentions some people seem to find in a text as well as to stress the impossibility of determining one "semantic direction" of a discourse. As a speech pathologist who is at the same time a critical theorist, as an everyday speaker, writer, singer, reader and listener who performed his subjectivity from the perspective of different ages, put in the roles of different genders, exposed to the regulatory practices of different languages and cultural conventions it is impossible for me to tell the conflicting voices apart and to adopt only one as my own and give it sole (consciously controlled) authority. [5]

2. How to Write Voice, how to Voice Writing Performatively?

As I started to question the suitability and ethical legitimation of the medico-scientific approach to the human voice, I became occupied with the question of how to write in a way that could effect a radical challenge to what seems as an amalgamation of a positivist paradigm, research method and presentation practice. Turning away from my profession's realism, objectivism and quantitativism made me, via meandering pathways, fancy a kind of "hybridized writing" (NETTELBECK, 1998, p.3) that, as it "brings the "creative" and the "critical" together" (ibid., p.4) and "uses fictional and poetic strategies to stage theoretical questions" (GIBBS, 2003, p.309), has been labelled "fictocriticism" by some (see for instance KERR & NETTELBECK, 1998; GIBBS, 2003; HECQ,

1 I use the term "deconstruction" and its derivatives here following GARVER in the sense of "a sustained argument against the possibility of anything pure and simple which can serve as the foundation for the meaning of signs" (in DERRIDA, 1973, p.XXII).

2005). This approach, with its "focus on the creation, rather than the explication, of 'meaning' " (NETTELBECK, 1998, p.2), allows me "both to theorise and to dramatise" (GIBBS, 2003, p.309) those issues that matter for my examination of the intricacies involved in an approach to text production and in performances of subjectivity that cannot be located comfortably in the available academic and literary frameworks. In its "concern with self-reflexivity, with the fragment ... with intertextuality ... with the bending of narrative boundaries and the crossing of genres" (NETTELBECK, 1998, p.3) it opens a suitable space for the mysterious cacophonies of the human voice. In fictocriticism, as NETTELBECK argues, the movement "between the poles of fiction ('invention'/'speculation') and criticism ('deduction'/'explication'), of subjectivity ('interiority') and objectivity ('exteriority')" (ibid., pp.3-4), that blurring of distinctions and oppositions,

"occurs not only through the irregular intrusion of a slippery subjectivity (the subject 'who says I') but also through various other devices that insert ambiguities into the text. To play upon metaphor and metonymy, to deploy intertextual echoes and analogies, to write (back) to a parallel text in a way that invokes that absent text but avoids the interpretative gesture: these are all devices that point to the simultaneous occurrence of more than one way of reading. What this strongly suggests is that fictocriticism is not just a 'genre'; more than that, it is a way of speaking, a mode of performance" (ibid., pp.5-6). [6]

On the one hand, fictocriticism seems to be the "mode of performance" par excellence for my examination, because it liberates us from the coercion to abstract and to echo abstractions and from the expectation to explain and to classify what cannot be clarified and categorised. On the other hand, it nevertheless appears to require materialisation as writing in the traditional sense, which is the creation of an assemblage of letters printed on paper giving them the appearance of stability and durability. As the notion of "voice", however, tends to be related to the notion of "sound", which is commonly understood as "the sensation produced in the organs of hearing when the surrounding air is set in vibration in such a way as to affect these" (THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY ONLINE, 2007) I consider the fictocritical sound performance as the "gold standard" of phonography (listen to [The show with the voice](#) as an example of this "genre"). [7]

In a nutshell, my project examines how to write the voice as a subjective and, as I will outline below, "autobiographical" sound. Moreover, as my approach is driven in a way that it cannot be type-cast as either art or research practice, from clinical, scientific and commonsense perspectives, it seems paradoxical from the start. For are we not asked to assume that it is essential to differentiate between "speech", "voice", "writing", "reading", and "listening" as modes of "communication" and to specialise in the study of one of those modalities in order to perform successfully within one of the available frameworks of knowledge production? And is it not contrary to received opinion and expectation to focus on the sensitivities of the "subjective voice" instead of prioritising the allegedly measurable, general, accessible? If I further commit to an examination of the "autobiographical voice", does this not imply a mobilisation of the concept of

"narrative voice" which, as "metaphorical voice", is mostly understood as "free of any material reference" (see GIBSON, 2001, p.640) and as such could do without activating the "literal voice" of the sound performance I am offering as the most suitable version of my work? And are we not, moreover, constantly reminded of the gaping alienation between the worlds of arts and academia such that it makes my approach that lets the perspectives overlap and the methods intermingle seem unlikely if not unscholarly? [8]

The question of how to write voice, how to voice writing in a way that could exceed the rivalrous hierarchy between the diverse forms of communication as it has been widely suggested by theorists of various disciplinary backgrounds leads to the issue of "communication" itself. Following DERRIDA, one might be inclined to ask how one could write in a way that destabilises and displaces this term in its superiority as a concept of "a means of transport or transitional medium of [...] a *unified* meaning" (DERRIDA, 1988, p.1). How could my writing thus contribute to a liberation of the notion of voice from this bequeathed shackle of a simplified theory of signification that applies, due to its inflexible normativity, a certain violence to the phenomena it pretends to merely represent? Here, another hint at the ethical dimension of my project appears, which becomes especially pronounced if we consider that the notion of voice (as sound) seems to be tied in a triple manner: not only to a straightforward conveyance of messages but also and in particular to assumptions about the sexed body and what is taken to be its core, the self. [9]

Put differently, I would think it important to ask whether "spoken communication", which tends to be misunderstood as a taken-for-granted meaning-delivery apparatus, must not rather modestly be associated with those practices that RÉE calls "conversation", "discussions that take place in the medium of speech, consisting of sequences and overlappings and minglings of vocally articulated utterances" (2001, p.789). If we thus deconstruct the notion of "communication" to a set of activities that might involve the transport of vibrations of air molecules between conversation partners if it is called "speech" and that might involve various kinds of arm, hand and finger movements if it is called "writing" and that might involve a combination of the former and the latter if it is called "voice" in its various appearances, the following becomes apparent: There is no straightforward connection with notions of "self" or "experience" or "meaning" to be found, which could moreover be assumed to be conveyed (untouched) through these activities. It seems rather that the issues of "subjectivity", "objectivity" and "signification" cannot be approached independently of each other as they are all entangled with the problematic of the effects of the use of language in human encounters. [10]

In this paper I will try to avoid a repetition of the pitfalls of a scientific essentialism and of the impasses of concepts of "writing" and "voice" as instances of readable "self-expression". Thus, I will suggest a form of text production that will, following DERRIDA, displace that which has been traditionally known as "communication" with a new concept of *writing* that "exceeds and comprehends that of language" (1997, p.8). As an aside: it is this postulate of "the general graphematic structure

of every 'communication' " (1988, p.19), which can be understood as the core issue that differentiates the theory of performativity in its deconstructive sense, on which I will focus in this paper, from AUSTIN's notion of the "performative" (see DERRIDA, 1988 for a detailed discussion and AUSTIN, 1976/1962). When DERRIDA displaces "communication" and its subcategories with writing as he understands it, this writing is no longer confined to an activity conducted by a conscious individual who prints letters on paper. Instead, "graphematic" becomes the term for what he considers as the general conditions of signification, conditions that appear incompatible with the ways in which "communication" is commonly understood. What are the characteristics of the "grapheme" that will from now on also constitute the characteristics of the "phone" and the "phoneme" and of what has been formerly understood as other modes of verbal and nonverbal "message exchange" or "information transport"? [11]

For DERRIDA, "to write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn ... offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten" (1988, p.8). According to this perspective any form of signification works beyond the presence of the producer, the receiver and the original context of the utterance "whether 'real' or 'linguistic'" (ibid., p.9). As one important aspect of the deconstruction of "communication" *absence* displaces presence as one of the key aspects of writing. Through this operation, any taken-for-grantedness that has been attached to "communication" practices and their potential effects is taken away. The text (which has now become a tissue of writing in DERRIDA's sense) emerges as a free-floating vibration that is tied to no one and nothing. It becomes a movement, to which all participants of a discourse have access, a matter that can be used in various ways and for various purposes, for which there is no right or wrong and no limitation. Nobody can claim ownership of the text any more or contend to provide its only truthful reading. As I will discuss further later, this new notion of writing cannot be considered as an act of "self-expression", as the text is regarded as immune to the infusion with "identities" or other forms of imagined self-presence (for instance there is no "male" or "female" writing possible any more). As the text itself is now regarded as free of meaning, all that is possible is to engage in the activity of making sense of it, which cannot be understood as a passive exposure or absorption of a transparent translation any more. Whatever we make of the text is a doing, which, as we will see later, can neither be understood comprehensively nor as a conscious activity nor as something we could control. [12]

The graphematic mark is further structured by "the possibility of disengagement and graft" (DERRIDA, 1988, p.9): it can be taken out of one context and inserted into others. Instead of being conceived as controllable by the hand and mind of one author, writing is understood as an "anchorless drifting" that can be cut and pasted at will and is thus, through its exposure to a recurring change in context, continuously exposed to processes of metamorphosis. Correspondingly, DERRIDA understands this citationality or repeatability, which he calls the "iterability" of writing according to a "logic that ties repetition to alterity" (1988, p.7). Or as KRÄMER writes, "each repetition of a sign is characterised by a spatio-temporal shifting and implies a becoming different; repetition and the generation

of difference are entangled" (2004, p.16, my translation). Put differently, for DERRIDA, iterability works as a "breaking force ... whose historicity and contingent implications rupture identity *from the inside*" (KIRBY, 2006, p.96). There are "fault lines ... internal to every aspect of language [and all modalities of experience] because there is no originary coherence which pre-exists this "breaking up" of the language operation" (ibid., p.97). Writing, in that it is structured by absence and iterability, appears thus as "a systematic production of differences, the *production* of a system of differences ... [as] *différance*" (DERRIDA, 2002, p.28), a movement in which "the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a *being*—are always *deferred*" (ibid., p.29). [13]

As a consequence of this postulate of a general writing as *différance* that "make[s] every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general" (DERRIDA, 1988, p.10) the voice can no longer be understood as an extra-discursive, *indifferent* translator of a "natural reality" but is exposed as a technical and artful device that produces "cultural" events. As *différance*, the "play of differences" (DERRIDA, 2002, p.26), precedes and structures everything, the voice emerges as a sound that is cut off from the illusion of the stable presence of the "body" and "identity" of the voice producer. [14]

Take as an example the following reconstruction of a conversation I had with my parents when I played the beginning of "the show with the voice" to them:

My mother: "Wer spricht denn da?" ["Whose voice is this?"]

Me: "Ich." ["Mine."]

My mother to my father: "Hättest Du gedacht, dass er das ist?" ["Would you have thought that this is him?"]

My father: "Na klar." ["Sure."] "Hast Du das nicht verstanden? Er hat uns doch gesagt, dass er eine Autobiografie schreibt, dann muss er das doch sein." ["Don't you understand? He has told us before that his work is an autobiography, so it must be him."]

My mother: "Bist Du das wirklich, David?" ["Really, this is you, David?"]

(As the show goes on it is again and again interrupted by my mother muttering: "Das hätte ich nie gedacht, dass du das bist." ["I would have never thought that this is you."])

I take this scene as a corroboration of my deconstructive perspective to the human voice. For what remains of *my* voice if it fails to represent me in my mother's ears and if I have to observe how my father first misunderstands the unpronounceable label for my work and consequently struggles to reconstruct my voice with the help of a slightly misguided theoretical operation? How can I confidently claim identity with the origin of a sound collage I put together from various sources at a time and location and for an audience different from the context of these 10 minutes I am referring to here, when those who listen to the playback of this text don't recognise me as the one who is meant to shape up in the middle of the vibrations that are stirring the air between us? Admittedly, I did

exaggerate in "the show with the voice" what makes the voice graphematic: By quoting exuberantly from scientific discourse² and even from the labels of two of my body care products, I exposed my tendency to use language—what AUSTIN would call—"not seriously, but in many ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of etiolations of language" (1976, p.22). By digitally manipulating my recordings and by using the built in text-to-speech voice of my computer I further accentuated the voice's always/already inextricability with "culture, technique, and artifice" (DERRIDA, 1997, p.15) and thus presented it as a "somatechnical"³ event. By speaking in a language that is not my mother tongue I inserted a further "spacing" (DERRIDA's term for a process of separation from all forms of present reference) between my "identity" and "my" voice. [15]

My sound performance can thus be understood as an implementation of my theoretical argument that goes like this: what we do and effect when we talk to each other and when we write and read cannot be understood as instances of a general movement ("communication") of a straightforward exchange of messages (entities that can be filled with stable meanings that can be unpacked upon arrival) between speaker and listener, writer and reader. Rather, meanings are created continuously in speaking, listening, writing and reading, and as those activities happen at times simultaneously, at other times time-delayed, and as they are certainly activities that involve various subjects and discourses, they cannot be assumed to constitute stable and consistent effects. Moreover and importantly, I argue that the linguistic practices of meaning-making, of making sense of the world must be understood literally as operations that make meanings, that create the world as they go and as such cannot be conceived as acts which could simply refer to, represent or transport pre-existing, extra-discursive phenomena. Through this rearticulation "communication" emerges as a production of unstable, unpredictable, preliminary *performative* events, as an instance of the workings of *performativity*. The theory of performativity that I mobilise here provides me with an important focus of my inquiry. I will ask repeatedly how to understand this term in its deconstructive senses and how this particular approach to critical theory can provide us with a rich resource for the re-examination of those terms that have become so familiar to us that they either aren't challenged at all or not as thoroughly as they should be. According to the performative perspective I adopted for my work I will argue that those phenomena, which we tend to regard as stable, taken-for-granted appearances of reality, on which we think we could rely as trusted tools for further knowledge production, like our selves, our gender, our voices, the texts we write, must rather be understood as something slippery that cannot be grasped or seized. They must be considered as events that tend to get out of control and in particular, with BUTLER, as products of those regulatory practices "by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993, p.2). [16]

2 BROWN, PERRY, CHEESMAN and PRING (2000), De BRUIN, COERTS and GREVEN (2000), GROSS (1999), KEIL (1994), VAN BORSEL, DE CUYPERE and VAN DEN BERGHE (2001).

3 See <http://www.ccs.mq.edu.au/research.php> for an outline of this new field of research.

As a phenomenon that is thus liberated from "being reduced to the representation of reality" (KOLESCH, 2004, p.24, my translation) the voice becomes useless for scientific endeavours because its diagnostic tools won't be able to take hold of it. Instead, due to its exposure as a staged event, the voice appears as "a performative phenomenon par excellence" (KOLESCH & KRÄMER, 2006, p.11, my translation) that is—like other performative events—"constituting the identity it is purported to be" (BUTLER 1999, p.33). Once unshackled from its "metaphysical pocketings" (KOLESCH, 2004, p.19, my translation) the voice metamorphoses to a "paradigmatical figure of transgression" (ibid., p.23, my translation) that, due to its ephemerality, "exists only in its continuous disappearance" (ibid., p.19, my translation). [17]

Thus, it seems that—if at all—we could write the human voice as a vibratory force that continuously destabilises and sets in motion whatever it encounters (vocal folds, air molecules, ear drums, hair cells, brain cells, thoughts, emotions, words, discourses, politics). It disturbs through its slipperiness but encourages through its raffishness and drive. Conceived as a performative phenomenon the voice has the power to queer the various categorisations and oppositions that lie at the heart of the discourse on human communication. My project emerges thus predominantly as a questioning of the method of writing as well as of the writability in general of phenomena like the voice that cannot be thought to exist outside the complex movements of text production. [18]

3. Why I Cannot Show My Voice in [Au]/[o]-tophonography

Due to a possible misguidance through the use of the label "[au]/[o]-tophonography", a term that, if pronounced, could easily be misunderstood as "autobiography" (as seen above), audiences might find it appropriate to scrutinise my work for snippets of information about my "self". They may expect further that the meaning of what they consider as my attempts of "self-expression" will either be delivered directly to their brains⁴ or—in case they encounter aesthetically more ambitious work—they will have to read between the lines for who I am and what I wanted to say about me. Ideally, they might think, they will find a paper on the Internet, in which I explain my work and thus myself. Unfortunately, this is not something I could achieve here. [19]

The main reason for my impotence to represent my work and me is that I understand what appears as "my" doing and being in general not as external phenomena to which I could simply refer but as processes whose effects are intertwined with text production and which must as such be regarded as unrepresentable, "performative" events (as mentioned above). In this section I would like to apply this perspective in particular to the issue of "[au]/[o]-tophonography". The advantage of this term with regards to my critical endeavour is that it is neither readily understandable nor easily pronounceable. If one tried to enunciate this heavily citational and perverting word construction for the first time

4 See DENES and PINSON (1972, p.5):

"Speech communications consists of a chain of events linking the speaker's brain with the listener's brain. We shall call this chain of events the speech chain."

one would probably have to cut it to pieces and say something like: auto/oto/phono/graphy. But, as we can see, putting the collection of those graphemes to speech, whether mumbled as a whole in a hardly intelligible way or analysed to fragments that can be spoken more easily, doesn't contribute to the delivery of an unambiguous meaning. Even if we translate from ancient Greek to self/ear/voice/writing, the assemblage of words doesn't seem to imprint its essence into our brains. While this is uncomfortable, it is not our fault. [20]

[Au]/[o]-tophonography as a clearly artificial, technical, cultural textual construction and critical practice cannot be assumed to bear a unified meaning core that would translate itself univocally for us who would just have to open our senses and let the appearance of truth simply sink in. As BARTHES tells us, "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" (1977, p.148) and as such does not carry "a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)" (ibid., p.146) that could be deciphered or transported from A to B. This move limits the possibilities of a simplistic understanding of meaning-making in text production and reception and thus in writing and reading, speaking and listening, in conversation, in communication, and discloses a large field of instabilities in an area of human experience whose smoothness of flow is widely taken for granted. [21]

In a similar vein, SMITH challenges the commonsense assumption of a straightforward relationship between notions of the "self" and autobiographical writing. She writes:

"The 'self', so often invoked in self-expressive theories of autobiography is not a noun, a thing-in-itself, waiting to be materialized through the text. There is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self ... located somewhere 'inside' the narrating subject ... awaiting transmission to a surface" (1995, p.17). [22]

As the text, for BARTHES "*is experienced only in an activity of production*" (1977, p.157) the self, for SMITH, doesn't exist before the writing but it is in writing, through the use of language, that the self emerges. She writes: "narrative performativity constitutes interiority. That is, the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling" (1995, p.18). [23]

If the self, my "auto" part, is conceived as a linguistic effect, I cannot know in advance what it is, I will, in fact, never be able to determine it, because it will always be in the making. All I can do is to ask continuously: How does the—necessarily ephemeral—autobiographical subject come into being? As a consequence, through its radical challenge to any form of unified, stable and coherent subject position, the performative perspective explodes the "autobiographical contract" (see LEJEUNE, 1982) of traditional autobiography that presupposed the identity of author, narrator and protagonist. None of its torn off and thoroughly riven fragments seems to have been suited for the classical role of the hero, as their formerly successful emergence cannot be attributed to extraordinary achievements any more. Instead, according to BUTLER, agency

must now be conceived, as an effect of "the reiterative and citational practice" (1993, p.2) of impersonal power structures. [24]

In SMITH's terms, the performative approach to autobiography troubles the traditional notion of the autobiographer as the representative of "the universal subject" (see SMITH, 1993) in "its privileged status as the origin of meaning, knowledge, truth" (ibid., p.8). It further points at the questionable status of autobiography "as one of the West's master discourses ... [that] helped consolidate bourgeois subjects who understood themselves to be individuals, rational, free, autonomous ... [and] reflected the historical forces that pressed persons into certain kinds of subjectivities" (ibid., p.18). In working out the sexism, racism and other exclusionary politics inherent in what appears as an amalgamation of theories of the self and narrative practices associated with Enlightenment values SMITH exposes the "universal subject's" "normative (masculine) individuality" (ibid., p.3) as dependent on the practice of evacuating what she calls "the 'colorful', that is, that which becomes identified culturally as other, exotic, unruly, irrational, uncivilized, regional" (ibid., p.9): "Woman, mother, and the feminine functioned in the text of traditional autobiography ... [as] 'the mess and clutter' of the nonidentical that the autobiographer had to clear out as he struggled toward self-identity and the narrative of a coherent past" (1993, p.19). [25]

Here again, the question of *how to write* is revealed as an ethical issue that puts me in a precarious position, whose names and occupations could be easily misread as aligning with "the tyranny of the arid 'I', which obscures through a gray and shapeless mist everything colorful that lies within its vision" (SMITH, 1993, p.3-4). I have to find a way to avoid stepping or being pushed into my predecessors' shoes from where I would make my audience (as they might wish) believe that I could wrestle with the most dangerous and exciting adventures (e.g. jumping from helicopters either on skyscrapers' roofs or with my feet automatically getting attached to skis my pilot's uniform changing to an all-body quilt landing on snowy mountains which I will elegantly slalom and loop while unerringly bringing down enemies of all kinds before I will—now changed to a light beige suit and Chrysler loafers—bump into a beautiful blonde at an exotic bazaar who will feed me with spices raising me to the seventh heavens giving you a chance of having a long look at her private parts and maybe catching a glimpse of mine before I will tell her after 5 minutes that I have to go because of work that has to be done racing with my 5 wheel drive through the desert to an oasis where I will meet a gangster-type guy standing with a cocktail next to the pool introducing me with my surname first and my first name and my surname then) while carrying out my mission. [26]

I know that in order to "perform", "show my voice" or even "come across" *differently*, if those interventions can be assumed to be achievable at all, it will not be enough to simply announce that [au]/[o]-tophonography is *not* a writing practice featuring a white, male, heterosexual agent. What is needed is rather a radical disassembling of what appears as the welded notion of "communication", as a straightforward means of reaching understanding between people, which

might put us in the position to construct a new perspective to subjective agency in meaning production. [27]

As indicated above, the problematic of *agency* in performativity, the question of *who is doing the writing* and *who speaks* has become contested in contemporary critical theory. GIBBS and TILSON for instance propose to replace the term "writing" with "textual production" in order to emphasise the productive effect "of both writing *and* reading" (1982, p.2). If we apply this proposal to the field of "phonation", with which we are especially concerned here, it becomes apparent that we have to assume a concurrence of processes of "voicing" and "hearing" or "listening": As "phonation" is understood as "the production ... of vocal sounds" (THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY ONLINE, 2007), which are in turn conceived as being produced both in the "vocal organs" (ibid.) and in the "organs of hearing" (ibid.), I suggest to use the term "sound performance" in order to point at the cooperative productive activities of both "spoken word performers" (who, as a rule, while speaking also hear or sense themselves speak) and "audience". Thus, it makes sense at this stage to explicitly widen the notion of "producing" in general to include processes of perception, interpretation and attribution. [28]

With regards to the "oto" part of [au]/[o]-tophonography (the ear, the listener, the audience) we might thus ask: How are we as the audience involved in the making of [au]/[o]-tophonography's subjects? This question implies once more the theoretical shift undertaken according to the theory of performativity, which has the effect that those subjects can no longer be understood as being presentable as stable, pre-existing, extra-discursive "beings" but must be regarded as emerging in the textual performance, which is always an intersubjective interaction. Here it becomes clear that we are entangled in a staging of inextricability without the possibility of referring to a kind of anchoring or solid base: the subjects who and that are made in [au]/[o]-tophonography, whether they be called "speakers" or "listeners" or "writers" or "readers" or subject matters of any other kind—like in our case the issues of "self", "other", "voice", "writing" and "communication"—can neither be regarded independently of each other nor can we afford to assume we could ever know them well enough to take them for granted. Instead of allowing us to rely on the sedimentation of their "being" as a familiar foundation for our further knowledge production, the dealing with performative events seems rather to keep us on the go by drawing us into conditions of instability and fleetingness. Thus, the making of "auto", "oto", "phono" and "graphy" as producing and produced events seems inextricably intertwined in [au]/[o]-tophonography. [29]

All this makes the task of writing more complex because it becomes apparent that this is not a start. I am already involved in an ongoing process of signification. I have always been written as I have always been writing my story, the story of my voice. However, the processes of voicing and being voiced—as they seem mostly to pass by unnoticed in their perpetual reiteration—have remained unfamiliar to me. As I constantly desire and feel pushed by others to the showing of my voice I face the endeavour's futility. Every aspect of my chosen and imposed project seems to slip away as I imagine that I will approach it: I witness

how my subject matters perform their ephemerality. I find myself already intertwined with what I fantasise I will yet undertake: I cannot figure myself beyond the showing of my voice and yet this doesn't put me or someone else in the position to grasp the emerging vibrations and to detect who I am. Nobody knows where or what my voice is, it metamorphoses and trails away in its infinite transformability. As it cannot be located or materialised, its "being" cannot be thought outside its performance. The voicing of my voice becomes the topic and method of my examination, its inaccessible finding and its indeterminable genre. [30]

If someone came and asked me: "What is *the* voice, what is *my* or *your* voice and how do they come to sound?" I might answer something like this: "It appears that neither the 'objective' voice as a general, universal phenomenon, nor the 'subjective' voice as an instance of unisonance that belongs exclusively to one person, can be said to exist". What GIBSON writes on the notion of the "narrative voice" appears to apply to the whole field of phonation whether it is approached from a scientific, a literary, a political, a performance or a performative perspective: "[V]oice is a theoretical construction" (1996, p.146). "The very assumption of a voice itself constitutes a mode of reading ... like its final truth or essential meaning, the 'voice' in a ... text disappears in the process of interpretation and reinterpretation" (ibid., p.151). [31]

Although we have to accept that the question of meaning-making in performativity cannot be understood in terms of individual efforts, according to BUTLER, there is some agency in phonography. This agency must not be confused with the fantasy of omnipotence of the human communication scientist, but it appears rather in the form of a "lack of success": as the necessary failure of performativity to secure normal, homogeneous and coherent subjects with uniform voices. As BUTLER argues, "the subject is neither a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation to language, nor a mere effect whose agency is pure complicity with prior operations of power" (1997, p.26). It is due to the fact that the power of discourse depends on reiteration in order to assume its act-like status and to reinforce its regulatory law that performativity not only "produce[s] the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (1993, p.2) but also provides "a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility" (ibid., p.3). [32]

Thus, it seems, paradoxically, that subversion can be achieved through surrendering to a compulsorily repetitive use of language that is beyond the control of the speaking subject. Because subjects find themselves "on multiple stages simultaneously, called to heterogeneous recitations of identity" (SMITH, 1995, p.20) behavioural conformity becomes impossible and failure, the "slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect" (BUTLER, 1993, p.122), becomes inevitable. As there is no performativity, no voice, no signification without reiteration of what counts as intelligible, there is no choice but to repeat. Yet, without a choice or necessity to make a deliberate attempt of subversion we can rely on a regular production of cacophonous clashes of contradictory expectations that may effect perversion, "the action of turning aside from what is true or right; the diversion of something from its original and proper

course, state, or meaning" (THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY ONLINE, 2007), of those cultural constructions that have turned out to be unhelpful, unduly restrictive and pathologising for some. [33]

The caution with which I chose the preposition in the title for this paper seems thus justified: given the complexities of the theory of performativity in its relation to signification, which can never be understood as simple representation, a showing of the voice seems impossible. "The show *with* the voice" attempts therefore rather, perhaps similar to its model, the German children's TV series, *The show with the mouse* (WDR, RBB, & SWR, 1971), to provide a platform for a "reexamination of the familiar" (SPIVAK, 1997, p.xiii), on which the voice, like the mouse, appears for some time and disappears again, but never speaks unequivocally. [34]

Appendices

[The show with the voice](#) (PDF file, 100 KB)

[The show with the voice](#) (Mp3 file, 6 MB)

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