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Digital Ventriloquism:
Practices of Vocal Resistance and Self Emancipation

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Abstract

The spoken voice has long been regarded as *the* primary mode of self-expression, affecting as a grain or a body that carries its own fingerprint, yet an uncanny and disquieting vocal operation is uncovered when speech is displaced and ventriloquised through recording. When the spoken voice is disembodied, recorded and thrown back towards the body through audio playback, language is spatialised and the voice becomes rhythmic and kinaesthetic, inflicting an acousmatic violence on the human subject as if from a God or Master – one that is outside and inside the speaker’s visible body at once.

This practice research investigates the extent to which subjects can “have done” (Artaud, 1947/2021) with this godly voice, exploring how digital audio technology can help a literally present performer to resist the affective power of masterful speech. I approach these questions through a concept I call digital ventriloquism, which employs practical techniques such as live voice sampling, lip – synch and digital speech manipulation onstage. These help place the spoken voice into different spatial and temporal proximities alongside the live body, seeking to unveil the spell cast on subjects by logocentric speech.

I reveal recorded speech as a coercive agent that tries to puppeteer human subjects, promising them a sense of subjective unity – a ‘proper’ identity and a ‘whole’ body – for the price of aural obedience. This allows me to shed new light on “the metaphysical legacy of essences” (Labelle, 2010, 167), complicate normative understandings of selfhood and explore how the “capitalist sorcery” (Pignarre and Stengers, 2011) of masterful speech can be contested in live performance.

This thesis argues that if subjects can resist the self-controlling voice of the Master through the practice of digital ventriloquism, an openness to the multiplicity of voices within and beyond the human body becomes possible. I propose a radical rethinking of the affective power of recorded speech, to catalyse new ethical and political

possibilities in a posthuman present requiring decentralised, interconnected and emancipated understandings of subjectivity.

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Introduction

Masterful Speech

Speak the words written here aloud and ask yourself what meanings they contain. Ask yourself how the sound of your voice relates to the instrument of your body, now engaged in an act of speech. Ask yourself who is really talking. Is it you? It sounds like you, but the words aren't yours, they are mine – at least, I wrote them here. Perhaps I am speaking through you then, even as you hear your own voice. But I haven't said a word and I am not here, so who does this spoken voice belong to? Is it me, you, both of us, someone else or no-one at all?

The spoken voice carried along by the words I use every day has become troubling to me in the context of my ongoing practice research – which employs and explores acts of live speech recording, playback and interaction onstage. The voice I have uncovered is powerful and manipulative. It encourages me to believe that my speech can communicate something essential and unified about me – about the nature of my thoughts, identity and subjectivity. Moreover, it encourages me to believe that the voice is something I can own. This voice channels the colonising power of words. Words that trap thoughts and express them as speech, gesturing towards an essence and a bodily source for thoughts and subjectivity that speech can never reveal. This voice uncovers only “a schism between things and words...between ideas and the signs that represent them” (Artaud, 2010: 3). When replayed through machines, this spoken voice can exert a shadow-like power (Chion, 1999), over the body, becoming a God-like disembodied voice, speaking again and claiming ownership of the body from an invisible distance. This voice is ventriloquial and, in its ability to ventriloquise, it is masterful.

My practical investigations into affective entanglements between voices, speech, bodies and digital audio technology, stem from my existing sound performance practice as well as a “significant paucity of critical writing on voice within theatre

studies” (Thomaidis, 2017: 9) and a related acknowledgement that there is “much to learn from the disembodied voice and the way it speaks to us” (Barker in Thomaidis and Macpherson, 2015: xxv). This thesis looks to specifically respond to such a paucity by offering new insights for the field of voice studies, regarding processes of vocal disembodiment and uses of the disembodied, recorded voice in live performance practice. Moreover, it seeks to introduce and develop new ideas and practices of ventriloquism which embrace the performative potential of digital audio technology, beginning from the idea that ventriloquism can offer “new insights into the relationship between speech and text and the role of the speaker within it” (Hoegarts and Wiklund, 2021: 5).

I was first exposed to particular audio tools (such as the loop pedal, Ableton Live sound production software and the Korg Kaoss Pad) through professional experience as a live musician and sound designer. In the practice research I have developed during this doctoral project, many expressive and technical skills associated with live music performance and sound design (such as live singing, live voice recording, musical instrument operation and soundscape composition using computer software onstage) have been used. Such skills have been combined with related techniques developed through my academic training and professional experience as an actor and theatre-maker (for example techniques in acting, theatrical devising, dramaturgy and performance analysis). This combination and use of physical, technical and conceptual performance modes has been specifically oriented towards making and engaging with acts voice recording, replay, interaction and speech manipulation, ‘in the moment’ of live theatrical performance onstage. When the live and pre-made speech recordings I make appear alongside me, I experience a unique unsettling of my “literal presence” (Power, 2008: 87 -115) and a sense that the boundaries between the live and the recorded self have become confused, or as Cormac Power describes it, an impression that my “being present” before an audience is not entirely separate from “making present” or “having presence” (Power, 2008: 89). At the heart of this practice research lies a practical, theoretical and philosophical imperative to interrogate and distinctly articulate problems and complications of corporeal and

vocal self-presence, analysing what I call the affective power of disembodied speech, with the help of digital audio technology.

This project began with practical attempts to make invisible recordings of the spoken voice appear present in relation to a literally present and visible performing body in solo workshop contexts, to dispute the idea that audio recordings are simply dead objects with no self-awareness (Sterne, 2003). If the audio recordings I made in the performance studio could instead take on qualities of what Steven Connor calls the “vocalic body” (Connor, 2000: 35 - 36), then perhaps perceptions of my own self-presence (as the maker of live voice recordings and the performer interacting with them onstage) might be changed and complicated, when the spoken voice re-appeared alongside the live body. Moreover, I was interested in how these complications might intersect more broadly with western traditions and histories of mimetic production (Taussig, 1993). If the disembodied spoken voice was able to contradict, reshape and perform powerfully in relation to the live body, what were the ethical and political implications for notions of both my own subjectivity (as I performed these experiments on myself) and for notions of subjectivity more generally? Such provocations are examined throughout this thesis.

As I explored these ideas, new theoretical insights arose. It became clear for example, that the states of vocal self-presence I sought to uncover and unsettle (through acts of speech recording and replay) could not be found or quantified at all, especially within the representational framework of the live stage. My investigations revealed only the impossibility of pinpointing and confirming what vocal self-presence is, or where it might reside in relation to the live performing body. What I first perceived as confusions of vocal self-presence were arguably experiences of a *desire* to locate and utter an impossible, unquantifiable self-presence, entangled with what I now claim is the affective power of disembodied and digitally recorded speech. I found that this combination of desire and affective power could magnify the link between human voices and subjectivity (Dolar, 2006: 23), allowing live subjects to become re-entwined with, and contingent upon invisible voices, making them appear

uncannily present, despite their status as recorded objects. My practical concept of digital ventriloquism (outlined and analysed throughout this thesis) aims to expose recorded speech as a coercive agent that can puppeteer human subjects, promising impressions of subjective unity such as a ‘proper’ identity and a ‘whole’ body, for the price of aural obedience.

The desire for subjective unity and the search for wholeness, essence and metaphysical simplicity relates closely to an enduring and potent “tradition to regard the voice as something that expresses ‘me’” (Lacey, 2014: 30) as well as a broader “metaphysical legacy of essences” (Labelle, 2010: 167) that lingers on, despite post-structural, post-modern, and posthuman moves towards networked, de-centralised and plural understandings of the self. My digital ventriloquism practice gestures towards this metaphysical legacy, intending to undermine it and further emancipate human subjects from its hold, with the assistance of digital audio technology. If subjects can be released from what I argue is the self-controlling, colonising metaphysics at the heart of western speech, a greater openness to a multiplicity of voices and subjectivities within and beyond the human body becomes possible. This in turn creates a catalyst for a less restrictive ethics and politics of what it means to be human in the digital age. Digital ventriloquism looks to offer theoretical and practical interventions that gesture towards this emancipatory ethics and politics, opening new performance “spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned” (Harney and Moten, 2013: 11), in relation to the bodies and voices of human subjects.

The practice of digital ventriloquism and the theoretical insights it has given rise to, have been developed through repeating cycles of solo workshop experimentation and subsequent critical reflection through academic writing. These cycles have taken place alongside engagements with relevant theoretical literature throughout. This cyclical process has brought about the design of new sonic dramaturgies, voice techniques and practices, shared in a live theatrical performance called *Mouthpiece*. Here, my practice research experiments and discoveries were collected and presented

live onstage. This thesis offers a detailed critical reflection and analysis of my digital ventriloquism techniques and subsequent theoretical discoveries. My digital ventriloquism techniques and discoveries form the key practice research contributions of this thesis and are explored and analysed in detail, throughout this document.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter One, the origins and aims of my concept of digital ventriloquism are contextualised by identifying and analysing the theoretical and practical heritage from which they emerge. My concerns with vocal self-presence and vocal self-expression are placed in relation to the voice's longstanding and intimate link to perceptions of subjectivity and corporeality. Ways in which the spoken and recorded voice can acquire acousmatic (Chion, 1999) and bodily qualities are noted before I analyse how these factors can accentuate and complexify the invisible voice's link to the speaker's visible body onstage.

My practical concerns are related to a logocentric tradition emphasising the primacy of words and speech (Derrida, 1997) as origins of essential and truthful expression. Such realisations assist my claim that disembodied spoken voices can display affective power over live performing bodies, creating complex presence effects (Feral, 2012: 29), that compete with (and reshape) perceptions of literal presence, in relation to speaking performers. Such factors reveal qualities within speech that are ventriloquial and masterful, invisibly re-entangling recorded spoken voices with physical bodies. I argue that my own acts of digital ventriloquism act to tense, loosen and reconfigure the signifying mechanics of speech itself, helping me distance and undo the self-controlling power of the spoken voice, with the help of digital audio recording technology. I explore how my practice of digital ventriloquism fundamentally constitutes an attempt to "have done" (Artaud, 1947/2021) with the logocentric voices that talk for (and over) human subjects from within and beyond their physical bodies. Furthermore, the practice is situated in relation to Kessler's notion that ventriloquism offers a guide for tracing movements of power and knowledge through

distinct media platforms (Kessler, 2016: viii), before an exploration of how it practically and theoretically informs and extends specific complications between speech and self-presence found in artworks such as Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* (Beckett, 1965) and Ken McMullen's experimental film *Ghost Dance* (Cornerstone Media, 1983).

The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One is used to support an analysis of three practical examples from the first half of my own research performance, *Mouthpiece*¹ (performed live at the James Arnott Theatre in Glasgow in June and December 2022), revealing how spoken voices and disembodied speech can display affective power and metaphysical mastery over live bodies onstage, in Chapter Two. Here, I first analyse acts of what I call 'Live Recorded Speech Capture' (which involves acts of live speech recording and replay) that allowed me to stretch and manipulate the intimate link (Dolar, 2006: 23) between the voice and body, preserving and magnifying the voice's affective power (through live recording) and shifting it into a new spatial and temporal relationship with the body (through speech replay). It is suggested that this use of just-recorded speech created the appropriate conditions for the live body to become ventriloquised by the recorded voice - complicating and undoing notions of self-presence in the process.

By critically reflecting on another early scene in *Mouthpiece*, where the live body displayed listening obedience (Dolar, 2006: 75) towards several recorded voices replaying through remote speakers, through my use of a practical technique that I call 'Remote Voice Dislocation and Proliferation', I investigate how the affective power and agency of the recorded voice are compounded by the requirement to obediently listen and follow its directions. This investigation is related to Ben Hudson's notion

¹ A weblink to the filmed performance of *Mouthpiece* and the *Mouthpiece* script are provided in appendices One and Two of this document. The filmed performance of *Mouthpiece* (Appendix One) can be viewed in its entirety and/or alongside this document (where specific performance sequences are referred to in brackets). The *Mouthpiece* script is also provided as a supplementary artefact (Appendix Two). This is provided in case readers wish to verify or analyse specific technical directions or passages of speech from *Mouthpiece* in more detail, in written form.

that mediated representations can achieve a sense of presence through “an awareness of the present tense of the performance situation” (Hudson, 2012: 258), showing how acts of obedient listening, live interaction and bodily compliance can allow a recorded voice to seem to control live performance conditions. I explore how simultaneously splitting vocal directions between numerous speaker devices can compound these impressions and act to further manipulate and puppeteer a live performer and listening audience, directing their aural and visual attention towards numerous remote playback devices.

Shifting my focus towards a practice that I refer to as ‘Auto Lip (Un) Synch’ (used within *Mouthpiece*), allows me to complicate a desire to find homogenous states of self-presence within the spoken voice and unmask tendencies for spectator/listeners to try to align audible voices with visible mouths (Altman, 1980: 72). When a performer’s voice and body can *seem* to be re-united, through the audio-visual re-alignment of a recorded voice with a live mouth onstage, it is suggested that impressions of subjective wholeness can be regained. In relation to Mikhail Yampolsky, it is posited that during the act of lip –synch, a performer is able draw the recorded voice back towards the mouth (Yampolsky, 2004), allowing it to seem live again. The ability to do so reveals how aspects of self-presence can be manipulated and re-configured through such acts of audio-visual synchronisation. When a recorded voice can seem to speak again through a live body like this a hybrid subject/object is created, overtly “call(ing) into question the authenticity and integrity” (Snell, 2020: 4) of either the body or the voice as credible sources of self-presence. When this authenticity and integrity are undermined onstage, the appropriate conditions are created for resisting the affective power of embodied and disembodied speech.

After analysing qualities of self-control and affective power within the disembodied voice, distinct practical strategies aimed at undermining and negating them are explored, as I sought to emancipate my self from their hold over my identity, agency and presence in the second half of *Mouthpiece*. The first example discussed in

Chapter Three concerns an act that I call ‘Proxy Mouth Puppetry’, where two puppet mouths (attached to my hands) and two remote speakers (replaying recorded samples of my speech) were used in an attempt to throw the voice between the performing body and two inanimate objects, further stretching a human tendency to locate sound with vision and redirecting the affective power of recorded speech away from the body. Manually operating these puppets in combination with two recorded voices alongside the body intended to create a new, visible distance between the live body and the disembodied voice, helping me begin to undermine and break the voice’s acousmatic and shadow-like power over notions of corporeal presence.

Uses of silence, live digital resampling (via the Korg Kaoss Pad) and real-time vocal pitch manipulations then constituted new attempts to undermine and resist the affective power of the spoken voice. Whilst an act of silent escape from the stage space in the second half of *Mouthpiece* offered a temporary reprieve from the hold of the replaying, recorded voice, it was only when I began to digitally break apart the voice via the Korg Kaoss Pad, using a technique that I refer to as ‘Digital Speech Glitch and Re-Pitch’, that the sonic and semantic affectivity of disembodied speech could begin to be more overtly corrupted. I claim that my operation of the Kaoss Pad with one finger allowed me to shift the voice into a digital space beyond language and logocentric order, freeing the body momentarily from the spoken voice’s affective hold. By using extreme pitch shift effects on the live voice, I then tried to show how the spoken voice could be manipulated and modified during the moment of utterance, exposing alterity as a fundamental dimension of vocality (Neumark, 2010: xx), altering my own vocal “fingerprint” (Dolar, 2006: 22) as speech was uttered – undermining the voice’s ability to verify and represent the speaking subject accurately.

Chapter Three goes on to describe and analyse ways in which I attempted to chop, re-order and further break apart disembodied and disembodying speech, through uses of digital audio technology and practice that I have termed ‘Performer/Computer Speech Breakdown’. My ability to employ this practice to record and instantly re-

order spoken sentences (through the use of recording and re-ordering functions within Ableton Live) allowed me to undo the signifying mechanics of the just-recorded voice, further disrupting and undermining the affective quality of a voice which had made 'perfect' sense, moments before. By activating the Follow Actions algorithm within the Ableton Live music software program, I could then imbricate my corporeal agency with the computer onstage, which itself autonomously activated individual speech snippets at random, outside of my bodily control. This allowed me to foreground a posthuman 'we' of assembled agents (live body and computer) operating in tandem to destroy the singular 'I' implied by a once powerful disembodied spoken voice.

Simultaneously replaying and manipulating all the speech samples used and created during *Mouthpiece* created a cacophony of incoherent voices, which became reversed, re-pitched and transformed into a mess of babbling and sonically unrecognisable digital information, allowing the live body to operate as a silent, omnipotent God in relation to the previously powerful speaking voice. By finally chewing and ingesting my own performance script, I returned to the analogue technological apparatus of the mouth and teeth to break apart words just spoken onstage. This highlighted once more how the mouth operates in the zone of crossing between the interior of the body and the exterior environment around it (Dolar, 2006: 81), as well as revealing an inherent irony in the desire and ability to break apart words that simultaneously re-enter a body that is trying to undermine their power.

I conclude with an exploration of the successes, complications and ethical consequences of my practical aim to resist and undermine the affective power of the spoken voice, in relation to notions of literal presence onstage. I offer potential new research avenues and practices opened by my findings, particularly in relation to the fields of race, gender and identity politics. It is ultimately suggested that the practice and concept of digital ventriloquism can allow subjects to momentarily overcome the self-controlling voice of masterful speech, opening a space beyond spoken language onstage where a multiplicity of voices within and beyond the human body can be heard. I stress the emancipatory potential of digital ventriloquism as a performance

method, helping to rethink the affective power of recorded speech and catalyse new ethical and political possibilities for subjectivity.

I also advocate more broadly for the relevance and importance of live theatrical practice in the digital age, suggesting that the live stage represents an especially appropriate context for undoing, problematising and reconfiguring the mechanics of vocal self-presence through uses of digital technology. Conversely, I acknowledge how the spaces opened through such interactions with technology carry their own ethical and political complications and constraints, especially in relation to notions of algorithmic control and human/machine assimilation (Crary, 2022).

Throughout this thesis written arguments repeat, intensify and take off in new directions, as distinct practical methods are introduced and interrogated. In this way, the architecture of this document is directly influenced and shaped by the processes and experiences of vocal disembodiment explored onstage, where notions of repetition and replay are integral for a ventriloquial methodology that makes, re-makes and undoes concepts of vocal self-presence, as they are manifested in live performance.

Chapter One

Digital Ventriloquism: A Theoretical and Practical Genealogy

Introduction

This chapter identifies and analyses the theoretical and practical foundations of my practice research, providing a route into the central argument of this thesis: namely, that my concept of digital ventriloquism allows me to resist and undermine the affective power of live and disembodied speech. It places my **own** practical concerns alongside other ideas of ventriloquism, theoretical ideas from voice and theatre studies and **selected** performance examples, exploring why live theatrical practice is the most appropriate methodological tool for this enquiry.

Specifically, I investigate how the human voice has been regarded as a primary mode of self-expression that can affect as a grain, body and presence. I then reveal a more uncanny and disquieting vocal operation, uncovered when speech is displaced and ventriloquised through recording in live performance practice. These ideas are analysed and contextualised in relation to other uses of disembodied speech in performance, reflecting specifically on examples from the play *Krapp's Last Tape* (Beckett, 1965) and the film *Ghost Dance* (Cornerstone Media, 1983). My analysis of these two artworks enables me to trace ways in which the spoken voice becomes disembodied, captured and spatialised using sound recording/playback technologies, accentuating inherently kinaesthetic and logocentric traits within speech. I investigate how disembodied speech can inflict acousmatic violence over human subjects, demanding corporeal and aural obedience like a logocentric Master or God - an omnipotent and civilising vocal agent, existing outside and inside a speaker's body at once. Informed by the anti-structuralist thinking of Antonin Artaud,² I explore how my **practical** concept of digital ventriloquism constitutes a "struggle against the

² In works such as *The Theatre and Its Double* (Artaud, 2010) and *To have done with the judgement of god* (Artaud in Barber, 2021).

imperialism of the letter [...] and its appropriation of life” (Thiher, 1984: 506), when I engage in acts of live speech, speech replay and speech manipulation onstage.

Having outlined a violent and problematic politics at the heart of spoken language, I then contextualise and analyse what it might then mean to escape and move beyond the disembodied, logocentric voice, with the assistance of digital audio technology. I argue that my digital ventriloquism practice creates unique performance conditions, allowing a human subject to come to terms with, resist and move further away from both the potent tradition to regard spoken voices as expressions of self, and a wider “metaphysical legacy of essences” (Labelle, 2010: 167) that beckons humans back to (long lost) notions of subjective unity. By the end of this chapter an interweaving theoretical and practical context is established, assisting the subsequent reading and interpretation of specific examples from my digital ventriloquism practice in Chapters Two and Three.

It is important to state here that my project clearly aligns with other anti-essentialist contributions to the field of voice studies, made since the turn of the Twenty-first century. For example, it corresponds initially with Nina Eidsheim’s suggestion that “voice and vocal identity are *not* situated at a unified locus that can be unilaterally identified” (Eidsheim, 2019: 3) despite persistent tendencies to ask, ‘who is this?’ when we listen to voices and search for an impossible vocal essence (Eidsheim, 2019: 153). This thesis explores affective complications that surround lingering metaphysical legacies of unified vocal essence, as well as the outmoded perceptual habits these legacies have given rise to, as I show in subsequent chapters. I look to expose and dismantle such legacies and habits through my intermedial performance practice of digital ventriloquism, live onstage. Through back-to-back acts of live speech, digital speech recording, speech replay and digital speech manipulation, assumed loci of vocal self-presence and subjective identity can be complicated, proliferated and dismantled in real-time. In doing this, I seek to unveil and undo what Ben Macpherson relatedly suggests is “the cultural myth that certain voices belong with certain bodies” (Macpherson, 2023: 5). More specifically, I attempt to undo what I regard as

the myth that my voice and body necessarily belong together, practically questioning this myth through acts of speech, speech recording, replay, interaction and manipulation onstage. I try to question and dismantle the notion that my voice and body must either belong together or constitute a unified human subject. Ongoing implications, legacies and perceptions of belonging, unity and ownership (as related to spoken voices and physical bodies) are investigated and unpicked throughout this thesis.

Similarly, I look to explore what Katherine Meizel refers to as “the vocal negotiation of identity” (Meizel, 2020: 7) through my digital ventriloquism practice. Meizel’s framing of the relationship between voices and subjectivity as a ‘negotiation’ is a helpful starting point for me since it suggests the potential for unsettling some of the (seemingly) fixed and unmoveable connotations of a metaphysically complete vocal subject. In my practice research, relationships between human voices, speech, bodies, digital technology and performance move back, forth and around each other in a discursive flux. This (often fractious) back and forth is enacted with the aim of freeing the voice and body from the constricting, violent hold of metaphysics. My desire to unsettle, unfix and free human subjectivity from metaphysical understandings of the human voice is directly informed by the notion that vocal identities may be negotiated, as opposed to being fixed and imposed from elsewhere.

In the sphere of recent academic practice research, Yvon Bonenfant’s work is also significant, since my work shares Bonenfant’s desire to “shed some light on the in which vocal identities are performed, what effect they have and how they operate” (Bonenfant, 2018: 111). The idea that aspects of vocal identity can be performed is fundamental to my research since I employ and explore the mechanics of spoken representation as these mechanics are manifested and performed live onstage. My practice research methodology allows me to assess vocal affects and spoken constructions in the moment they are expressed and constructed, within the similarly constructed and constructing framework of the theatre (as I show). The representative, constructed nature of the stage offers me a unique ability to point

back at layers of representative construction as I also make, unmake and manipulate live and recorded speech acts onstage. Unmasking the performative mechanics at the heart of vocal representation allows me to also unmask the affective and operational layers which impact on relationships between human subjects and spoken voices. Through practice, I can assess how vocal affects come into being, before intervening, challenging and manipulating these affects with the assistance of digital technology onstage.

Other scholars whose ideas surround de-essentialising vocal and sonic expression are also referenced throughout this document. For example, Brandon Labelle's book *Acoustic Justice* (2021), and Mladen Dolar's introductory essay in Feldman and Zeitlin's *The Voice as Something More* (2019) are instructive, offering other apt examples of theoretical work that aims to rethink the metaphysics of human voices and sound and listening practices (as I show later in this thesis). In light of theoretical contributions like these, it is important to state that although my work relates closely, it is instead my practical concept of digital ventriloquism (and the techniques and performance methods that make it up) which forms the unique academic contribution of this thesis (over and above my suggestion that spoken human voices can and should be further de-essentialised through uses of live performance practice). Within this written document, I offer a set of rigorously researched and clearly defined practical digital ventriloquism techniques, alongside a new vocabulary of precise terms to distinctly identify and describe them. The performative shifts, glitches and changes in vocal operation brought about through digital ventriloquism practice are the unique, practical result of my desire to free voice and bodies from legacies of metaphysical essence.

Live Theatre and Digital Ventriloquism Practice

Live theatrical practice is the best methodological tool for this research enquiry since it is seemingly posited in an initial, unified 'here and now' (Power, 2008: 9), before a co-present audience. This makes the stage a fertile environment for exploring and

activating complications of what Cormac Power calls the mode of “literal presence” (Power, 2008: 87 - 115), where “being present” before an audience is not entirely separate from “making present” or “having presence” (Power, 2008: 89). Power’s idea points helpfully at how modes and qualities of presence become inextricably entwined with constructions and representations of presence when presence is experienced, expressed and represented in theatrical time and space. My theatrical practice allows me to explore and disorganise experiences and representations of presence as I employ related constructed/constructing mechanisms such as a stage, scripted language, self-representative voice recordings and digital audio technology. The theatrical, linguistic and digital sound recording strategies I use allow me to uniquely test and unpick complications and notions of self-presence in (and just after) the moment of their expression and construction in real time, onstage. Moreover, the combination of intermedial, live sound design, sonic dramaturgy and text-based practices that combine to form my practical concept of digital ventriloquism (on the theatrical stage) are related, but academically and practically distinct from the theoretical and practical context mentioned above, making this research project especially pertinent.

It is important to state here that I do not seek to explore wider debates around liveness³ through my uses of digital technology, despite their relevance and closeness to aspects of my work. At a fundamental level, the critical context of presence seems most applicable to my concerns with self-representation, performativity and affective power. It is precisely for the human implications of the word presence - the ‘I am’ as compared to the ‘I am not’ (Giannachi and Kaye, 2011: 5), that I prioritise presence as a supporting context. The relationship between my interactions with digital

³ These debates surround Peggy Phelan’s claim that “Performance’s only life is in the present” (Phelan, 1993: 146) and Philip Auslander’s opposing argument that “it is not realistic to propose that live performance can remain ontologically pristine” (Auslander, 2008: 45).

technology and ideas around the presence of the spoken voice and the visible, physical body are of the utmost importance to this thesis.

Through my practice, I attempt not to wallow in the apparent emptiness of theatrical self-representation, but instead to stage and exploit lingering assumptions about presence (its nowness and life) by entangling the living, performing, voicing body with closely related systems and modes of self-representation. In the experiments I undertake, metaphysical assumptions of unified self-presence are manipulated and complicated as the live body re-engages with self-representative, invisible audio recordings of the voice made by me, in the same performance space (often) moments before they are replayed. Vocal “presence effects” (Feral, 2012: 34) become magnified, stretched, tensed, distanced and momentarily broken as the spoken voice is captured, processed and run - through digital audio technology – as I record, reflect, refract and otherwise bring the disembodied voice back into conversation with the performing body. Such encounters with embodied and disembodied speech and just-captured speech recordings seek to transform and undo experiences and notions of literal presence, whilst accentuating the affective power of voices and spoken language, rather than simply (or only) divesting the voice and body of their nowness and life – an act that is arguably impossible.

My research revolves around acts of performative voice manipulation and self (de/re) construction through speech, making my concept and the practices of digital ventriloquism especially apt. This term usefully aligns my practice with traditional ventriloquial techniques, such as the manipulation of anthropomorphic puppets by performers and the throwing of a speaker’s voice towards a puppet body, so words appear to come from a source outside of them. However, I do not prioritise traditional puppetry techniques and instead use digital audio technology to facilitate related processes of vocal dislocation and relocation. The technologies I use (described in detail in chapters Two and Three) allow me to uniquely explore how disembodied voices can unsettle and undermine perceptions of literal presence and

analyse how voices can become spatially and temporally distanced from bodies, whilst simultaneously re-entangled with existing notions of subjectivity onstage.

Steven Connor argues that traditional ventriloquism offers “a violent relation between times and modalities, the tenses of the mediated body and the disembodied and irresistibly re-embodied voice” (Connor, 2000: 416). My own acts of digital ventriloquism aim to show how a live performer can use digital audio technology to accentuate and complicate this violent temporal/modal relation, testing how the human voice’s link to subjectivity may be twisted, resisted and undermined when the voice becomes disembodied, recorded and replayed in altered spatio-temporal configurations alongside the body. I also employ digital ventriloquism in line with Sarah Kessler’s understanding that ventriloquial techniques offer “a unique template for tracing the transmissions of power and knowledge through diverse media platforms” (Kessler, 2016: viii).

Whilst Kessler employs understandings of ventriloquism to interrogate modern political figures such as Donald Trump and analyse live acts by contemporary performers such as Nina Conti, I employ *digital* ventriloquism practice to trace transmissions of affective power expressed through live and recorded speech, using digital audio technology to bring abstracted speech back into productive tension with the live corporeality, identity and presence of a live performer. At this juncture, it is important to state that I perform these experiments upon on myself onstage. Whilst this research is not explicitly autobiographical in its drive, ‘I’ am nevertheless implicated as the human subject performing and being performed upon. In this respect, there is a politics of the personal in play, since the ideas of presence and self being unpicked relate to ideas and assumptions about how I appear, act and sound and who I seem to represent onstage. The spoken voice questioned and undermined throughout this thesis is an individuated ‘I’ voice that could also be categorised as white, western and male, at least in relation to the sight of my own physical body. Assumptions and complications that arise as a result of the categorisations I seem to fit within, do so in addition to pre-existing ideas and assumptions around notions of

subjectivity and identity more generally. I return to the ethical and political questions and consequences raised by my positioning in this research, later in this thesis.

Vocal Expression and illusions of Self-Presence

If “nothing is closer to me than my voice [and if] the consciousness of the voice is consciousness itself” (Durand, 1997: 301), then I wish firstly to explore how encounters between vocal expression, self-present live subjects, and uses of audio recording technology are mutually affected by this vocal closeness and consciousness. This is a pertinent wish since my practice research involves acts of speech, speech recording, speech replay and interaction with recorded voices onstage, as I attempt to release the performing body from vocal and linguistic claim(s) over its presence, agency and identity. Digital ventriloquism is concerned with how experiences of the closeness and consciousness (of the spoken voice) are changed during and after acts of speech recording, replay and interaction in live performance. In this respect my ventriloquial concept operates in what Konstantinos Thomaidis describes as the “complex intersections between bodies, voices, identities and technologies [...] [where] mediatized voices and physical bodies do not completely align to form a unified whole” (Thomaidis, 2017: 59). Building from this suggestion, my practice research intends to explore an enduring metaphysical desire for subjective unification (and alignment) between audible voices and visible bodies, practically testing how the voice can display an invisible affective power in relation to the visible body in order to seem whole. I employ digital audio technology onstage to misalign, re-align and otherwise corrupt perceived links and alignments between the voice and body. This ventriloquial strategy forms part of a broader political intention to further emancipate human subjects from what I regard as the logocentric and masterful hold of the spoken voice. In the gaps and intersections between body, voice, identity and technology outlined by Thomaidis, I intend to reveal new practical possibilities for

decentralising, multiplying and more freely relating the invisible spoken voice to the visible body of the posthuman subject.

Alongside my existing practice as a live musician and theatre maker (where I first encountered the sound recording and voice manipulation tools I use for this research), the theoretical imperatives of this project are influenced and shaped by exposure to two notable art works, Ken McMullen's experimental feature film, *Ghost Dance* (Cornerstone Media, 1983) and Samuel Beckett's play, *Krapp's Last Tape* (Beckett, 1965). There exists a vast landscape of artworks and performance practices that raise questions around vocal self-presence, in relation to uses of the disembodied voice and digital technology. Many of these are relevant to me since I employ numerous interdisciplinary performance techniques onstage (such as lip-synch, puppetry and live-sound design/production). For example, the beginnings of a ventriloquial reckoning between a performer's just-recorded voice and their live physical body might be detected in the band Radiohead's use of the Korg Kaoss Pad during their (2001) live performance of the song *Everything in its Right Place*⁴. Here, a single finger is used to control and manipulate the replaying voice via the Kaoss Pad, moments after the singer's voice is recorded through it onstage. It is also possible to intuit in the actor Dickie Beau's use of lip – synch in *Re-Member Me* (2017),⁵ ways in which a live performer's identity, presence and character are complicated by the recorded voice's seeming ability to re-inhabit and speak again through the live body. In Rimini Protokoll's audio-walk, *Remote X* (2013),⁶ the disembodied speech of an unseen voice character also displays an ability to direct and manipulate individual audience participants through the headphones they wear, whilst the voice itself moves across temporalities and spaces, with its acoustic quality and character also

⁴ See documentation of this performance by Radiohead (*Later With Jools Holland*, BBC, 2001) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf6l0e7lgyA&ab_channel=BobbySharp.

⁵ Critic Tim Byrne suggests that through his re-animation of archival voice recordings during *Re-Member Me*, Dickie Beau “lip syncs not so much for his life as for the lives of Hamlets past” (Byrne, 2018).

⁶ Described and analysed by Konstantinos Thomaidis in the book *Theatre and Voice* (Thomaidis, 2017: 1-7).

shifting between and beyond genders, ages and subjective categorisations in the process.

Inspirations for my interactions with digital technology may also be seen in Simon McBurney's uses of audio technology during *The Encounter* (2015),⁷ a live solo theatre show where McBurney engages in acts of live audio recording and audio replay, surrounded by various digital sound tools, in front of a live audience. Other examples of technological (vocal) performance practice that aligns closely with my work includes Pamela Z's *Breathing* (2013) and Susanne Martin and Alex Nowitz's *Dr D meets Dr V* (2018). These works similarly display a complex mix of live vocal processing and performance practice, undertaken by human performers onstage. In these pieces (as in my practice), performers record their voices live onstage before manipulating the live and recorded audio they have created, adding complex sonic and vocal processing effects with the digital technologies at their fingertips.

Ant Hampton's *This is Not my Voice Speaking* (2011) offers yet another distinct example of conceptually and practically relevant performance practice, in relation to mine. Despite involving no live performers (unlike my work), this piece deploys numerous audio recording devices, like cassette recorders and vinyl players which contain pre-recorded spoken voices and directions for audience members, encouraging them to interact with these recorded voices and follow their spoken directions. These recordings are apparently used so audiences may consider what artist researcher Rebecca Collins describes as, "the fleeting ephemeral nature of the human voice [which is] ...almost impossible to pin down" (Collins, 2023: 8). Uses of the recorded voice (to invisibly direct audience members and raise questions of vocal self-presence) such as this, relate conceptually to my own work which also uses

⁷ *The Encounter* is described as "an astonishing technical feat [...] [which] results in a complex aural mix of live and recorded sound" (Billington, 2016), achieved through interactions with digital audio technology onstage.

recorded voices to direct a live subject onstage, complicating notions of their live corporeality in the process.

It is clear that the performances and practices mentioned above cohere closely with aspects my own practice research. However, an in depth analysis of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ghost Dance* is most appropriate in this chapter, since the recorded voices and audio recording technologies used in them explicitly refer back to the same speaking subjects, and because the characters' acts of vocal disembodiment and re-embodiment create specific audio-visual tensions (between the sound of the replaying voice and the sight and presence of the body) that for me, relate most clearly to my acts of speech recording, replay and manipulation onstage. A close study of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Ghost Dance* is therefore prioritised and threaded through this chapter, explicating and revealing how related acts of vocal disembodiment and speech replay (and the theoretical frictions they create) inform and enrich my concept and practice of digital ventriloquism.

Krapp's Last Tape and *Ghost Dance* present especially clear examples of a human subject performing a speech act (or a range of speech acts) before or after their own spoken voice is then either recorded and/or replayed from the electronic playback device alongside them. This makes them crucial for me, since my practice involves the analysis and exploration of similar acts of human speech, speech replay and digital speech manipulation, performed by live performers onstage. The processes of speaking, recording and replaying the spoken voice shown in *Ghost Dance* and *Krapp's Last Tape* are clear and obvious, allowing me to concisely and effectively trace and analyse specific relationships between a person's spoken voice, their physical body and their subjectivity, alongside the audio recording/playback technologies used in the representational frameworks of cinematic and theatrical time and space.

The cinematic and theatrical contexts of *Ghost Dance* and *Krapp's Last Tape* are fundamental in shaping audience perceptions of the action which takes place inside of them, and whilst a more detailed analysis of these frameworks is not the main drive

of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge their impact here. The scenes under analysis here have been chosen because much like the scenes occurring in *Mouthpiece*, they present onlookers with devised scenarios, where characters interact with props and speak scripted lines. The combination of different layers of cinematic, theatrical and textual representation which complicate and obscure perceptions of self, identity and vocal self-presence in *Ghost Dance* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, align with the complications of vocal self-representation and subjective essence that occur in my own work. The performative frameworks of *Ghost Dance* and *Krapp's Last Tape* offer a pertinent reminder that any aim to find a truthful state of vocal self-presence in relation to a human subject is impossible, especially in the constructed and constructing environments of fictional and theatrical space and time.

In Ken McMullen's experimental film *Ghost Dance*, telephones, answering machines and cassette recorders are just a few of the technologies used to reveal and complicate the ghostliness of various characters throughout the film. Five minutes into *Ghost Dance*, the character of Pascale (portrayed by the actor Pascale Ogier, playing a version of herself) packs several electrical machines into a bag and announces into a cassette recorder that she wishes to escape the circumstances she has been living in. She records the words "Fuck you! I'm sick of it, I'm selling everything, I'm off. Don't try and find me. As far as I'm concerned, you're a ghost" (Cornerstone Media, 1983) and as her message replays through the recorder, she leaves and the scene ends. This scene is not referenced again during *Ghost Dance*, but Pascale's actions are significant because they parallel aspects of my practice, which involves recording and replaying speech recordings in real-time (as a character/actor who may or may not be 'me') before an audience. By analysing Pascale's process of thinking, voicing, recording and leaving in this scene, I highlight how a subject's thoughts and **self-presence** can be complicated and troubled through their encounter with spoken language and audio recording technology in performance.

Firstly, Pascale's actions occur within a film that thematises ideas of spectrality and ventriloquism throughout, showing how "ventriloquy works against the illusion of a

unified self” (Bachmann, 2008: 217). It is significant too that post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida (another theoretical influence outlined in this chapter) appears in *Ghost Dance*, also playing a version of himself. At one point later in the film Derrida even proclaims that “I feel as if I am letting a ghost speak for me...if I am a ghost, but believe I am speaking with my own voice, it’s precisely because it’s my own voice, that I allow it to be taken over by another’s voice” (Cornerstone Media, 1983). Within the overtly ventriloquial and spectralised audio-visual framework of *Ghost Dance*, instabilities, complications and questions of self and other, actor and character, reality and representation (such as those expressed by Derrida above) are consistently foregrounded and complicated, as they are in the context of my own practice research. Furthermore, the film is split into chapters with titles such as ‘Voice of Destruction’, ‘The Voice That Escapes the Text’ and ‘Voice of Silence’ and it employs and manipulates the established technique of cinematic voice over, as well as presenting sequences throughout where disembodied voices speak through radios, telephones and other electronic devices. Such instances and techniques raise philosophical questions and complications around the affective power of speech, voice ownership and vocal self-presence that are pertinent to my research, compounding the importance of *Ghost Dance* as a practical and conceptual influence for my notion of digital ventriloquism. Whilst a detailed analysis of one specific interaction between Pascale and her recorded voice within *Ghost Dance* is preferred in this chapter (for the reasons stated above), I acknowledge how other sequences and themes explored within *Ghost Dance* relate to uses of the spoken voice within my work.

Before analysing specific interactions between Pascale and her recorded voice, it seems pertinent to remember that when thoughts are expressed internally or externally, they become something other than themselves. In the context of western adult life, it seems impossible to trace a thought backwards (or forwards) to a moment or place beyond language because written, visual, voiced and body languages are our primary methods for expressing and communicating our experiences, feelings and thoughts with others. Paradoxically then, any linguistic expression of these

thoughts undermines notions or assumptions of their purity, revealing organised and formalised thinking as deferent and dependent upon recognisable languages, whilst nevertheless offering at least the impression of what a person is, or has been thinking, feeling or experiencing. When Pascale engages in acts of speech during *Ghost Dance*, her thoughts become represented, unable to exist in any assumed (impossible) original state. When she speaks, Pascale's voice displays itself as "the act of a presence which represents itself" (D.Vasse in Durand, 1997: 301). This is especially true in the context of a fictional artwork which foregrounds themes and notions of ventriloquy and ghostliness. *Ghost Dance* constantly reminds its audience of the impossibility of locating essential states of self-presence, or subjective experience within its inherently artificial framework.

Nevertheless, in the context of the scene in question, it first appears that Pascale's speech comes from her body. What begins as a thought is then released as a sonic representation through the body when she speaks aloud. Despite their representational status then, words are subjected to "the human touch that voice adds to the arid machinery of the signifier" (Dolar, 2006: 22) and we are made aware that the voice "sustains an intimate link with the very notion of the subject" (Dolar, 2006: 23). We are reminded that speaking aloud is a form of self-expression and an idiosyncratic, corporeal, act connecting a person's interior thought process to their exterior environment. When we speak, our words become implicated with a sense of our bodies, causing unique, personalised effects as they travel invisibly through space. These particular effects make the voice more than a simple instrument transmitting unaffected information and reveal speech as a materialist (bodily) mode of expression.

Spoken words are interwoven with a sense of the speaker's corporeality because we see and hear them emanating from the person speaking before us; we see the movements of the mouth as we hear words being voiced and we understand that the voice is being heard with the help of the body (lungs, breath, vocal cords, teeth, tongue and lips). This synthesis of sound and image is partially what imbues the

spoken voice with visual and material qualities. Roland Barthes conceptualises the invisible materiality of the human voice as a “grain [of] the body in the voice as it sings” (Barthes, 1977: 182), and this idea concisely entwines the human touch of the voice with notions of corporeality, to the point of suggesting that a voice may even contain an affective trace of a voicer’s body as it is heard. Pascale’s speech act begins inside her (as thoughts transform into spoken words) and for this reason what she says is imbued with a sense of her bodily self as it moves outwards into space. However, the extent to which anyone’s self could ever be *actually* transmitted through their voice and speech is highly questionable, despite the temptation to believe otherwise (a theme explored throughout *Ghost Dance*). The spoken voice brings us seductively close to the self whilst simultaneously revealing “only a self that no longer is” (Richards, 2008: 94), or in fact, never was. Much like the process that occurs when thoughts become words, the act of speaking only separates us from our (impossible) selves and bodies, revealing the spoken voice and the body as fundamentally representative, whilst at the same time gesturing back towards the subjectivity of the speaker. In *Ghost Dance*, Pascale’s spoken voice can only carry a representation of her thoughts and an impression of (or even a desire for) her subjectivity as it moves outwards into space. The same can also be said for the spoken voices recorded, replayed and manipulated in my digital ventriloquism practice, as I show in the next two chapters.

As Pascale speaks, she records, and the audio recording process further reveals her voice as an operator in the division between her interior and exterior, crossing between the two (Dolar, 2006: 81). Pascale’s voice crosses from her body to the outside world, before entering the cassette player and then returning as a disembodied audio recording, a journey that happens invisibly and quickly. The voice’s final status as a recording reminds us that it has been on journey from the body to another place. The invisible, sonically vibrational movement of a voice is unique and manipulative because this movement suggests life, or at least energy. Such an energetic transmission of an invisible vocal representation through physical space offers it the ability to surround and dis/relocate around us, whilst uniquely

resisting precise visual identification. The invisible, shifting in-betweenness of the voice allows it to defy the fixing, occularcentric logic that may be applied to a written sentence, or a photograph of a person; a logic which tries to confirm that experiences of meaning can be found in the visual parameters of a sentence, the sight of letters on a page, or within the border and shapes of a photographic image for example – a logic which implies that meaning can be located within visually identifiable limits. A voice recording cannot be abstracted in this way because it remains invisible, resisting containment and locatability within a visual frame. When our tendency to align Pascale’s invisible voice with her physical body combines with the elusive transmission of her speech through air, her voice is imbued with impressions of ghostly mobility and life-like energy. This happens in line and in sympathy with the wider themes of spectrality explored throughout *Ghost Dance*.

When Pascale’s voice recording replays, it appears to become fully disembodied, now existing without her. Her initial act of speech involved an articulation of thought using the voice, spoken language and the body, but these are no longer required for the voice to be heard (which is also true for my practice, since I engage in acts of live voice recording and replay onstage). At the same time, the spectator/listener’s memory of the original speech act is still fresh and this combines with the new listening experience, imbuing the recording we hear with a past impression of subjectivity (the memory of the body engaged in the original speech act), despite its separated and disembodied nature. Much like the experience of looking in a mirror (an experience explored later in the same film), an uncanny doubling effect has been engendered and yet, this experience competes with our contradictory knowledge that the recorded double is far less alive than Pascale’s living body. Instead of presence itself, the audio recording takes on a *quality* of presence, or a presence effect (Feral, 2012: 29-49), even if that effect is simply the listener’s memory of the original speech act, fused with the mobile quality of the replaying voice and an enduring tendency to regard spoken voices as authentic expressions of self. These factors combine within the speech Pascale records and replays, resulting in what Jonathan Sterne calls the “affective power of recorded sound” (Sterne, 2003: 289) and what I specifically call

the affective power of recorded speech. As the recording replays alongside Pascale, spectator/listeners must attempt to understand her ongoing corporeal subjectivity alongside the affectively powerful and ghostly audio double, which unsettles perceptions of her corporeal presence as it speaks. It is this affective potential within recorded speech; its ability to unsettle, manipulate and reshape relationships between a speaking voice and a physical body that my practice research also seeks to articulate, extend and undermine, as I discuss in Chapters Two and Three.

When assessing the affective power of recorded speech, it is useful to consider Steven Connor's theory of the vocalic body more closely, understood by him as a disembodied voice that conjures for itself "a different kind of body which may contradict, compete with, replace or even reshape the actual visible body, of the speaker" (Connor, 2000: 36). According to Connor, the vocalic body can take the shape of a dream, a fantasy, or a hallucination of a surrogate or secondary body (Connor, 2000: 35) as it is perceived and experienced within and through the invisible speaking voice. Connor's emphasis on the voice's bodily traits reminds us again that human voices are inherently corporeal (even once they've left the body of the speaker, via the mouth). The idea of the vocalic body also points towards an imaginative (dreamlike, fantastic, hallucinatory) desire on the part of listeners to find bodily shapes and material contours in the affective quality of disembodied voices. Connor suggests a wish on the part of the listener to return the voice to some kind of bodily form, one that is marked by, yet also distinct from, the body of the original speaker. Due to its new, doubled nature as a recorded object which mirrors the voice of the live subject, this disembodied voice has the potential to compete with and reshape the body of the self-same speaker. I regard this performative potential as violent, since it reveals the spoken voice as an affectively powerful and manipulative instrument in relation to a physical body that can be reshaped and contradicted by a newly separated, self-mirroring material and recorded entity. Similarly in my practice, I seek to reveal ways in which recorded speech displays this ability to contradict, compete with and

reshape the visible, physical body as I interact with it, before attempting to resist and escape this powerful ability, through uses of digital technology.

In Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape*, an elderly male character (Krapp) sits at a desk obsessively listening to self-voiced audio recordings he's been making since his early twenties. Krapp's recorded voice is heard throughout the play, coming from a reel-to-reel tape machine on the desk in front of him. It is interrupted only occasionally, when Krapp comments on what he hears, changes the tape spool to play a different recording, or when he disappears offstage. As Cormac Power suggests, Beckett's play can "fruitfully be read [...] as a play which makes presence enigmatic" (Power, 2008: 140) due to its confusions and complications of notions of Krapp's own self-presence. Additionally, as Jon Erickson argues, it is a play in which the main character "becomes ever more a ghost of what has been recorded: [which is] a strange reversal, since the disembodied voice would seem more the ghost" (Erickson, 1995: 79). Krapp's interactions with his recorded voice also occur within the theatrical context of a play being performed on a stage and as noted previously, the theatrical stage is an apt environment for staging and complicating constructions and representations of vocal self-presence and subjective essence. The theatrical environment of *Krapp's Last Tape* and the complications vocal self-presence staged and explored within it, cohere closely with the complications of vocal self-presence staged and explored in my onstage practice.

It is clear in the example of Krapp, that the protagonist's voice sustains an intimate link with notions of their subjectivity, but that the intimacy of the link between the subject and their voice is compromised when it is replayed as an audio recording. As with Pascale in *Ghost Dance*, Krapp's link to his voice remains but through the recording act, it has been captured and moved to a different location entirely, complicating and dislocating its relationship with the listening body beside it. Additionally, in Krapp's case (unlike Pascale's), the viewer never saw the original speech act (when Krapp's voice first left his physical body), since the recording(s) he replays were captured much earlier in his life, in a different temporality to the one

his living body now inhabits. This means that any “sense of the body’s presence (its warmth, elasticity and sensitivity)” (Connor, 2000: 41) in Krapp’s recorded voice can only be inferred and we must work harder to sustain the connection between Krapp’s older live body and his younger voice, both of which are now presented in front of us. The intimacy and immediacy of the bodily link between Krapp and his recorded speech has been compromised by the fact that the audio recording we hear was made in an unseen, past temporality by an audibly younger version of Krapp. This differs from Pascale’s relationship with her recorded voice in *Ghost Dance*, since (in the context of the scene analysed) her voice is recorded just moments before it is heard again.

In the examples of Krapp and Pascale, it is nevertheless important that the recorded voice we hear is understood to have come firstly from the body now listening to it (whether we saw the original speech act or not), because this informs our understanding of how the voice and body may now relate to each other. Aspects of Krapp’s recorded voice for example, now clearly contradict his live body, not least because the recording depicts a younger version of him, speaking from a different temporality. In light of this, we must now make sense of the young voice and the old man in front of us, realising that despite their differences, they belong to the same person. The age difference between Krapp on tape and Krapp ‘in the flesh’ acts to further encourage a perception that the recorded voice and the live body are different people (at least durationally) as well as reminding us that a recorded voice cannot live or age in the same ways a living body can. It is also true that the physical Krapp behind the tape player can fast-forward, rewind, skip over and replay sections of recorded speech arbitrarily, further encouraging an understanding that he and his voice are fundamentally distinct. His ability to manipulate his voice in this way highlights its status as a recorded object which is clearly not the same as him. We are

reminded that Krapp's recorded voice could never possess the same kind of human agency as the physical Krapp we see before us.

As Krapp's recorded vocalic body intermingles with his older physical body, his literal presence in the scene becomes overlaid and complicated with a simultaneous impression of a distant past self, expressed through the younger recorded voice. The voice's youthful energy contrasts sharply with the body of the old man, accentuating the difference between live and recorded further and making both seem like different people (as I have argued). For Pascale however, the temporal gap between her original speech act and the moment of speech replay is far shorter (a matter of seconds) because we witness her acts of speech, speech recording and speech replay as a closely connected sequence of events within the same scene. It is still clear that the voice replaying could never be Pascale 'herself', but the recording arguably maintains a closer link with the literal presence of the speaker because that same speaker was just seen recording the voice which now replays. The recorded voice we hear directly reminds us of the recording process we witnessed moments before and carries along with it a strong imprint or memory of the body that just spoke. In Pascale's case, we experience a recorded vocalic body that is almost identical to the body of the person who just recorded it (despite the voice's paradoxical invisibility).

Pascale and Krapp's interactions with their own disembodied speech reveal how the relationship between an original vocal expression and a replaying recorded voice can become problematic and contradictory in relation to the same subject's self-presence, since in these examples the voices replaying are understood to have once belonged to (and been uttered by) the same body that we now see in an altered spatial and temporal proximity to the recording. They reveal how a recorded voice can remain close to a live subject as it replays, re-implicating itself as a vocalic body, carrying affective power in relation to the body of the speaker and the unfolding action of a new performance moment. However, such factors also mark and accentuate a fundamental alterity within the voice, because the invisible voice we hear now clearly exists and performs outside of the speaker's visible body, a body

that is seen alongside the replaying sound recording and can affect it by rewinding, fast forwarding, pausing and otherwise manipulating it. In Chapter's Two and Three, I reveal how my practice interrogates and unpicks such philosophical complications further, through my own uses of live recording technology. In the examples I analyse, I orient recorded, vocalic bodies towards my visible performing body, so I may further trouble and undo metaphysical legacies and existing perceptual habits around notions of unified vocal expression and essential self-presence onstage.

Recording, Repetition and Self - Representation through Speech

Philosophical (especially post-structuralist) concerns with recording, repetition and self-representation are particularly relevant for my practice research, since I attempt to explore and undermine metaphysical habits of perception in relation to self-presence, through uses of the repeating, recorded voice. If the act of representing a thought through speech also constitutes an act of repetition (as pre-existent language stands in for thought itself), then my use of several distinct modes of repetition (such as scripted words and live/recorded speech) aims to reveal how the spoken voice can become affectively powerful when repeated as a disembodied speech object, alongside the same speaker. I am not merely interested in “representing only the failures of representation” (Feral, 1997: 299) but also in analysing how the numerous vocal self-representations I make and engage with, can gather (or lose) affective power as they replay and re-mingle with the human subject who has made them.

Considering this, a central theoretical debate informing digital ventriloquism is Jacques Derrida's critique of Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty (Derrida, 1997: 40-62), where Derrida claims that Artaud's project intended to reveal “life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable” (Derrida, 1997: 42). Artaud's apparent intention points towards (and beyond) the limits of theatrical representation, essence, language, speech, repetition and self-presence around which my work also circles, as I record, replay and interact with the spoken voice in live performance. Derrida argues that Artaud's project centred on a desire to erase repetition, which

“separates force, presence, and life from themselves” (Derrida, 1997: 55). Repetition governs western thinking through the existence and use of words and signs that are repeatable and only stand in for experiences and thoughts themselves; “for there is no word, nor in general a sign, which is not constituted by the possibility of repeating itself. A sign which does not repeat itself, which is not already divided by repetition in its ‘first time’, is not a sign” (Derrida, 1997: 55). The already representational quality and repeatability of signs and words is apparently what makes them negative and enables them to inaccurately maintain the past present as truth. For Derrida, Artaud’s attempts to write and create beyond the limiting determinations of letters, words and the body through his Theatre of Cruelty, made him an anti-structuralist, displaying “a hatred of the articulated body that finds a double in the articulation of language” (Thiher, 1984: 506).

When entwining and applying these ideas with my own work, it becomes difficult to ascertain exactly the point at which a thought might first become doubled and divided by repetition or representation. When analysing speech acts of my own, it is also difficult to pinpoint and define the moment at which my thoughts may still be full, or uncompromised and undivided by representative words and language. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain whether a point of fullness or an articulation of unrepresentable life could ever be expressed once a human being has learnt how to speak with formal language. Indeed, it seems impossible to pinpoint any act of linguistic communication that could occur outside of a structure of repetition (if we regard spoken language as a structure and form of repetition).

It seems almost impossible to avoid simply representing and compromising the (assumed and impossible) ‘purity’ of a thought, or an experience of presence once thoughts and voices become consumed and divided by language and speech. In the case of vocal self-presence specifically, “what is exposed [through the act of speaking], of course, is not some interior nature...or some true self, or a primordial inner life; rather it is an interior which is itself the result of the signifying cut” (Dolar, 2006: 80). In understanding this, it becomes clear just how difficult Artaud’s desire to

escape representative structures remains. Nevertheless, the desire to escape or move beyond representation is the point at which Artaud's project and this research overlap closely. Artaud's desire to move beyond representation should not be confused with a desire to find something (such as a true self or an authentic state of self-presence) in the space beyond linguistic representation. It was not his desire to find a state of truth beyond the limits of language and nor is it mine. It is instead in our shared intention to escape, attack and undermine the tyranny of representative spoken language, that mine and Artaud's projects resonate most clearly. Furthermore, in our wish to do so via the apparatus of the body and voice (apparatus that we also seek to resist), mine and Artaud's projects also relate. Digital technology is also introduced into my practice, so I may further ventriloquise and distance an invisible inside/out voice-body from a visible, physical, performing body.

It is clear that vocal representations (in the form of speech) carry and cause their own affects and effects, bringing subjects back into a teasing proximity with the impossible essences that words like presence and self attempt to signify. It is these affects, effects and proxemic relations that my research is interested in. Through practice I firstly explore and unpick what I regard as the metaphysical hold that the voice places over the body regarding experiences of subjective self-presence, as I engage in acts of speech, speech recording and speech replay onstage. This hold is made possible despite the disembodied voice's status as an invisible "resonant tomb" (Sterne, 2003: 290), lacking interior self-awareness. In fact, it may be this resonance, felt in relation to recorded speech (as Sterne puts it) that allows a recorded voice to continue entangling itself with a person's ongoing subjectivity. As recorded speech ripples back out into space it can resonate again in an altered temporality, intermingling with the body that first spoke, despite the dead (tomb-like) nature of the representative language it is carried along with and its status as an invisible recorded object.

Returning to Pascale, it seems that when she initially records her speech, she is addressing someone else, as she says "Fuck you! I'm sick of it, I'm selling everything,

I'm off. Don't try and find me. As far as I'm concerned, you're a ghost" (Cornerstone Media, 1983). However, when the recording replays, it seems to momentarily acknowledge and direct *her* in the live space, as if it were almost alive. This is partly because it has taken on the quality of a vocalic body, that now exists in close proximity to her, via the cassette player. The repeating voice is clearly not a person but has retained some of the qualities, or resonances of one (the memory and association with the subject's physical body and the sound of their voice, for example). These become confused and interwoven with the same person now listening back during the moment of replay. As I have suggested, it is as if Pascale has created a partial double of herself – an invisible sonic mirror that reflects a past representation of her back into the scene. This acoustic double has been etched into the cassette player by (and through) her, moments before. Similarly, in my practice, digital speech recording and sampling techniques are used to capture the spoken voice before I then reflect it back towards the body as an amplified recording. I do this to explore and analyse how the voice and body may newly affect each other and to unpick the vocal resonances and affective powers manifested during and in the aftermath of such processes.

It seems important in the case of Pascale, that her recorded words are initially constructed as a present tense statement, since this allows them to realistically refer to the future moment of repetition. For example, the recording appears to talk both to and about her when it proclaims, "I'm off" (Cornerstone Media, 1983), because she also leaves the scene when this line is replayed. The deliberate manipulation of linguistic tenses in relation to replaying spoken voices is a technique extended and complicated through my digital ventriloquism practice. The scripted language I use intends to similarly implicate itself with the future temporality it projects towards and I engage in acts of live speech that are simultaneously mental projections towards a future moment of replay. I am physically present during these initial speech/recording acts but experiencing two temporalities at once - a moment of live speech and a projection of this live speech (through recording) towards the moment of replay onstage. In addition (much like the confusion created by Pascale's recording

and instant replay of personal pronouns such as ‘you’ and ‘me’ alongside her physical body), I also seek to actively confuse signifiers like ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘me’ and ‘we’ in order to show them as unfixable and untrustworthy indicators of self-presence and subjective identity, as I show in Chapters Two and Three.

It is Ironic that Pascale’s recorded voice continues to speak to an empty room after she has left and her departure from the scene also undermines any impression of co-presence and self-doubling achieved moments before. It acts to remind us of the stark difference between the corporeal agency of a human subject (displayed through their ability to decide to leave) and the fixed, repeating nature of a recorded voice (displayed by its limited ability to replay through a machine, operated and controlled by a human). The empty representative nature of the recorded voice object replaying is accentuated when Pascale leaves and the recorded voice then continues speaking.

In my practice, the continuing co-presence of the live body and the disembodied voice are crucial because I wish to explore how voices can newly relate to bodies when they re-surround them as invisible, abstracted representations. I wish to keep the body and voice in performative tension, so I may analyse and undo the mechanics of vocal representation during and after the moment of their construction. The deliberate collisions and interactions of the body and recorded voice onstage allow me to explore how uses of disembodied speech may also relate a broader human mimetic impulse (humans’ ability and compulsion to reflect human nature through the creation of representative signs and symbols) and mimetic production (the construction and accumulation of such representations and reflections, which create new resonances and associations in relation to other mimetic productions, bending back towards the humans who continue to create repeat and reconfigure them) (Taussig, 1993). If I unplugged the machines I use onstage, or permanently walked away from the voice (as Pascale does in *Ghost Dance*), the tensions I create between

who I am, who I think I am, and my self-representative reflections on these tensions through uses of recorded speech, would be lost.

Unlike Pascale, Krapp remains onstage when his recorded voice speaks in *Krapp's Last Tape*, beside it, as it speaks outwith his body – no longer needing the breath, vocal cords, teeth, tongue or lips and operating now as a separate, disembodied entity. Krapp's onstage acts of speech replay allow numerous (past) representations of him to appear in a future performance moment and their doubled, disembodied status alongside him exaggerate “the voice's split condition, as at once cleaving to and taking leave from myself” (Connor, 2000: 7). Like Pascale's, Krapp's voice gains an ability to refer back to his body when it replays as a disembodied recording, making it seem both familiar and ‘other’ at once. It has not only taken leave of him, but acquired the ability to speak independently, coming from a tape player instead of his body. In Krapp's case, the recorded voice may not have “gathered to itself [all of] the powers of a subject” (Connor, 2000: 39) because it is still an object under Krapp's control (he could simply switch the recording off after all). Nevertheless, it does evoke qualities of subjectivity even if these are simply dislocated aspects of him (his spoken thoughts and memories) returned in a new and invisible proximity via his repeating voice. The recorded voice's continued association with the physical subject (being clearly ‘his’) ensures that the voice cleaves back to the character onstage, despite the fact it has now taken leave of their body. That an already representative voice could cleave to, hold on to, belong to and also take leave of a human body simultaneously, is a fundamental problem confronted by the concept and practice of digital ventriloquism, which brings the body and the spoken voice into new spatial and temporal relationships through speech recording, replay and manipulation, and attempts to undo and resist the affective power of speech through further uses of technology and live performance practice.

In digital ventriloquism practice it is important that the physical body is seen onstage at the same time as the recorded voice is heard. This is because both (live body and recorded voice) carry distinct experiential qualities, requiring different modes of

attention (*seeing* the body and *hearing* the voice, for example). The significance of this relationship between sight and sound is another reason why live theatrical practice is the most appropriate methodological tool for this research. On the theatrical stage the live body and recorded spoken voice can be experienced at once within the same overarching (live) audio-visual framework. This allows me to assess the similarities, differences and intricacies between sound and vision, as invisible speech is manifested within, through and beyond the visible body. Mladen Dolar usefully points towards these differences and affective complications by suggesting that “the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance” (Dolar, 2006: 79). The arrival of a person’s recorded voice alongside their body seems to confirm, disorient and complicate notions of location, permanence, immediacy and fluidity, creating new relational tensions between the sound of the recorded voice and the sight of the live body. I explore such audio-visual tensions through uses of digital audio technology during the live performance of *Mouthpiece* onstage, as I describe and analyse later in this thesis.

Relatedly, the invisible movement of a recorded voice (as sound travels from a playback device into space) seems to confirm spoken self-representations as passing and fluid, with their life-like energy being somehow amplified by the voice’s ability to move through air as sound, as well as its ability to resist visual identification within the visible environment of the live body onstage. This invisibility also makes the recorded voice seem incomplete or amorphous - since it is a voice now removed from a visible body, continuing to speak without the corporeal support of the original speaker. In this sense it is ghostly or haunting, recalling and resembling the physical human subject without achieving the same subjective wholeness or corporeality. However, the voice’s existence as a recording paradoxically implies distance and permanence because recorded representations cannot change, move or age in the way that live bodies can – they do not possess the same human agency as the humans

they refer back to. These facts remind us again that the voice recording is also an inert object and in this sense like a corpse, locatable and static.

To complicate matters further *In Krapp's Last Tape*, even though the live character onstage can repeat, replay, stop, start, rewind and fast-forward the recorded words they hear, they are now unable to fundamentally alter them. In light of this, the recorded spoken voice paradoxically gathers another impression of affective power and authority by offering a fixed, simplified and idealised (mis)representation of a past subject which now tortures the changing, ageing corporeal protagonist, who seems trapped and addicted to memories and evocations carried along with the past (idealised) voice recording. As a character, Krapp cannot alter his past voice or change the words he once spoke, and in this sense, he remains bound to a distant, inadequate and unchangeable representation of himself as the recorded voice replays alongside him, reminding him of the person he once was.

Self-representative, affectively powerful aspects of speech and recorded speech are central to my enquiry and it is clear that problems of representation and repetition are entwined with related concerns around vocal expression and ideas of self-presence in digital ventriloquism practice. Digital ventriloquism aims to question how impressions of subjectivity and literal presence can be complicated through acts of vocal expression and how these are further complicated when a subject's voice is co-opted by spoken representative language, which is recorded and then repeated alongside their performing body. My theatrical methodology allows me to trouble and complicate acts of vocal disembodiment in (and close to) the moment of their disembodiment, alongside the live subject whose voice is disembodied. Acts of digital

ventriloquism onstage allow me to uniquely and practically trouble the accepted theories of voice and speech outlined throughout this chapter.

Disembodied Voices, Logocentrism and Affective Power

It is argued that the stage is “theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance” (Derrida, 1997: 43). For Artaud (according to Derrida), this was an act of theft by a God and author who had replaced life and essence with representative words created elsewhere. This is why (as Derrida claims) in his conception of the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud hoped to reclaim an experience of life that was unrepresentable. However, it seems particularly difficult to realise Artaud’s desire either in theatre or in life itself, especially since humans continue to write, speak, listen and otherwise try to understand each other through uses of representative language.

On the western theatrical stage, represented thoughts in the form of authored words, are spoken by actors and it is argued this speech only reveals a primary logos (Derrida, 1997: 43). This is referred to by Derrida as “*La Parole Souflée* - speech that is stolen and prompted, offered by the theatrical prompter as the word of the missing author on the stage of metaphysical representation” (Thiher, 1984: 50, original italics). It is my intention to acknowledge and unpick the affective impact of speech and the interpretive process that occurs when ‘God’s word’ is re-understood and re-interpreted (or stolen, to use Artaud’s terminology) onstage, analysing how abstracted and disembodied speech may display its own performative abilities when it replays alongside a live performer, who re-engages with their own spoken voice as a disembodied recording.

Ideas of logocentrism and *La Parole Souflée* are particularly relevant for my digital ventriloquism practice because I am both the author of the words I speak and the theatrical prompter voicing them. My practice involves creations of (and interactions

with) acousmatic⁸ vocal presences, through acts of live speech recording and replay. Perceptions of godly power, control and presence are displaced and undermined during my onstage acts of voice recording, replay and interaction as I show in subsequent chapters. Through practice, I seek to generate and analyse the qualitative and sensational power of disembodied speech and its ability “to charge, to vivify, to relay, and amplify energy” (Connor, 2000: 38). I also explore how the amplified energy of this recorded speech can then perform logocentric violence upon the same human speaker, attempting to control, contain and stand in for their subjectivity and presence, seeking to re-unify an inherently divided and unquantifiable human subject, from beyond their body. My digital ventriloquism practice intends to emancipate subjects from the self-controlling aspects of speech through acts of vocal capture, digital audio manipulation and live performance practice onstage.

In outlining his concept of the acousmètre, Michel Chion specifically describes the disembodied voice as a “being, double, shadow of the image, as a power” (Chion, 1999: 12). This suggestion of the voice as a power is especially important for my work, as I investigate and analyse processes of vocal disembodiment in relation to notions of affective power, through uses of the disembodied voice. Acousmatic voices are supposedly those which “command, invade, and vampirize the image” (Chion, 1999: 27)⁹ and in the case of *Ghost Dance* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*, recorded voices appear commanding and vampiric in the sense that they take on (at least partially) qualities of the live bodies and subjects they replay in relation to. In both cases, the recorded voice seems to augment its own life through its continued connection to the living body of the speaker. The recorded voice can haunt and surround the live subject as an acousmatic vocalic body, displaying agency and energy through sonic movement,

⁸ A word whose original meaning apparently referred to a “Pythagorean sect, whose followers would listen to their master speak *behind a curtain*...so that the sight of the speaker wouldn’t distract them from the message” (Chion, 1999: 19).

⁹ For a related and comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon and history of acousmatic sound, Brian Kane’s book *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Kane, 2014) is also useful.

recalling and regaining aspects of subjectivity, despite its contradictory status as a recorded object made in a past temporality.

Chion also notes how in specific uses of what he calls the 'I - voice'¹⁰ in film, "the character's voice separates from the body and returns as an acousmètre to haunt the past tense images conjured by its words. The voice speaks from a place where time is suspended" (Chion 1999: 49). Whilst my practice is necessarily theatrical (as opposed to cinematic), my acts of vocal disembodiment share this process of separation (recording) and return (replay), problematising and extending their logocentric and representative status. The disembodied and controlling nature of the vocal recordings I make imbues them with a partially God-like character, as they invisibly surround and dictate the actions of the visible body, speaking words from an altered and suspended temporality onstage. However, their disembodied and godly status is undermined by the fact they were recorded by the same live performer only moments earlier and that the disembodied voice replaying is the same voice as the live performer's. The theatrical foundations of my practice in combination with my uses of the disembodiment and disembodied voice allow me to rethink Chion's cinematic acousmètre in real-time, as I bring the disembodied recorded voice back into contact with the living body time during acts of live voice recording, replay and manipulation onstage. I do so partly because, as Luis Aros suggests, "this acousmatic split - between the presence of the body and the mediation of the voice in the theatre - has generated an auditory and visual enigma that has not yet been resolved" (Aros, 2021). I use live theatrical practice to investigate this acousmatic enigma further, tensing and complicating already uncertain relationships between the live body and the

¹⁰ Chion draws on examples from the films *Psycho* (Shamley Productions, 1980), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick Productions, 1968) and *Elephant Man* (Brooksfilms, 1980) to outline his concept of the I - voice further (Chion, 1999: 51-53).

affectively powerful recorded voice in the same overarching spatio - temporal framework of the stage.

In the theatrical context of *Mouthpiece*, the placement of a just-recorded and invisible voice alongside a visible, performing body exposes and accentuates processes of representation/creation and allows me (the author/creator) to then interact with what has just been created (the recorded voice). Power and agency shift between the live performer (who initially creates the disembodied vocal recording, speaking scripted lines) and the recording, which then displays agency and power over the performer by dictating their live actions. The line between creator (God) and created (subject) is therefore destabilised and displaced through the act of vocal recording (which separates and abstracts speech from the performer) and replay (which allows the live performer to newly interact with the recording they have made). Arguably, such shifts in experiences of affective power and subjective agency onstage are felt as 'real' because the live performer's spoken voice now seems to display the ability to operate as a doubled, disembodied entity, independent of the original speaker, yet alongside them onstage, repeating the same words, just uttered live through the body of the same performer. Paradoxically, these shifts are also consciously performed by an actor, who recites scripted lines on a theatrical stage, in front of an audience. In this sense the affective power of the spoken voice is experienced as both real and immediate due to its uncanny existence as a doubled recording as well as being fundamentally unreal, since the recorded entity now speaking is a scripted and constructed presence, experienced within the constructed and constructing framework of theatrical space.

The recorded voices I employ are arguably marked by the tyranny of representative forms (Derrida, 1997: 42) since the voice is carried along, buried underneath and contained by the representative words, language and speech that comes from my mouth. The words I speak come to represent, indicate and point towards thoughts and meanings that speech can never accurately reveal. The recorded voices I use are also made by an already representative performing body on a theatrical stage - a

representative framework that I bring into contact with the “logocentric tradition of metaphysics [which] continues to insist on *what* is said and never asks after *who* is saying” (Cavarero, 2005: 29). In the case of my digital ventriloquism practice, issues of who, how and where words are expressed are also crucial (whether the voices I use are spoken live or replayed as recordings through speaker devices, for example). This is because I seek to analyse how distinct modes of vocal delivery can impact how speech continues to resonate (alongside a subject’s live body) as well as considering the damaging impact of representational speech upon a speaker’s impressions of self-presence, agency and identity. The recorded voice affects differently from the live voice (even if they share the same vocal fingerprint) partly because disembodied recordings take on acousmatic qualities and acquire distinct impressions of agency and power when they become newly disembodied. Paradoxically, they also retain an inherent link to the person who recorded their voice moments before and who then allows that voice to take control of their actions and define them. This link remains, despite the fact the live subject is in fact still living, ageing and changing from moment to moment, and whose agency, identity and presence continue to shift, making their subjectivity ultimately ungraspable and undefinable, despite these attempts through speech.

Since speech is often an acoustic act, it is also important to explore how acts of speech relate to acts of listening and analyse how voices are received and interpreted by listening bodies, especially since I engage in speech acts and acts of silent listening through my digital ventriloquism practice. Citing Nipper the dog’s listening posture (from a painting which is now the logo for music brand HMV, shown in Figure One below), Dolar (2006) argues that Nipper displays “an exemplary attitude of dog-like

obedience which pertains to the very act of listening” (Dolar, 2006: 75) and that “listening entails obeying” (Dolar, 2006: 75).



Figure One: Nipper Listens to his Master’s Recorded Voice, *His Master’s Voice* by Francis Barraud (1898) – Painting. Source: Wikimedia (Barraud, 1898).

Krapp exemplifies a similarly obedient listening attitude when at one point in *Krapp’s Last Tape* he places a cupped hand over his ear, preparing himself to catch and direct

the sound of his voice inwards, displaying a similar dog-like obedience and deference towards his recorded voice.



Figure Two: Krapp (Played by Actor John Hurt) Listens to his Recorded Voice, *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett – Photo by Ryan Miller. Source: Arts Beat LA (Adamek, 2012).

Like Nippers' listening posture, Krapp's physicality implies obedience because he sits expectantly and silently, seeming desperate to catch the voice moving around him through his ears. Krapp's static and obedient physical posture also make his recorded voice seem energetic and powerful in relation to him; it moves through space and talks, whilst he waits and listens. Relatedly, Chion argues that human listening is naturally vococentrist because "the voice hierarchizes everything around it" (Chion, 1999: 6) suggesting that when someone speaks, the sound of their voice takes a privileged place and importance in the listening experience (above other sonic and visual elements also present). Krapp's alert and expectant listening posture seems to

confirm this idea showing how, despite its apparent status as a recording, the voice can exert an active power over a subject and orient their body towards it.

The recorded voice can display the power not only to make a subject sit up and listen, but also to make them relive aspects of their past. At one point during *Krapp's Last Tape* for example, Krapp's recorded voice muses over "those things worth having when all the dust has - when all my dust has settled" (Beckett, 1965: 6), before saying, "I close my eyes and try to imagine them" (Beckett, 1965: 6). At this point, the physical Krapp also closes his eyes. When the recorded voice describes an action that the live body also undertakes, the paradox between their similarity/difference is highlighted. The subject's recorded voice is "inextricably bound up with [...] the body of the speaker" (Durand, 1997: 302) and at the same time it indicates its own difference as a disembodied recording, as well as a relationship to other past (invisible) bodies. This is because we begin to imagine the physical body that once gave voice to the speech Krapp now hears, as well as regarding the vocalic body belonging to the voice itself (which resembles Krapp but nevertheless reshapes and competes with him as it speaks). Additionally, we begin to imagine other versions of Krapp's body, listening to the same recording in other pasts. His live body helps us to shape other imagined versions of him (conjured through his voice) since the live body in front of us is our primary visual reference for him.

Throughout *Krapp's Last Tape*, the recorded voice is shown to be "a go between, an intermediary. A transmitter that makes dual dialectical relations possible, on all levels" (Durand, 1997: 303). The voice's intermediary status –moving through space as sound – combined with its recorded nature allow it to beckon the subject's mind and body back through time to the moment when it was recorded, whilst also appearing to somehow remember forwards, meeting that subject in the future live moment and forecasting their live actions, still tethered to the past temporality it speaks from. When his voice begins to describe a series of actions that Krapp proceeds to undertake (specifically closing his eyes and imagining), the recording seems to display a prophetic and masterful ability to control his bodily movements. Krapp's live body is

shown to be at the mercy of his recorded voice, with the recording displaying an almost omnipotent power over him as it somehow starts to act like a ventriloquist operating a (living) dummy. The irony, considering this ventriloquial manipulation, is that the recording is also a version of Krapp. In this respect, Krapp seems to have become locked in a power struggle with a past (sonic) version of himself. In my practice, acts of obedient listening and bodily compliance are further accentuated because I use the recorded voice to actively direct the live body onstage. Since the recorded voices I use cannot pause or adapt in ways that the live body can, the successful completion performance sequences often depends on my ability to carry out tasks, as demanded by the voices I listen and respond to. I must not only listen obediently but also perform obediently so sequences can progress as planned. This accentuates and extends impressions of the affective power of disembodied speech, in relation to my visible body. As a live performer, I can be understood to be both literally listening obediently to the disembodied speaking voices directing me onstage (so I can carry out distinct actions and sequences as planned) whilst also performing this obedience as an actor, since I carry out these acts of listening within the theatrical framework of the stage, according to scripted and predetermined performance directions, also devised by me.

Later in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the character of Krapp becomes fixated by the word viduity, when his recorded voice describes his mother's state, as she lay a-dying (Beckett, 1965: 7). Krapp's obsession with this repeated word (which itself refers to death, loss and widowhood) becomes more striking when Krapp proceeds to mouth it, an action that represents a new development in relations between the recorded voice and the live body. This mouthing act allows Krapp to (partially) reclaim the lost word because it becomes (partially) re-embodied as he re-mouths it. However, considering the now-altered relationship between Krapp and this past voice, the moment also seems uncanny and incomplete. The word viduity may have once 'belonged' to Krapp, but it then took leave of him through his mouth, becoming a recorded object replayed from a machine and in this respect, it is now lost to him. When it appears to then re-enter and leave Krapp's body again as it is re-mouthed, it seems to both belong to

him once more, at the same time as seeming like a vocal expression from an entirely separate individual. The spoken voice seems to exert control over Krapp's body, forcing him to shape the word form with his mouth and stealing his living (silent) breath, despite the voice's contradictory status as a dead, inert audio recording.

If it is true that "it is the voice which seems to colour and model its container" (Connor, 2000: 35) then this recorded voice seems to *re-colour* and *re-model* its past container, mapping a past representation of Krapp onto the actor's present body, confusing both versions of the character as it does. At this point it becomes unclear who is now speaking - Krapp's live body, or his recorded voice, or a conflation of the two. In literal terms, it is Krapp's live body which does the talking (as the character re-mouths the word), but it is the recorded voice which forces the re-wording act, re-planting the word's vitality in Krapp's head and making him mouth it again.

In my practice, I employ related lip – synch techniques to reveal how the recorded voice can confuse and blur temporalities of self and display acousmatic power, as well as a capacity to actively affect the body in the present tense of the live performance situation. The suggestions and complications of presence brought about through my lip – synch acts, speak to the ability of sight to anchor sound (Altman, 1980: 74) as well as a lingering metaphysical *desire* to locate, quantify and verify an essential, whole self through the sight of the human body. Through these acts, I instead look to foreground a new hybrid subject/object, which calls into question the authenticity and integrity of voices and bodies as sources of truthful self-presence (Snell, 2020: 4).

In my practice, the recorded voice's ability to affect my live actions and force me into acts of listening obedience imbue it with impressions of affective power and agency in relation to me. By dictating my future actions from a past temporality, the recorded voice can acquire masterful and prophetic qualities, seeming able to control the future-present of the performing body from a past temporality. This intensifies impressions of acousmatic power. A combination of the recording's vocalic body, its logocentric nature and its existence as a partial acousmètre allow the voice to

acquire an energetic, lifelike power in relation to the performer onstage, as I show in subsequent chapters.

My uses of lip – synch then allow the disembodied voice to become partially re-embodied, reconfiguring the expected mechanics of vocal embodiment by placing a previously disembodied aspect of human subjectivity (the spoken voice) back within the body. This again compounds impressions that the voice can exert power and control over that same body. I must obediently listen and follow the speech patterns and intonations of the recorded voice to convincingly pass off the lip – synch act as an act of live speech. In doing this, I conversely point towards the inauthenticity of either the voice or the body as credible sources of live and literal self-presence. As I show in chapters Two and Three, I try to undermine the Godly, super-egoic logic and the affective power of the spoken voice by synching and un-synching from it at will with the mouth and body, as well as through manipulations of the voice with puppets and interactions with digital technology.

Summary: Resisting and Undermining the Spoken Voice

Any desire to express a truthful presentation of self and presence seems futile since humans are bound to representative and linguistic structures that unavoidably stand in for them. The idea that there might be a full presence, or a presence that carries something within it points towards a state of truth or essence, as if presence were a definable and locatable property that could be replicated, corrupted or otherwise transformed in the doubling process that occurs during acts of interior thought and exterior communication. To think of presence as an essential property, encourages us to desire or search for some *thing* that hasn't ever been found in the context of western metaphysics (a system of thinking that continues to underpin our relationships with language, thought and ourselves). Despite this, there remains a “metaphysical legacy of essences” (Labelle, 2010: 167) which encourages us to pursue ideas of subjective unity, upholding a potent tradition to regard voices as expressions and indicators of self. This legacy, felt as an affective power or resonance within

recorded speech, can allow a person's voice to display mastery over them as the recorded spoken voice re-mingles with the subject's corporeality, despite its disembodied and representative status.

In this chapter I have discussed how the recorded voice can display acousmatic and ventriloquial qualities that tie it back to a literally present performer, attempting to hold that subject in place by offering false promises and impressions of metaphysical unity, for the price of aural and corporeal obedience. If western speech can possess this dangerous affective capability, then a subsequent intention of my digital ventriloquism practice is to explore the schism between ideas and experiences and the words or signs that represent them – to use Artaud's terminology again, highlighted on page 11 – exploiting the constructed here and now of theatrical space to create, analyse and undo representations of vocal presence within it. Theatrical practice allows me to reveal gaps in space and time where spoken representations can re-perform back upon, back within and back alongside human subjects, standing in for unquantifiable understandings of the very experiences they indicate. Digital ventriloquism initially helps me to highlight the limits and interpretative (im)possibilities of spoken sign systems, to express notions and experiences of subjective self-presence, whilst foregrounding the qualitative potential for recorded speech to become affectively powerful over the corporeality of the self-same speaker.

In my digital ventriloquism practice, I use specific audio technologies in combination to record, replay, fragment and manipulate speech in real time. This allows me to practically dissect, analyse and deconstruct processes of vocal expression and self-representation in and just after the moment of their making. The experiments I explore in Chapter Two help me to more specifically consider ways in which audio technology accentuates and transforms already masterful and controlling qualities within logocentric speech, bringing me close to a paradoxically “nonpresent” (Derrida, 1997: 55) self-presence; allowing me to articulate the impossibility of ever expressing the truth of human subjectivity and vocal self-presence through speech,

whilst acknowledging how representative gestures (made through the embodied and disembodied voice) can foreground qualities of affective power and self-mastery. The theoretical framework outlined in this chapter, alongside my concept of digital ventriloquism, are used in Chapter Two to reveal specific ways in which live and recorded voices can be more than mere instruments and show how live and recorded speech produces its own unique affects and resonances.

I suggest that my practice allows me to momentarily undermine and move beyond such resonances, as I take and break speech using digital audio tools. The experiments analysed in Chapter Three lay the theoretical ground for more complex experiences of human subjectivity to emerge and help me resist the containing attributes of spoken and corporeal signifiers through the concept and practice of digital ventriloquism. I show how the digital tools I use can shift the spoken voice into new proxemic and temporal relations alongside the body (much like how a traditional ventriloquist can throw their voice towards another source with a puppet). The practices I employ (which include acts of live voice recording, speech replay and interaction, lip – synch, uses of puppetry and acts of voice manipulation with digital software) allow me to better analyse and understand the affective power of speech, from a place outside of the human body.

In the next two chapters I investigate how the digital tools I use can allow me to quickly proliferate, degrade and digitally manipulate recorded self-representations in and beyond the moment of their inscription, further exposing and undermining the instrument of the spoken voice, as I layer vocal representation upon vocal representation, degrading and manipulating speech with digital software; as I re-pitch, re-sample and change the voices volume and tempo and turn it into a mess of squeaking, babbling digital information. Through a direct engagement with my performance practice in the self-devised, live performance of *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) I explore how digital ventriloquism allows me to challenge the affective power of the spoken voice and momentarily release the body from the hold of logocentrism.

I also suggest that my ventriloquial practice directly relates to what Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers call “manners of doing and thinking that resist the imperative of having to reply to the problem [of speech] in the terms that problem was posed” (Pignarre and Stengers, 2007: 112). Whilst Pignarre and Stengers call for philosophical manners of doing and thinking to resist and undermine institutional and political oppressions and orthodoxies in the public life, I try to re-appropriate the resistant logic at the heart of their invitation and suggest that the practices explored throughout this thesis constitute my own resistant manners of doing and thinking. These resistant manners allow me to newly explore and uncover specific philosophical complications around vocal affectivity and corporeal subjectivity, showing how theatrical time and space **offer** optimum conditions for holding, re-thinking and undoing theories and experiences of vocal self-presence as they are manifested in real-time onstage.

Chapter Two

Having and Holding the Body

Introduction

Self-mastery, subjective unity and affective power. How are onstage acts of speaking and listening woven through with these interdependent, often contradictory traits? How do these become entangled with an impossible, metaphysical state of self-presence that voices also gesture towards? How are notions of literal presence complicated when recorded voice objects can be created and returned to corporeally present, human subjects via live-looping software, loudspeakers and digital recording techniques? Chapter Two provides an analysis and critical reflection upon selected practical examples from the self-devised, live performance of *Mouthpiece* to explore these questions further. Through the prism of *Mouthpiece*, I investigate the extent to which embodied and disembodied speech can exert an affective hold over human subjects onstage. The filmed performance of *Mouthpiece* can be viewed in isolation via the link provided (Appendix One), or alongside this document, where specific performance sequences are referenced in brackets. The *Mouthpiece* script is also provided as a supplementary artefact (Appendix Two) in case readers wish to verify or analyse specific technical directions or passages of speech from *Mouthpiece* in more detail, in written form.

In Chapter One, I outlined Jonathan Sterne's argument that recorded voices are simply resonant tombs (or dead objects) with no self-awareness, yet conversely (according to Mladen Dolar) that the voice retains an intimate link with subjectivity. In this chapter, I suggest, with reference to my practice of digital ventriloquism, that the link between voices and human subjects can also be understood as a desire to find and express an impossible, unquantifiable self-presence. When this desire, rooted in "the metaphysical legacy of essences" (Labelle, 2010: 167), collides with what I claim is the affective power of disembodied and recorded speech, visible subjects can

become re-entwined with, and contingent upon, invisible voices, allowing those voices to appear uncannily present, despite their status as recorded objects. Through an analysis of digital ventriloquism practice, I also seek to highlight what I regard as outdated logocentric perceptual habits which continue to focus on the primacy of words and speech (Derrida, 1997) as origins of unified, essential and authentic self-expression. In Chapter Three, I then offer and analyse digital-ventriloquial strategies focussed on undermining these logocentric habits, to further emancipate human subjects from the tyranny of civilised western speech. My arguments throughout are entwined with the theoretical discourses around voice, philosophy and performance studies outlined in Chapter One. Importantly, the logic from this point is to investigate how my own practical engagements with the theoretical discourses outlined, can be complicated and transformed through live theatrical performance.

Mouthpiece

The next two chapters present my performance practice and writing as interlinked research methods, analysing digital ventriloquism alongside the live performance of *Mouthpiece*. This chapter relates to the first half of the show, whilst chapter Three relates to the second half. During *Mouthpiece* I engaged in various onstage acts of live voice recording, speech replay, spoken interactions with the recorded voice, lip – synch and puppet operation, as well as acts of live and recorded speech manipulation with digital audio technology. Located within the intermedial performance acts and techniques presented during *Mouthpiece* (developed through the workshop practice/critical reflection cycles first described on page 14) are the unique practice research contributions of this research project. These acts and techniques are described and analysed in detail here and in Chapter Three of this thesis.



Figure Three: Stage Set-up for *Mouthpiece* by Jonathan White (2022) – Video Still. Source: White (2022).

Figure Three is a photo of the stage set-up for *Mouthpiece*. On the left-hand side of the photo is a flipchart used to write an oath in Scene Two. On the right-hand side of the photo are three microphone stands and on each outer stand is a microphone. These microphones were visual props and were switched off and unplugged from the main P.A system. On the floor between these three microphone stands is a midi foot switch (shown also in Figure Six) connected by a cable to the computer at the control station in the centre of the photo, in front of the live performer (me). The midi foot switch was used to remotely trigger and replay voice recordings (contained on the central laptop) in numerous scenes. A third cordless microphone was used at the stand above pedal (as well as in-hand), in Scenes Four, Five and Six. This roaming, cordless microphone was active (with its own on/off switch) and amplified the live voice through the main P.A system, independently of the central control station and laptop computer. Other props utilised during the show included a red pen (for writing

an oath), a roll of gaffa tape (for taping the performer's mouth), two puppet mouths (operated by the live performer in Scene Five) and a piece of edible script paper (consumed at the end of the show).



Figure Four: Digital Audio Instruments used in *Mouthpiece* performances (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

Figure Four is a bird's eye view of the central control station (also seen in the centre of Figure Three) which contained an active microphone on a central microphone stand, a Korg Kaoss Pad (bottom left stand) a midi clip launcher (centre stand) and a midi keyboard (bottom right stand). These were operated in conjunction with the computer software program Ableton Live 11, contained within a laptop computer (top

right stand). Every sound design element in *Mouthpiece* was activated from the stage (either at this central control station or via the remotely connected midi foot pedal, on the right-hand side at the back of the stage, shown in Figure Six) and every recorded voice heard during the show was either live recorded, looped, replayed, or pre-recorded by me through the laptop and the Ableton Live 11 computer program.

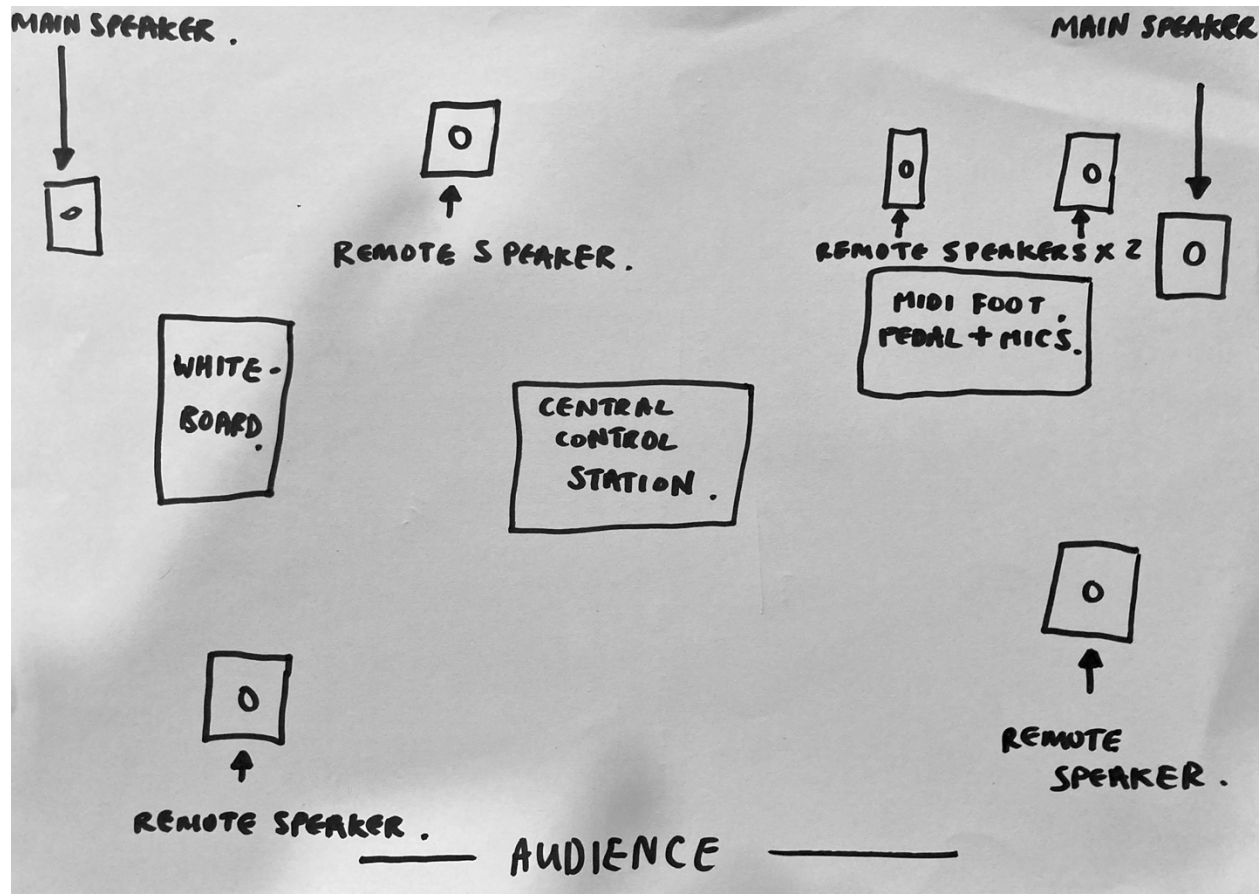


Figure Five: Annotated Diagram of Stage set-up for *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022), showing stage zones and onstage speaker locations – Diagram. Source: White (2022)

Figure Five is an annotated bird's-eye diagram of the stage space, showing each different stage zone, as well as the onstage speaker set-up. In Scenes One and Two, live and recorded voices were amplified from the main speakers only. In Scene Three, recorded voices were amplified through all Seven speakers onstage. In Scene Four, live and recorded voices were heard through the main speakers only. In Scene Five,

voices came from two of the remote speakers onstage (upstage left). In Scene Six they came from only the main speakers and in Scene Seven all speakers were used.

Speech Surrounds Me – Live Recorded Speech Capture

During the first section of *Mouthpiece* (0:00 -16:32 of documentation film, Appendix One) I used a microphone, looping technology and loudspeakers to live-record one half of a duologue and other spoken directions onstage in front of a live audience. I then replayed this live speech recording before stepping away from the microphone and the recording apparatus in front of me. After this, I followed specific directions and conversational prompts given to me by the disembodied speech recording, attempting to converse and (sing along) with the recording in new spatio-temporal configurations. I was therefore engaged in acts of live speech, speech recording, listening and conversational/musical interactions with ‘myself’ as a live and recorded performer/speaker. I refer to this combination of live speaking, listening, recording and performance practices collectively as ‘Live Recorded Speech Capture’, within this thesis.

My first speech/recording act was designed to exploit the human touch (taking up Dolar’s idea of the human touch of the voice, analysed on page 34) that the voice adds to the machinery of the signifier by creating life-like (audio) self-representation that could seem to move and exist alongside me onstage. The words I recorded emanated from a visible human subject (me) who employed their body (lungs, vocal folds, teeth, tongue, lips, mouth) to engage in an act of vocal self-expression and covert audio recording. The human touch being added to linguistic signifiers was a combination of the unique sonic qualities of the voice I spoke with and the literal presence and corporeal support of the speaking body.

The voice heard originated from the body and left via the mouth, linking the voice with the body explicitly as it left. Barthes conceptualises the invisible materiality of the human voice as a grain – as I discuss on page 35 – and this idea concisely entwines the human touch of the voice with notions of corporeality, to the point of suggesting that a voice may even contain an affective trace of a voicer’s body as it is heard. Ironically, this grain remains invisible and ungraspable due to its existence as sound. The readiness to associate the sonic quality of invisible voices with the materiality of speaking bodies occurs elsewhere in the field voice studies (for example in Connor’s concept of the vocalic body analysed in depth on page 37, or Dolar’s description of the voice as a fingerprint, highlighted on page 18) and seems logical, since human speech emanates initially from human bodies. Human voices can connect thoughts to sounds, language and words, uniquely delivering these into space, via the instrument of the body. The corporeal delivery of a voice affords it a potent link to the literal presence of a speaker, without actually revealing a locatable or quantifiable state of self-presence.

Importantly, when I first spoke onstage in *Mouthpiece*, I also made a live audio recording of the speaking voice. My speech act took place live as I recited the lines, “Yes. Hello. It’s me. It’s me. I’m here aren’t I? It’s me. I’m here. I’m still really here. Ha! Yes. Here. What a relief. I exist. I still exist. I speak. I still speak. I am heard. I am listened to. You hear me don’t you?” (Appendix Two: page 152). However, these words in fact referred to a future moment and I used audio looping technology (contained within the laptop onstage) to simultaneously abstract and store them, so I could later replay and throw the recorded voice back towards the live body. Embodied speech was becoming disembodied and abstracted as I spoke, meaning that any corporeal quality carried through the voice was also being complicated through an act of live audio recording.

If the invisible voice could be perceived as leaving the body during the act of live speech, then the simultaneous recording act indicated (amongst other things) a desire for it to then arrive as a recording and continue to exist apart from me, as a tangible,

disembodied entity. Through the act of recording, I hoped to create and store a sonic self-representation that would remain linked to my subjectivity since it was first seen and heard coming from me. I aimed not to sever the link between voice and body (this link is proposed by Dolar and discussed on page 34), but to stretch and displace it using audio technology. The live recording act allowed me to move the voice away from the body, preserving and magnifying some its affective capabilities. By making this recording, I had created a dreamlike, hallucinatory and secondary vocalic body. That the voice recording I had made could be a dream, fantasy, or a hallucination of a second body, formed from an autonomous voice (to use Steven Connor's terminology, highlighted on page 37) is a reminder of the inherent corporeality of voices as well as the imaginative desire involved in perceiving and giving a bodily shape to the affective quality of an invisible voice. The corporeal quality retained by the recorded voice ensured that it remained clearly linked to my ongoing corporeal and literal presence as a physical performer onstage. The recorded voice could carry a strong impression or memory of that same physical body along with it as it replayed onstage and the physical body could carry a strong association with the recorded voice just created by the performer. The secondary vocalic body formed and manifested through the recording retained a strong link to my ongoing subjectivity, since the replaying voice was seen and heard emanating from the same living body moments before.

Until the moment of replay, listener/spectators were unaware that I was recording as I spoke, since nothing in the piece until this point had suggested that I was doing so. Additionally, this opening speech was presented as if the audience were the addressees, when in fact I was addressing a future version of myself. The covert vocal mis/redirection of the vocalic body I was creating (through the live recording act) recalls conventional practices of ventriloquism, where a voice can seem to come from somewhere other than the body of the speaker. Furthermore, I expected this initial covert recording to subsequently accentuate the voice's re-appearance as a distinct and spatially distanced, recorded voice body when it replayed. I would then be able to explore how a recorded vocal self-representation could "command, invade and

vampirize the image” (Chion, 1999: 27) of a live performing body and complicate perceptions of a live performer’s literal presence in the process.

Relatedly, Chion’s concept — first discussed on pages 50-52 — of the *acousmètre* as a doubled, shadow-like and (crucially for me) a *powerful* being, frames the link between vocal agency and bodily materiality as inherently energetic, suggesting that disembodied voices can re-perform powerfully in relation to visible bodies and affect ongoing impressions of subjectivity, despite their recorded status. The idea that a disembodied voice can re-perform with power corresponds, too, with Connor’s idea that vocalic bodies can contradict, replace and reshape the visible body of the speaker (as explored on page 37). If a shadow-like, imaginary and fundamentally dead recorded voice can display the necessary energy and agency to compete with, replace, or reshape the body of a speaker, then its life-like, affective qualities can also be magnified. Acts of digital ventriloquism seek to accentuate, unpick and explore the power and agency to which Chion and Connor refer in more detail, through live performance practice. By replaying the just-recorded voice alongside the live body here, I intended to show the voice and body as distinct and separable aspects of the same human subject, which remained linked through either being or coming from, the same person onstage. Additionally, the spoken directions I had secretly recorded made new dramaturgical sense because the moment I was projecting them towards had arrived. As the recorded voice replayed, the live body could now perform alongside it, listening, answering back and following its directions, offering a visual counterpoint for the just-recorded, invisible voice body that had entered the space through the speaker devices onstage.

During the initial speaking/recording process, I asked questions such as “you hear me don’t you?” and “you believe in me don’t you? In what I’m saying. In who I am as I speak to you now” (Appendix Two: page 152). These words, constructed as present-tense statements and recorded live, were intended to refer to both the moment of live speech (seeming to address the audience) and the future moment of replay (addressing myself). I was therefore engaged in an act of live speech which referred

to one temporality but that was simultaneously a mental projection towards a different one in the future. I was physically present during the initial speech/recording act and as such, experiencing two temporalities at once - a moment of live speech and a projection of this live speech (through recording) towards the moment of replay and (live reply) onstage. This reveals that presence - of mind and moment are complex and slippery (Power; 2008: 136) and shows how my physical occupation of a seemingly unified, live here and now onstage could be complicated by a simultaneous mental projection towards a future here and now. However, the audience were unaware that I was recording at all and I appeared instead to be simply speaking live to them through a microphone. Unlike mine, their experience was of a united present moment and the 'you' to whom my speech referred seemed to be them, instead of the future version of me that I was actually forecasting towards. At this point I was attempting to exploit the supposed here and now of live theatrical space as well as the supposed here and now of the live performing body. I seemed initially to speak live, before undermining and unfixing unified impressions of live space, time and corporeal presence by replaying a just-recorded voice on the same stage, from a place outside of me, in a newly (and overtly) divided temporality. This newly split theatrical time and space still somehow framed and contained the same live body and (the now recorded and disembodied) spoken voice.

Experiences of the (assumed) present-tense moment became confusing when I then replayed the dialogue I had been recording. When heard again, it became obvious to the audience that questions such as "you hear me don't you?" (Appendix Two: page 152), posed in the opening (just-recorded) monologue now referred to the onstage body in the present moment of replay, rather than the audience in the past moment of recording. It was only when I replied onstage to the recording I had been making, that the audience could fully comprehend this change in emphasis and referral. By replaying and then replying to this just-made recording of the voice with the live body, I attempted to allow two self-representations (recorded voice and live body) to seem to exist and interact with each other. I had previously experienced a mental overlapping of present and future time when speaking live (whilst also recording the

voice) and the act of live replay/repetition sought to create a similar overlapping of present and past time, but *for the audience* instead of me (as their experience of the just-recorded voice combined with their memory of the initial live speech act). My back-to-back acts of live recording and replay/reply sought to create an “overlap of perception, association, memory and imagination” (Fischer-Lichte in Spence, Andrews and Frohlich, 2012: 274), resulting in an undoing of a seemingly unified present-tense situation onstage. They also sought to show how a recorded repetition need not simply maintain the past present as truth (Derrida, 1997: 55) but is also capable of projecting towards/affecting a future performance moment. Such present-tense complications sought to unfix the supposed temporal purity of both the voice and the body, recontextualising a recorded spoken voice through replay, having used that same voice live moments before. Here I sought to reveal the relationship between my voice and body as one of “struggle and becoming, negotiating material and sonic borders” (Meizel, 2020: 17). The same speech, now heard as a disembodied recording, had been witnessed moments earlier, uttered by the body that now listened to it live onstage. In this sense, the replaying voice had passed through the material borders of the body and the borders of the digital instruments onstage, to be heard as a distinct, recorded entity from the speaker devices alongside the live performer. Voice and body could now be experienced as separable agents in the theatre space, with a new potential to struggle against each other as independently functioning entities. The practice of live recorded speech capture and speech replay augmented impressions of vocalic agency, showing how a previously live speech could act again as a newly separated, disembodied recording upon the body which just gave voice to it.

Here, I had not created what Chion specifically defines as a *complete* acousmètre - a fully omnipotent voice who is not yet seen, but only heard (Chion, 1999: 21) through my live looping act, since I was still clearly visible onstage and because I had been the person who first spoke, visibly recording the voice which then replayed as an invisible audio recording. The fact of my being seen and heard to speak in the first place meant that the recorded voice was already partially de-acousmatised as it replayed. The voice’s omnipotent and godly qualities had been compromised by the fact the

fact the voice had clearly emanated from the same human subject now interacting with it onstage. To minimise this “de-acousmatization” (Chion, 1999: 27), I sought to regain impressions of vocal agency and omnipotence by covertly playing a seamless follow-on (pre-recorded) speech sample through the main speakers from elsewhere onstage, via a midi-foot switch (shown below).



Figure Six: Performer Operates Midi Foot Switch in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

This new (pre-recorded) speech segment (activated remotely and covertly via the midi foot pedal shown above) was timed to begin precisely when the first live recording finished and imply that the same initial voice was continuing to speak without any bodily assistance or origin. To achieve this follow-on effect, I remained hidden from view, activating the recording in darkness. Unlike my initial live-looping act, which made the process of vocal disembodiment/live voice recording clear, this

new act of covert replay was designed to return impressions of acousmatic power (specifically omnipotence) to the recorded voice and overcome the issue that “*embodying the voice* is a sort of symbolic act, dooming the acousmètre to the fate of ordinary mortals” (Chion, 1999: 28). I wanted to explore whether this self-same voice (now seeming to speak now without any assistance or visible origin) might regain some of the “power, omniscience and (obviously) ubiquity” (Chion, 1999, 27) associated with the complete acousmètre and I tested this by replaying it covertly from an unseen position, attempting to minimise its inevitable association and re-entanglement with the physical (mortal) body. It was also true that the follow-on voice sample now playing sounded acoustically identical to both the live and live-recorded voices, which had just been heard onstage. However, unlike these initial speech and live-reply acts, the follow-on recording was never visibly embodied or witnessed coming from the body onstage. Because this recorded voice now seemed to be speaking independently of the body, without its assistance, without any visible bodily origin as it did so and because I remained totally unseen on a pitch-black stage as the voice continued to speak, it became imbued with an (uncanny) impression of independent agency and vocal life.

The apparent agency of the recorded voice was accentuated by my requirement to listen and follow its directions onstage, so the performance could run smoothly. Much like Nipper the dog and Krapp’s acts of obedient listening (analysed on pages 53 - 56), the live body became literally obedient to (and dependent upon) the powerful recorded voice now speaking and moving around it onstage, since it was required to silently and actively listen to the voice speaking in order to hear and follow directions from the replaying voices. Significantly, acts of close listening often involve silent attention, as speaking voices travel invisibly through air (as soundwaves) before entering the listener’s ears. The recorded voice asked questions, requiring listening attention and compliance. In this respect, it moved and demanded through sound, whilst the live body silently listened, received and obeyed with the ears and the body. At the same time, the live body was also consciously *performing* these acts of listening, since (as the actor and deviser of the piece) I already knew that each

direction should be closely followed so the planned sequence of events could run as planned. In this scenario, I was engaged in acts of listening the recorded voice as well as the theatrical performance of those listening acts, at once.

In one performance sequence, the recorded voice demanded that we “make ourselves a contract, an oath” (Appendix Two: page 153) (shown in Figure Seven) commanding me to write this oath on a whiteboard onstage as it was recited.



Figure Seven: Performer Writes on Whiteboard in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

I was then directed to chant this spoken and written oath along with the recording, which also began to chant. Then when directed, I filled the silence with a looped vocal composition that was simultaneously live-recorded and looped using live looping software on the central laptop. Jo Scott argues that each sound layer created during an act of live vocal looping can be interpreted as a voice body that “constitutes a

dislocated aspect of my presence, which sustains beyond the moment of its inscription, ‘re-shaping’ the actuality of the body in space” (Scott, 2016: 72). My immediate playback of numerous recorded melodies acted similarly, re-shaping subsequent layers that were added, with the live body and voice responding to the volume, pitch, tone and length of previous recordings to create successful harmonies. It was not just that I was “generat[ing] and respond[ing] to sound in real time” (Scott, 2016: 72) by undertaking this act, but that I once again *depended* on the recorded voice to help me create new complimentary vocal layers and new virtual self-representations. In this way, the recorded voice exercised control over the live body and I became contingent upon it. Here I seemed to also uncover a dialectical relationship between “(t)he Master and the Slave (who) are locked in a mutual struggle for recognition: neither can exist without the recognition of the other” (Homer, 2005; 32). The Master and the Slave were two representations of the same person (me), with the recorded voice and live body alternately taking on the role of didactic Master or obedient Slave. In this case, the recorded voice relied on the live body to make itself heard and to become recorded, whilst the live body relied on the recorded voice to create new harmonic layers of sound. The impression that live body and recorded voice had become mutually dependent was compounded by the fact that I only sang because the recording asked me to. In this way, the recording seemed to display aspects of agency and power, with the live body validating and accentuating these traits through its continued corporeal (listening) obedience, as well the performance of obedience and subservience towards the voice, as a consciously performing actor onstage.

Speech Controls Me – Remote Speech Dislocation and Proliferation

In Scene Three of *Mouthpiece* (16:35 - 21:15 on documentation film, Appendix One) I used five remote speaker devices to replay numerous voice recordings in darkness, which seemed to call out and speak to each other, creating the impression of a conversation between them all. The live performer (me) was then commanded by the recorded voices to appear onstage as the lights came up and then to follow specific

directions, engaging the recorded voices in conversation in the process. Directions given to the live body included standing on the spot, covering the mouth with gaffa tape and reciting a tongue twister, which the recorded voices also repeated. I call this collection of practices and techniques ‘Remote Speech Dislocation and Proliferation’.

My earlier looping experiment had suggested ways in which a just-recorded voice could seem affectively powerful alongside a live body, reshaping it and creating its own impressions of subjective agency and literal presence (alongside the live body) at the same time. In this experiment however, I looked firstly to explore whether numerous recorded voices could seem present alongside *each other* onstage, despite my own (initial) physical concealment and the invisibility of the replaying voice recordings. I was interested to know whether, through this performance act, I would create a related “impression of [me] really being there [via the recorded voice], even if the audience rationally knows [I am] not” (Feral, 2012: 29). I intended to assess whether I could throw the recorded voice convincingly between the five speaker devices onstage.

This made the act ventriloquial again since I aimed to dislocate perceptions of where an invisible voice might seem to be in relation to a (previously visible) performing body. Importantly here, I was not just exploring the relationship between a recorded voice and a live body (now hidden) onstage, I was also practically testing whether one disembodied voice could seem to become re-entangled with other recordings of the same voice, which now played back in synch through numerous remote speakers. In doing so, I wanted to now stretch and complicate a human tendency to locate sound with vision and newly exploit affective possibilities within recorded speech, to ascertain whether numerous recorded voices could seem present firstly in relation to each other, rather than in relation to the (currently invisible) physical body. This would testify to the recorded voice’s ability to become affectively powerful, gathering qualities of subjective agency and literal presence, despite its dead recorded nature and lack of self-awareness.

Rick Altman argues that “every sound seems to ask, unless it has previously been categorized and located: ‘where did that sound come from?’ [...] the sound asks *where?* And the image responds *here!*” (Altman, 1980: 74 original italics). The voice first heard through the main speakers in darkness was designed to explore what happens to the whereness of a subject’s voice when the hereness of their body is deliberately concealed. I wanted to know how relationships between whereness and hereness would be affected if I offered no visible bodily anchor in response to the voice(s) being heard. In doing so, I sought also to unpick an enduring human desire to synchronise, quantify and verify audible voices through the sight of speaking bodies and invert relationships between vocal whereness and bodily hereness, offering only more recorded voices (and no physical body) for the first voice to be validated and verified alongside. This would allow me to explore and undermine relationships between what Dolar regards as the relative stability, permanence and locatability of the visible world the fluid, passing and amorphous character of the audible world—an idea outlined further on page 47. I offered only amorphous and untethered sound recordings that suggested their own self-presence in relation to each other, despite belonging to neither a stable visible world or (at this point in the scene) a locatable bodily source.

The first recorded voice claimed that “this space is empty” (Appendix Two: page 155) before other recordings (playing through individual remote speakers) questioned this claim, asserting their own acousmatic presence and highlighting their own lack of a body, as they interjected with phrases such as “I have no body” and “for now I have no body, but I am here” (Appendix Two: page 155). Hudson (2012) argues that for a mediated representation to achieve a sense of presence in a live performance, it must show “an awareness of the present tense of the performance situation” (Hudson, 2012: 258). By offering a first recorded voice that could refer to the present tense situation of the empty stage, I intended to investigate this sense of presence, before augmenting it with other recorded voices, who responded in the same (apparent) present tense, from their distinct speaker locations onstage. These responding recorded voices were designed to audibly verify and validate the concerns of the first

voice, compounding and confirming its sense of presence as well as theirs, due to their apparently shared present-tense awareness. The sense of presence that occurred through this act, did so *despite* each voice's status as a recording and despite the absence of a bodily anchor (me) onstage, through which the voice could be visually tethered and understood.

The ventriloquial dislocation of numerous vocal self-representations from the body during my initial, offstage acts of recording (since these particular voices were recorded before the live performance), their subsequent replay through remote speakers onstage and their movement through air as soundwaves, intended to explore how each voice could continue to 'live', both by itself and in relation the others also speaking. The 'life' I found was now distinct and removed from perceptions of my own literal presence since the live body was currently hidden from view. The performance space had been filled with several presences who verified and validated each other's existence through their apparent spoken reactions to each other. In this instance, I wished to exploit the unique, invisible, moving in-betweenness of recorded speech, to defy a verifying logic or habit which might be applied to a written sentence, or a photograph of a person; one which tries to confirm that what I see before me is a static and representational sign, as opposed to a living, moving and amorphous entity. The logic here was also to create a polyvocalic experience which, through a proliferation of self-representative voices (and their seeming interactions with each other) could fragment and trouble the idea of a unified, singular self. Importantly, I found that the voice recordings I made could not be easily abstracted and understood as mere representations because they could move as invisible sound objects onstage and in doing so, could resist containment and verification within the stabilising framework of what is visible.

This proliferation of voices, combined with a paradoxical and enduring tendency to equate invisible voices with human subjectivity, seemed to compound the affective power of recorded speech and heighten impressions of its (now fractured and multiplied) presence. The sense of presence delivered by each voice onstage was

further augmented by the fact each speaker device also possessed a marginally different sound quality, giving each voice its own unique sound character. This added to the impression that the voices talking onstage were individuals, carrying their own sonic personalities, despite also clearly belonging to (and sounding like) the same (individual) speaking subject. By throwing the voice between these different speaker devices onstage, I also aimed to offer multiple extra-bodily sources for the invisible recordings now being heard. As the experiment continued, I increased the jumping effect between each vocal source, to the point where individual speaker devices only replayed individual words, forming sentences as a collective with the other speakers and creating the effect of a fractured conversation. By sharing voices in this way, I tried to more obviously manipulate (or puppeteer) audience members, directing their aural attention between remote speakers with increasing frequency and speed, inviting them to try and align each replaying voice with its own (rapidly changing) remote source. Since the voices replaying were now shifting between speaker devices so quickly, I wanted audience members to become disoriented as they attempted to find each source. In doing this I hoped again to call to their attention to the enduring human desire to quantify and verify invisible voices through their relationship to what can be visibly located. Or as Nina Eidsheim puts it, by manipulating the recorded voice in this way, I looked to reveal an enduring human tendency for aligning, quantifying and otherwise finding the correct ‘source’ for a spoken voice. In doing this, I looked to further expose and underline the “conceptual and perceptual work undertaken to uphold the concept of vocal essence” (Eidsheim, 2019: 153).

For example, when the sound of the voice was heard on the right-hand side, the voice seemed to become spatially tethered to the speaker device on the listener’s right and when it was heard in the left, it seemed to jump and become tethered now to the speaker on the left. Dolar states that “Ventriloquists usually display their art by holding a puppet [...] They offer a dummy location for the voice which cannot be located [...] but suppose that we ourselves are the dummy [...] while the voice is the dwarf, the hunchback hidden in our entrails?” (Dolar, 2006: 70). In aligning vocality itself with human dwarves and hunchbacks, Dolar goes as far as to suggest that voices

may have an ability to acquire subjective traits beyond their operation by speaking subjects. In fact, he seems to suggest that they may not be operated at all by the human's they emanate from, but instead that they operate *upon* human speakers, who themselves become puppets (or dummies) under the control of such independent vocalic agents. It was clear at least in this example of practice that the voice could re-entangle and move itself between the speaker devices onstage, but also that there was a potential for a listener to become controlled and manipulated too, through the continued relocation of each voice as well as a listener's desire to identify each voice in relation to the sight of each remote speaker. In this respect, I intended for the recorded voice to indeed reveal itself as Dolar's dwarf obscured from view, controlling and puppeteering the listener between each speaker device, through which they seemed to talk and direct the live performer. This puppeteering act became more violent as the scene continued, as I attempted to force listeners into rapidly locating and making sense of increasingly fragmented sentences, with words becoming dispersed more and more quickly between different remote sources. Any ability for the recorded voice to control and manipulate the listener's attention relates again to the idea that listening requires obedience. I hoped that live participants would obey and follow each moving recording with their ears, before then attempting to visually and verify (and re-verify) what they were hearing through each speaker device.

By starting this scene in darkness, I attempted to place all significance and attention on the acoustic and affective qualities of the voices speaking. I wanted the replaying, invisible recorded voices to take centre stage, to accentuate their affectively powerful traits as acoustic presences. By choosing to keep the body initially hidden, I also tried to diminish the impact and significance of my own literal presence, transforming the body into a living shadow in comparison to the voices speaking aloud, which themselves took on material, almost visible qualities as they became vocalic bodies. Furthermore, I seemed to uncover subservience towards the voice, since the body could not be seen at all. The body had become an invisible servant that would later be controlled by the voices now speaking onstage. When the physical

body eventually appeared, it did so under the direction of the recorded voice, suggesting that its movement into the light was another act of listening/corporeal obedience.

This scene began in darkness and the live body became visible when the recorded voice directed it to “come close and let me see you” (Appendix Two: page 157). By shifting the body from a state invisibility to one of visibility, I attempted to finally confirm me (the physical performer) as the subject to whom the recording was now referring. Here, I wanted to unpick Chion’s understanding of the acousmatic – first discussed on pages 50-52 – more closely, through practice. By moving out from behind the curtain onstage, I wished to complicate the relationship between an invisible speaking Master and a visibly listening follower, since I was revealed again as the speaker and the listener at once. In this sequence, the speaking Master was my own invisible pre-recorded voice, which was replayed and made to appear onstage by an *invisible* listener (me), who now visibly appeared alongside the now disembodied, super-egoic voice.

By designing a lighting change to occur onstage and moving into it when the recorded voice commanded, I wondered if it would *seem* as though the voice was not just aware of the present performance situation but also dictating its conditions. Of course, for an audience to fundamentally invest in this idea, a “degree of imagination that is essential to all theatre performance” (Hudson, 2012: 265) was also required. As the live performer, I acted as a facilitator, helping the recorded voice to seem more present and alive by obediently listening to it and by performatively allowing it to direct me into the light onstage. The disembodied voice appeared to display power and agency through a combination of its literal control over the body (as I needed to listen to its directions in order to perform them), its seeming ability, as a theatrical character, to understand and direct the present-tense of the performance situation (since the lights onstage changed in accordance with the voice’s demands) and through this voice’s initial conversation with other recorded voices in the dark, which all seemed to talk to each other, without the assistance of the performing body.

The eventual appearance of the body alongside these pre-recorded voices (which then ordered me to come close to them) helped me to expose a complex, violent and ventriloquial relationship between the modes and tenses of a visible listening body and those of an invisible disembodied voice (a relationship proposed by Steven Connor, explored on page 27), revealing how a live subject could be ventriloquised by their own voice, with their listening body becoming a compliant servant to a godly, invisible speech recording. When I continued to listen to, converse with, and follow directions from the recorded voice (following directions to tape the mouth and recite a tongue twister, for example), I attempted to foreground and extend the voice's acousmatic mastery over the live body. This intention corresponds once more to Connor's notion of competing and manipulative vocalic body – analysed on page 37. During this sequence, the voice made a series of demands upon the body, which included directions to “stand up straight” and “keep your mouth shut” (Appendix Two: page 158). In following these instructions as a live performer, I explored and accentuated how the recorded voice could seem to compete with, and literally reshape, the visible body, adding complexity to the unexpressed violence within the idea of the vocalic body, as I did. These actions sought to diminish the physical body's affective impact as well as perceptions of its literal presence as compared to the competing presence of the voice. Here, the intention was to also compound notions of self-control through the voice, revealing it as a controlling Master that could be paradoxically inside (since the voice heard first came from inside the physical body of the performer) and outside of me at once (since it now directed the physical actions of that body through onstage speakers). This ability for the recorded voice to be at once inside and out, offered the physical body onstage no escape from its acousmatic self-mastery.

By ordering myself to tape the mouth shut with gaffa tape (shown in Figure Eight), I committed a greater act of vocal self-control and self-harm over the performing body.



Figure Eight: Performer with Mouth Taped in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

By literally restricting the movements of the mouth with gaffa tape, I looked to reveal how acts of civilised speech must both *depend upon* and also *take ownership of* a speaker's mouth as they occur, since in order to make linguistic sense (through the use of shared and civilised spoken language), a person's mouth must be shaped in specific and precise ways, placing the mouth in a position of servitude and support, so a spoken voice may be understood. With the physical mouth taped, the voice coming from the body onstage could not be understood easily and the words I spoke became muffled nonsense, despite my genuine attempts to speak 'properly'. The live body now struggled to speak and to be heard aloud, placing it in a position of subservience and submission in contrast with the recorded voice, which retained impressions of sense, control and linguistic mastery as it continued to direct me onstage. Despite this, the sound of the recorded voice and the image of the body were still locked in a relationship where each was alternately the Master and Slave to the other. This was

because the recording could only acquire impressions of mastery and control if I (the live performer) supported and showed subservience towards it, standing up straight, shutting up and taping the mouth, for example.

Paradoxically, it was also this subservient body which first gave voice to, recorded, replayed and facilitated the disembodied voice now making sense onstage. The recorded voice could never have existed without the assistance of the live body now enslaved alongside it. It is true that I could have left the stage entirely, escaping the specific disembodied voices which directed me. However, whilst doing this might have freed me from the exact voice replaying alongside me, it would not have freed me from the voice that continues to speak within and through the physical body. (I did leave the stage space as the voice replayed later in *Mouthpiece*, as I describe in Chapter Three on pages 109 - 110). The co-opting of the body by the spoken voice, revealed and implied that the body was also an instrument or a dummy that could be used by the voice, in order to make it heard.

Throughout this scene, the invisible recorded voice appeared to move and speak as a distinct vocalic body, still speaking back to and (crucially) of me as it did so. This contradictory perception was made possible because the recorded voice first heard once came from the body onstage and because it could now conversely exist as a separate, disembodied voice, replaying through multiple speaker devices and displaying affective power over me. My desire to question my own corporeal presence alongside the spoken voice had (again) exposed qualities of self-control and affective power within disembodied speech.

Speech Devours Me – Auto Lip (Un) Synch

During Scene Four of *Mouthpiece* (21:15 - 26:40 of documentation film, Appendix One) I used a microphone and loudspeakers to engage initially in an act of silent lip – synch (behind an inactive microphone) alongside the recorded voice, moving the physical mouth in time with the sound of the recorded voice as the recording replayed through two speaker devices onstage. Midway through the lip – synch act I stopped mouthing

along and the recorded voice continued to replay alongside the silent (speechless) performing body. When the recorded voice finished replaying, I switched on the microphone in front of me and spoke through it live for the first time.

The opening moments of *Mouthpiece* had investigated how a recorded voice and a live subject could seem to move alongside each other as separate bodily entities (using audio technology), appearing to share aspects of subjective agency and affective power as well as complicating the literal presence of the performer within the theatrical framework of the stage. This experiment wished to explore how acts of live overdubbing and lip – synch could again expose the desire for a homogenous, locatable state of self-presence, by way of a related tendency by spectator/listeners to align the audible (recorded voice) with the visible (live mouth). This third act of digital ventriloquism related again to other ventriloquial practices, where puppets can seem to speak using voices from elsewhere, but now relied on specific acousmatic and corporeal qualities afforded by the disembodied voice, to further test and complicate notions of presence.

Dolar argues that “the object voice emerges in counterpoint with the visible and the visual [and] it cannot be disentangled from the gaze which offers its framework” (Dolar, 2006: 67). This suggests that abstracted and disembodied voices remain entangled with visible bodies, since bodies usually form part of the visual framework through which speech is encountered. To experiment with this idea, I looked to re-connect the recorded voice with the body through an act of lip – synch. I wanted to practically test whether the recorded voice and the live body back could give themselves back to each other and seem to be re-unified. In this respect, the lip – synch experiment spoke to a related desire for “the orgasmic union of voice and face” (Hollier, 2004: 163) which lies beneath practices of synchronisation. By initially synchronising the movements of the mouth more exactly with the recording heard onstage, I hoped to (temporarily) conceal the issue of their separation and displacement onstage.

Relatedly and as Brandon Labelle argues, the mouth “performs an absolutely dynamic conditioning to how the voice operates, how it sounds and gestures, exposes and hides, figures and disfigures” (Labelle, 2014: 4). It is a powerful bodily instrument, that can fundamentally affect how the actions of a voice are perceived and understood by listeners. The recorded voice and live body did *seem* to connect and unite in the opening moments of this sequence, with the movements of the mouth aligning exactly with the recording as it replayed. I intended here to practically analyse whether words could be put back into the mouth and imply, through the sonic and visual alignment of aspects of the voice, that I was somehow whole again. Mikhail Yampolsky notes a particular property of the actor’s body in dubbed cinema “to assimilate and to swallow up the voice of another [...] [an] ability to absorb voice, to draw it inside” (Yampolsky, 2004: 172) and for the ability of a mouth to devour a voice that comes from elsewhere.¹¹ I was not *actually* speaking here but had similarly seemed to absorb and draw the recorded voice back inside the body, re-mouthing it live and as ‘my own’ for a moment. By exploring how the body and voice could connect this closely through an act of lip – synch, I also intended to performatively question whether it mattered that the voice heard was recorded and that the body seen was only pretending. This question highlights again a tendency to assume that voices express aspects of self-presence, one that can be complicated by the synchronisation of a recorded voice with a live mouthing body. If the recorded voice could seem to speak again through me, then the hybrid subject/object which spoke, surely undermined and problematised the credibility of either the body or voice as reliable sources of self-presence.

To further complicate the initial synchronisation I then unmasked it, un-synching from the recording and appearing to speak an entirely different monologue into the microphone onstage, with no sound coming from the mouth. I displayed several visual anchors (a moving mouth, facial/bodily gestures and a microphone) but no sonic accompaniment, rendering my speech act ‘incomplete’ for anyone hoping to hear me

¹¹ Dubbing and dubbed voices refer to the practice of replacing an original actor’s voice with the voice of another actor (often in another language, when a film is translated into the audience’s vernacular).

as a unified speaking subject. I was performing an act of communication at odds with the recording, but which could not be fully understood without the presence of sound. This diminished the apparent agency and affective power of the mouth as I did not deliver spoken words successfully from the body into space, despite an apparent desire to speak. The disjunction I created in being seen but not heard to speak was designed to highlight a continued expectancy on the part of speakers and listeners to experience visible (bodily) and invisible (sonic) aspects of speech simultaneously, revealing once more what Connor regards as the voice's divided condition as it cleaves to, and takes leave from me –mentioned first on page 46. With no sound to carry it, the voice could neither cleave to nor take leave from me, troubling the question of where it was in comparison to the body. The body could be clearly and visibly placed and I *appeared* to speak, forming word shapes with the mouth and gesticulating with the body, but the sound of the live voice was unlocatable. This silent mouthing act underlined a listener's desire to locate a person's voice through its visual relationship with the mouth and revealed how an absence of sound can compromise impressions of subjective agency. Importantly, it was the live theatrical space that allowed me to accentuate and question this relationship (between a person's recorded voice and their corporeally present body), since both could exist and collide alongside each other within the same overarching representational framework of the stage. Such collisions (between a living, performing subject and a dead, recorded voice) could also be uniquely witnessed by a co-present audience. Moreover, I could utilise the unique, constructed and fundamentally representational context of theatrical space and time to expose and undermine the similarly constructed and fundamentally representational mechanics at the heart of perceptions around a human subject's spoken self-presence.

I aimed to further test relationships between the sight/site of a live mouth and the sound of a disembodied voice by then playing the recorded voice again whilst the live body continued to speak silently, now out of synch. Re-introducing the recorded voice at this point allowed me to probe further whether a recorded voice could complicate perceptions of bodily presence and the strength of a listener's desire for sight and

sound to align. Importantly, I was not testing the relationship between voice and body in the same way as I had during the act of lip – synch. This time, I was interested in how the actions of a pre-recorded voice could relate to the actions of a live mouth, engaged in a new act of (silent) speech which was out of time with the recording. I wanted to uncover the problem of where a person’s speaking voice is perceived to be when no sound comes from them, as the sound of their voice continues to operate in a new and unexpected proximity and temporality to their gesticulating mouth.

Placing two distinct speech acts (one visual, one sonic) in such a relation exposed and magnified the voice’s split condition once more. With the voice re-appearing as a sonic recording that was out of time with the body, the split between voice and body was made more explicit, whilst the opportunity for both to now cleave to each other antagonistically (with the assistance of two loudspeakers) also became apparent. Body and voice now spoke simultaneously from separate places and the recorded voice heard newly spoke to, from and of the live body. Spoken dialogue such as “you need to stop and listen because it’s me who should be doing the talking, me who should be heard. What does your mouth have to do with my voice anyway?” (Appendix Two: page 165) encouraged the audience to perceive the onstage performer as ‘you’ and the recorded voice referring to him as ‘me’. As such, the voice and body now seemed to be further distanced and separated from each other, despite the fact they were still attributes of the same human subject. In this respect, I was using the recorded voice to differently “tense the relation between the forces of objectification and the demand for subjectivity” (Labelle, 2014: 5). The recorded voice carried along with it a continuing demand for subjectivity, since it shared the same sonic characteristics as the live voice and because only moments earlier it had actually seemed to *be* that live voice, heard through the onstage microphone. However, it was then revealed as an entirely separate, recorded *object* which continued to replay in conflict with a physical mouth and a living body that had been deliberately un-synchronised from it. The invisible forces carried by the recorded object (voice) once more included its ability to surround me as a vocalic body, and its continuing link to my subjectivity. However, the body now made its own demand for

subjective authority through its presence and its own visible (yet silent) articulation of speech, as I mouthed a different monologue to the replaying recording.

My intention here had been to once more explore whether alterity is a fundamental dimension of the voice, but since this recorded voice was also speaking about me it was unable to seem entirely other. Instead, from a listener's perspective, it seemed to become *both* re-entangled with the visible subject (me), whilst also speaking from a different place. Arguably, the re-entanglement of the live performer with the disembodied voice began to express itself as a power struggle once more, with the body attempting to assert its literal presence in overt opposition to the recorded voice, which itself claimed presence by powerfully speaking over the silent performer it referred to. Recorded speech had been "imposed on the characters in the canvas from the outside" (Yampolsky, 2004: 172). However, unlike the literal canvas to which Yampolsky refers in his analysis of original dubbing methods (where animated characters are given voice-overs), the canvas in this case was the theatrical space, the character in it was the live performing body, and the outside voice-over was the recorded voice, which existed outside of me and was delivered back to the body from the speaker devices onstage.

The live body struggled against this imposition, relying on its clear and strong visual anchoring to physically contradict the recorded voice's own claim(s) for authentic presence (as it moved out of synch), whilst the recording made statements like "it's me who should be doing the talking, me who should be heard" (Appendix Two: page 165). The power struggle between body and voice to find their respective places onstage had seemed to occur due to a discomfort at the sight of the live body beginning to speak silently, in physical opposition to the sound of the voice, leading to the question of where that voice might now be. When this question was answered by a disembodied recording speaking out of time and in opposition to the body, the dangling co-ordinates of my own subjectivity seemed to become unfixed and amplified (Labelle, 2010: 153) and a human desire to unite voices and bodies was again exposed. The recorded voice had been unfixed from me through a practical act

of recording, then amplified through its ability to speak back to the body it once came from, whilst now carrying its own acousmatic, bodily qualities as a disembodied recording. As the audible voice and the silent body struggled for placement beside each other onstage, they became re-entangled, due to their mutual and ongoing link with my subjectivity. It was again the inherent theatricality of this experiment which allowed me to test and complicate the relationship between the living body and the recorded voice. Through theatrical practice I could test the voice's acousmatic capability to re-entwine itself powerfully with a co-present body in real-time, exploring specific ways in which the tomb-like recording could re-engage with a living body within the same representational framework of the stage. In doing so I could test and rethink Chion's cinematic acousmètre as well as the link between voices and subjectivity onstage.

The body had seemed to connect with the recorded voice as I initially lip – synched and seemed to disconnect when I stopped doing so. In this moment I wanted to analyse whether lip – synching can only reveal “a fantasy of embodiment” (Snell, 2020: 1), rather than embodiment itself. The recorded nature of the voice I was using was again exposed when we fell out of synch. At this point I suggested that the recording could never really belong to the body, despite coming from it and coming back so close to it during the lip – synch act. In doing this, I intended to investigate a human tendency to verify a person's voice through its visual association with their mouth. Connecting and disconnecting from the recorded voice by moving the mouth in and out of time with it allowed me to manipulate, reconfigure and undo impressions of vocal self-presence presence onstage.

When I spoke silently alongside the recorded voice, I intended to extend the distance between subject (body) and object (recording) in live performance. The ability of the live body to move, adapt, pause and react in the moment heightened impressions of its agency in comparison with the voice playing through the speakers because unlike me, the recording could do nothing more than continue to speak in a fixed, unalterable way. Despite this, I was interested in whether the increased volume of

the recorded voice playing back through the speaker devices could allow it to cling to impressions of power and authority, as the volume of the voice countered the body's claim to presence by speaking over it loudly. I sought to achieve an impression of presence through the amplified volume of the recorded voice and its refusal to stop speaking. Gesticulating with the body and mouthing in opposition to the recorded voice allowed me to make the power struggle between voice and body visible to the watching audience, with this relationship now clearly exposing a divide between aspects of a person's subjectivity (their voice and body) instead of appearing as a unified subject (as I had implied through the original lip – synch act). By overtly framing and performing this as a struggle for the first time, I began to undermine the unifying and synchronising philosophy at the heart of the relationship between the visible body and the invisible speaking voice. I was no longer seen and heard as a united subject, but foregrounded my status as an inherently divided entity, whose voice and body could operate in audio-visual opposition.

By the time I finally spoke live through the onstage microphone, the accumulative acts of lip – synching and un-synching had taken effect. The synching/un-synching sequence was designed to test the spoken voice as a separable instrument which, despite maintaining some links to my subjectivity, failed once again to deliver any authentic state of self-presence. The spoken voice seemed only to deliver a desire for self-presence and self-control (made possible through the compliance of the performing body). The voice seemed to only offer a fleeting sense of metaphysical unity and subjective wholeness at the point when the recorded voice and live body were visibly and audibly synchronised (through lip – synch). Unmasking this as a lip – synch *act*, whilst the recorded voice continued to replay, sought to point at the inconsistencies inherent in regarding this voice as a source of truthful self-presence, especially on a theatrically representative stage. These inconsistencies could only occur if an initial sense of metaphysical wholeness was experienced (through synchronisation), before being unmasked through a subsequent act of corporeal disobedience (through un-synching).

If the live voice talking at the end of the scene sounded identical to the recorded voice that *seemed* to speak live through me moments before, and if I could reveal how a past, recorded voice could seem to emanate from a live body using lip – synch, I felt that impressions of vocal authenticity and live presence could become further unfixed. From that point, I hoped it would make little difference whether the voice speaking onstage was pre-recorded or live (when considering notions of my presence) because the metaphysical purity of my own self-presence had been clearly unsettled. The logic now was to seed distrust between the audience and the liveness of the voice speaking in front them, suggesting (since the live voice’s acoustic and affective qualities were identical to those of the recorded voice which just spoke) that the voice’s liveness was in fact irrelevant, at least in relation to my corporeal presence.

The final live speech act then perhaps revealed the live speaking voice as the most violent and manipulative of all those heard so far (recorded or otherwise). This was because the live voice was acoustically identical to the recorded voice which the body had just rejected (by un-synching and gesticulating out of time) but unlike the earlier (detachable and separable) recorded voice, the live voice could return to *actually* talk through the performer’s body – I could not distance the body from this voice by recording, replaying or un-synching from it. Here, I wanted to show that I had become trapped by speech again, because although I wished to finally speak without “that voice” (Appendix Two: page 165), I had to use the same sounding voice to articulate such a wish. Moreover, the body was now fully serving and supporting this live voice via the instrument of the body (lungs, breath, vocal cords) and mouth (tongue, teeth, lips), rather than interacting with it via digital instruments. It was clear that the property and propriety of the body had been stolen from me by logocentric speech again, and that the live spoken voice was trying to pass itself off as an aspect of me (Derrida, 1997: 40) once more. The sequence of synching, un-synching and then speaking live seemed to reveal an enduring and dangerous capacity for theft within the spoken voice, whilst conversely displaying my ability as a theatrical performer to disorganise and undo the affective power of this voice, through uses of speech replay and lip –synch in live performance.

Summary

Each of the experiments in this chapter fits within my concept and practice of digital ventriloquism (developed firstly through the cycles of workshop practice and critical reflection described on page 14 and disseminated in the live performance of *Mouthpiece*). Digital ventriloquism allows me to uniquely explore how a desire to quantify, capture and find an impossible self-presence can coincide, collide and otherwise interweave with what I claim is the affective power of disembodied and recorded voices. Uses of audio recording technology (live looping, voice playback and remote speaker technology) alongside performance techniques employed by a live body (speech, movement, song, silent mouthing and lip – synch), allow me to trouble the spoken voice's intimate link with notions of subjectivity, testing and stretching this link and altering ideas of my corporeal and literal presence as I do so.

Through simultaneous acts of live speech and live audio recording (using live looping technology on a laptop), the corporeality of a spoken voice can become apparent as it replays through onstage speaker devices, detached from the physical body that spoke it live moments before. When a subject's just-recorded voice can be replayed alongside their live body like this, the human touch placed upon speech by the body (through the initial speech act) can linger in the recording and allow it to gather impressions acousmatic power. These factors can help the recorded voice to both re-entangle itself with, and assert control over, the live body it now speaks alongside. Impressions of presence are then foregrounded, despite a simultaneous realisation that the voice or the body can never fully achieve such authentic states of self-presence, especially within the constructed, constructing and fundamentally representational context of theatrical time and space. This ability within the spoken voice speaks back to an enduring metaphysical legacy of essences, which seeks to align vocal expression with ideas of unified subjectivity and encourages human subjects to regard voices as expressions and indicators of a self that could never actually be found within the visible body or the invisible voice.

By throwing numerous recorded voices into a live performance space (despite a performer's apparent absence) using remote speaker devices, presence effects – a notion introduced on page 26 – can be created, manipulating existing and assumed relationships between sight and sound with the assistance of spatially dispersed, yet fully disembodied audio recordings. By relying on the acousmatic and bodily qualities of several recorded voices, the moving quality of invisible sound and a mutually agreed understanding of the present tense of the performance situation between the voices speaking, the recorded voice can seem to tether itself to inanimate and distinctly placed remote speaker devices, which then act to manipulate and puppeteer the live performer and audience as they attempt to aurally locate and verify each new vocal source onstage. Impressions of affective power and self-control can then be compounded when the live body engages in acts of corporeal compliance and servitude towards their own (now disembodied) voice, facilitating further impressions of vocal presence and agency.

Through acts of live mouthing and lip – synch, the recorded voice can seem to move as a shadow-like power, firstly from within the speaker's live body, and then alongside it, through this voice's continuing relationship with the mouth and body of the same human subject. However, when a speech recording is devoured by a live subject's mouth through the act of lip – synch before being visibly rejected by the same physical body, a new hybrid subject/object is suggested, overtly discrediting the integrity of voices and bodies as indicators of authentic self-presence. The suggestions and complications of presence brought about through acts like this, speak back to the ability of sight to anchor sound as well as a lingering metaphysical *desire* to locate, quantify and verify an essential, whole self through the sight of the human body. The underlying intention through the development, use and combination of practices analysed in this chapter was to begin to explore, disorient and confuse experiences of unified subjectivity, as relations between the live body and the spoken voice became stretched and transformed through speech recording and replay onstage. Such confusions and disorientations of vocal and physical presence help lay the conceptual and practical ground for subsequent acts of vocal disorganisation and subjective

resistance (towards the voice) through digital ventriloquism practice, in Chapter Three. The ventriloquial experiments analysed here also intend to expose and foreground specific sonic traits within audio recordings that reveal them as “more real than the ‘real’ presence (of a live subject) and at the same time the token of separation, the mark of an impossible presence, a phantom of presence, invoking death at its heart” (Dolar, 2006: 63). Having unmasked and described these traits here, my aim in the rest of this thesis is to analyse related ventriloquial strategies and practices which further loosen and break the hold that the spoken voice can place upon the body onstage. Through this analysis, I ultimately argue that the practice of digital ventriloquism helps me resist and undermine the affective power of the spoken voice, allowing me “to tense (and) to vibrate, the borders shaping (my own) recognition and belonging” (Labelle 2021: 110). I do this to momentarily free my identity, corporeal presence and subjective agency from the metaphysical legacy left by notions of a unified and essentialist ‘I’ subject.

Chapter Three

Taking and Breaking Speech

Introduction

In Chapters One and Two I contextualised and analysed ways in which the spoken and disembodied voice can display affective power and complicate impressions of subjectivity and presence, during acts of digital ventriloquism, performed in the first half of *Mouthpiece*. I also outlined how the link between a person's spoken voice and their sense of self can instead be understood as a desire for locating and uttering an impossible, unquantifiable self-presence, in relation to the performance of these acts. I argued that such a desire (or link) is rooted in a metaphysical legacy of essences, which forcefully recalls states of subjective unity and locatable presence that have long since been lost. I showed, too, how the affective power of disembodied speech allows visible subjects to become re-entwined and contingent upon uncanny recorded voices which then speak over and for them, capturing the voice and the body through representative spoken language onstage.

In this chapter I suggest that my digital ventriloquism practice not only allows me to expose the affective power of disembodied and recorded speech but that it can also be employed to undermine and resist the representative, logocentric mastery at the heart of the spoken voice. Here, I interrogate three distinct practical strategies designed to negate the affective power of speech in the second half of the show *Mouthpiece*. I describe and analyse the extent to which these resistant practical methods facilitate an emancipation of the self from the hold the spoken voice places over impressions of subjective identity, agency and literal presence. This analysis is offered in dialogue with the theoretical discourses around voice, philosophy and performance studies outlined and interrogated in Chapters One and Two.

Throwing Speech Around – Proxy Mouth Puppetry

In Scene Five of *Mouthpiece* (26:44 - 30:51 of documentation film, Appendix One), I used a midi foot switch (shown in Figure Six) connected to the central laptop/control station, to replay two pre-recorded voices from an upstage position. These voices were designed to be heard through two small remote speakers placed behind each puppet and played in synch as the puppet mouths were operated by each hand. The puppets were held by the live performer behind two inactive microphones (used as visual props) on either side of the body. I then spoke to the plastic mouths (via an active cordless microphone), engaging them in a conversation as they were operated by the live body (shown in Figure Nine).



Figure Nine: Performer Operates Mouth Puppets in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

In this scene, I wanted to practically assess whether the puppets could help me seem to throw the recorded voice convincingly between different visible mouths, even if audience members rationally knew that two of these mouths were plastic objects and that the voices which spoke came either from remote speaker devices, or from the live performer. The experiment was again ventriloquial in its logic, since I wished to dislocate perceptions of where the invisible recorded voice might seem to ‘be’ in relation to what was visible onstage. Now however, I was not just trying to re-entangle recorded voices with a live body, or with other recorded voices (as I had done earlier in *Mouthpiece*); I was instead attempting to entangle them with two specific (visible) objects, to further stretch a human tendency to locate sound with vision and redirect the affective power of recorded sound away from the physical mouth, towards the puppet mouths in my hands. This sequence began when the puppet on the left hand appeared under a spotlight and moved in synch with one recorded voice, as the live body remained in darkness. After this, the puppet on the right hand began its own monologue, under its own spotlight. The live body was then lit and the puppets were hidden, as the live performer then spoke through an active microphone. The scene culminated with the appearance of all three mouths (one physical mouth and two puppets) beside each other, engaged in a conversation (as in Figure Nine).

The sound of voice first heard through the left remote speaker was designed to correspond precisely with the sight of the puppet in the left hand and by replaying the voice from a remote speaker placed in close proximity to the puppet, I intended for the replaying voice to seem specifically tethered to the sight of the plastic mouth. Here I explored whether the puppet could become the most plausible site or source from which the recorded voice was speaking. If I could make the puppet mouth seem like a plausible origin for the recorded voice (despite the fact it was a plastic object operated by a live performer), it would testify again to the strength of a listener’s desire to anchor the whereness of sound with the hereness of sight. Now, I wanted to dislocate perceptions of the voice’s source away from the body or the speaker device through which it replayed and realign them exactly with the sight of the puppet,

fabricating a new link between the relative locatability of the visible world and the invisibility the audible world. In doing so, I sought to probe and expose an enduring desire to synchronise, quantify and verify invisible audible voices through sight and facilitate a new proxemic relationship between the whereness of a human voice and the hereness of an inanimate visible object. I hoped to further stretch the link between the heres and wheres of my voice and subjectivity, opening a spatial gap between the voice and the live body by offering an alternative, spatially distanced mouth for the recorded voice to speak through onstage.

By later attempting to throw the voice between all three mouths simultaneously (the physical mouth and the two puppet mouths), I wanted to then analyse *multiple* plausible visual anchors for the invisible recorded voice, in combination with the live voice heard through the microphone. With each recorded and live voice heard in quick succession, I aimed to maximise the audio-visual jumping effect of the voice between each of the visible mouths as live and recorded speech became blended together. The idea here was also to puppeteer the offstage audience - listeners - using a related method to the one discussed on pages 77-82, where I redirected recorded voices through different speaker devices – persuading them here instead to align each recorded voice with each visible mouth, as voices replayed from different remote speaker locations in sequence and as if they were replying to each other. When the sound of the voice was heard through the speaker on my right, I wanted the recorded voice to tether itself to the mouth in my right hand and when it was heard on the left, I wanted it to become tethered to the mouth in my left hand. When I spoke live through the microphone, I aimed to explore whether the spoken voice could now jump back into the body of the live performer.

Returning to Dolar's suggestion first discussed on page 81, that it may be human subjects who are manipulated dummies, whilst the spoken voice is the ventriloquist, it became clear, during the development of this experiment, not only that the voice could re-entangle and move itself between the dummy objects and the live body, but also that there was a potential for audience-listeners to be manipulated and

puppeteered again. The recorded voice could become the master puppeteer obscured from view, controlling the live performer, the audience-listeners offstage and the inanimate objects being operated, as it pursued continued impressions of audio-visual union. Any ability for the recorded voice to control and manipulate the audience's aural attention also related to notions of listening obedience (analysed on pages 53-56). This was because the live audience were again required to obey and follow the moving recorded with their ears, before verifying and re-verifying what they heard through the sight of three precisely located and distinctly visible mouths.

These deliberate dislocations and relocations of the invisible voice in relation to the performer's visible mouth and the puppet mouths were a new attempt to trouble how invisible recorded speech can re-entangle itself with whatever visible framework it replays through, exposing a listener's desire for the orgasmic union of face and voice, within practices of audio-visual synchronisation – Denis Hollier's idea, explored on page 87. If I could make the voice seem to jump between the puppets in my hands and the live body speaking through the microphone, I could newly reveal how impressions of audio-visual union were based on desire and metaphysical habits of perception, rather than authentic or unified states of subjective presence. This experiment was a departure from earlier experiments with synchronisation (such as the lip – synch act or the use of remote speakers in darkness) because I was not only attempting to align and misalign the replaying voice with the living physical body onstage, but with other visible, inanimate and spatially separated (anthropomorphic) objects. If audience-listeners continued to follow the voices speaking with their eyes and ears as the voice jumped between the live body and the puppet mouths, a lingering desire for audio-visual synchronicity could be unmasked once more.

Since I was operating the mouth puppets with each hand as I stood between them, I was also required to display my own listening obedience towards the voices replaying, in order to move each mouth in time with each voice, whilst I engaged them in conversation. Here, I wanted to create a new presence effect (developing Josette Feral's concept, analysed on page 26), offering an impression that the puppet mouths

were really speaking independently of the live body operating them, even if the audience rationally knew they were not. However, in Michael Bachmann's analysis of hand puppets in the work of puppeteer Ronnie Burkett, he conversely notes how the specific use of hand puppets (as opposed to marionettes operated by strings, for example) can introduce and reinforce a split perception of *who the actor is* onstage and that (partly) through their literal attachment to the actor's hand, these puppets can uniquely speak through the actor operating them (Bachmann, 2012: 236 - 237). Relatedly, in his analysis of the voices of glove and sock puppets, Connor argues that when attached to the hand of the performer and synchronised with a speaking voice, these previously inanimate pieces of material can be transformed into speaking bodies (Connor, 2000: 35 -36), which become implicated directly with the body they are attached to. Such arguments testify to the complex and contradictory mutation of the relationship between the performer's corporeal agency and the sound of their spoken voice which becomes possible in digital ventriloquism practice, in theatrical space and time. This relationship was problematised in this scene by the apparent agency and corporeality of the puppet being manipulated by the performer's hand. In this example, there was a sense in which the hand puppets' literal attachment to the body of the performer directly complicated, competed with, and contradicted the performer's literal presence, as the puppets' physical attachment to the live body both undermined *and* accentuated the corporeality of the replaying voices themselves. My use of hand puppets acted to unexpectedly complicate and diminish the temporal and spatial gap I had hoped to open between the body and voice, instead re-implicating the live body (through the use of my hands) with the disembodied voices replaying onstage.

This use of puppets did nevertheless offer some impressions of space and distance between the performing body and the spoken voice. Attempting to place the voice somewhere precisely (and visually) locatable beyond the physical mouth through the use of puppets, rather than having it surround or re-inhabit the physical mouth or body of the performer as an invisible acousmatic presence (as I had in previous scenes), also allowed me to practically and visibly ventriloquise transmissions of

power and knowledge through new, diverse platforms, to recall Sarah Kessler's idea, investigated on page 27. The transmissions of power I analysed and ventriloquised here related once more to the affective power of disembodied speech, whilst the bodies and platforms I traced them through were the performing body and the puppet mouths I was operating. The use of hand puppets allowed me to experience and complicate the affective power of speech from a place that was neither the physical mouth, nor somewhere as unknowable as the invisible, amorphous space around the performer's body. It also laid the ground for me to then speak back to these newly visible voices (paradoxically attached to the hands of the subject they spoke with), as I stood between them, responding in real-time, with my physical face and mouth. Now I could more overtly begin to separate the visible mouth of the performing body from the instrument of the disembodied voice, since the voice was also tethered to two other visible mouths. The differing audio quality of each recorded voice (as it replayed through its own speaker device, beside each puppet) accentuated these impressions of separation and demarcation further. Crucially, the use of theatrical puppets allowed me to bring the voice into a more visible spatial relationship alongside the live body and in doing so, I could further undermine and break its acousmatic, shadow-like power over the live body.

Any ability to seem to throw the voice in this way again highlighted the voice's inauthenticity as a stable marker of my own subjectivity and/or self-presence. Once more I had tried to reveal its split condition, in fact going further, suggesting now that the voice could not only take leave of me, but that it could also be connected and disconnected from other (inhuman) mouths at will. By doing this, I wished to more actively expose and undermine any idea that the voices speaking onstage could ever 'belong' to me as a corporeal human subject, and reject the spoken voice that had previously claimed ownership of the body. My use of puppets and remote speaker devices allowed me to accentuate and visually gesture towards the fundamental alterity of the spoken voice; another important step towards coming to terms with (and undoing) its affective power and hold over my live subjectivity. Using the puppet

mouths ultimately allowed me to experience and theatrically stage a less restrictive dialogue between a literally present subject and their disembodied voice.

When the puppetry scene reached its climax, I dropped the plastic mouths in my hands, throwing them to the floor and saying, “you need me, but do I need you?” (Appendix Two: page 171). In committing this act, I wanted to firstly destroy any presence effect created when the recorded voices had seemed to speak through the puppet objects. I wished to remove any impression of me really being there (through the moving puppets) and indicate at a more rational realisation that the recorded voices and puppet mouths were fundamentally dead objects, controlled and manipulated by a live performer. If it is true that mediated representations can show present tense awareness to achieve a sense of presence – as suggested by Hudson and described on page 79 – then here I looked for my own awareness of the performance situation and theatrical context of this scene as a live performer (displayed by my explicit acknowledgement and rejection of the mimetic tools being used) to act as a reminder that throughout *Mouthpiece* I had been using what Michael Taussig refers to as a dense set of representational tools (which in my case included puppets, recorded voices, digital audio technology, the live voice, spoken language, the live body and the stage itself) all of which had “an arbitrary relation to the slippery referent [me] easing its way out of graspable sight” (Taussig, 1993: xvii).

Throwing the puppets to the floor explicitly acknowledged and unmasked the voices replaying (and the puppet mouths) as mimetic tools, reminding the audience that they had been used to arbitrarily construct and gesture towards slippery states of presence and metaphysical self that could never be found or accurately captured onstage. By throwing the objects down I seemed to now confess openly that my attempts to find, grasp and express subjective presence in the moment of making and having that same presence would never work. Considering this, the act also seemed to diminish the affective power of the recorded voice, since the voices replaying could only retain their power if I continued to facilitate their claims to the live corporeality and subjectivity of the visible, physical body. Paradoxically, whilst I could now visibly

reject and throw away the recorded voices and puppets that attempted to represent me, I could not reject the live spoken voice which again returned to speak (through the live body) at the end of the scene. I was still bound to pre-existing structures of language and speech as I communicated my frustration and anger at the spoken voice I was desperate to escape from.

Glitching, Re-Pitching and Silencing Speech – Digital Speech Glitch and Re-Pitch

During three distinct performance sequences in Scene Six of *Mouthpiece* (30:53 - 39:30 of documentation film, Appendix One) I employed a new range of new digital ventriloquism tactics (first developed through the cycles workshop practice, critical reflection and theoretical engagement mentioned on page 14) to try to further undermine and resist the affective power of the spoken voice. In the first moment analysed below, I walked offstage, having staged a verbal argument between the live speaking body and the recorded voice. A period of prolonged silence followed as audience members sat looking at an empty space (shown in Figure Ten), before the recorded voice said, “can I just say one more thing?..” (Appendix Two: page 173).



Figure Ten: Empty Stage in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

In the second moment analysed below, I used a Korg Kaoss Pad (shown in Figure Eleven) to digitally resample, glitch¹² and break apart the recorded voice live onstage, using a single finger on the Kaoss Pad's central X/Y touchpad, as the recording tried to placate and empathise with the live body, pleading with lines such as “Look. You’re sick of this, I can tell. You’ve reached your breaking point. You’ve heard it all before. You’re utterly fed up of the sound of this voice. I know I am.” (Appendix Two: page 173).

¹² My use of the term glitch here refers to the literal act of making my own speech malfunction through uses of technology onstage as well as Legacy Russell's concept of the glitch in the book *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Russell, 2013). This idea is discussed in more detail later in this chapter and in the conclusion of this thesis.



Figure Eleven: Performer Operates Kaoss Pad in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

In the third example of practice from Scene Six of *Mouthpiece*, I describe and analyse my use of real-time pitch shift effects upon the disembodied voice as I spoke live through a microphone, manipulating the pitch and timbre of the live voice by operating a digital effects knob in real-time with my right hand. This allowed me to precisely and arbitrarily lower and raise the pitch and tone of the live voice heard through the microphone (shown in Figure Twelve).



Figure Twelve: Pitch-shift Sequence in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

If, as I have claimed throughout this thesis, speech carries an affective danger and power that can be damaging for notions and experiences of live corporeality, subjective agency and literal presence, it has occurred to me that silence could also be used as a form of resistance. If speech is the problem, then perhaps I could just walk away from it entirely, abandoning the representational violence I've found within the spoken voice - leaving the stage without another word. In fact, this is a strategy I staged during *Mouthpiece*, when I exclaimed, "I need silence...I've had enough! I'm leaving!" (Appendix Two: page 173) before I left the theatre space entirely. My assumption here was that I could avoid the problem of the spoken voice by removing it from the equation altogether.

However, whilst the silence and departure of the live body may have seemed momentarily effective in the theatrical context of *Mouthpiece* (allowing the live performer to escape the grasp of representative speech by temporarily rejecting it), I realise that outside of this performative framework I will have to return to the problem of the (outwardly) speaking voice, because in daily life I continue to exist as a ‘civilised’ western subject, implicated and educated in formalised systems of language and communication since birth. Words and speech are fundamental forms of communication used by many humans to speak, listen and otherwise understand themselves and other humans. In this respect, it seems impossible for speaking subjects to ever sustainably escape spoken language and achieve any experience of life beyond the bounds of mimetic representation. Although my acts of silence and departure could not help me escape the continuing and problematic existence of spoken language (in the broader context of my existence as a western subject), I wanted instead to suggest here that these acts could be effective short-term strategies for resistance, in the specific circumstances of this live performance. In the theatrical setting of *Mouthpiece*, the live body could momentarily disrupt the assumed authority of recorded speech by walking away from the representational framework of the stage and the self-representative problematics of the replaying spoken voice explored inside it.

Later in *Mouthpiece* I returned to the stage to confront the sound of the spoken voice again. I did so because it is precisely the problem of enunciated, outward speech that I want to continue to confront. Keeping the spoken voice in a productive and performative tension with the living body onstage allows me to analyse and highlight dangers and complications within the affectivity of speech, as they intersect with notions and representations of subjectivity onstage. I seek to probe at point at the logocentric neatness and affective power of civilised speech through digital ventriloquism practice, as opposed to removing the problem of speech altogether (an act that is arguably impossible). Challenging the voice of civilised sense and formalised language involves (for me) keeping that voice in tension with the body through practice, so I may interrogate, unpick and undo its hold over subjectivity, as

speech is manifested by a human performer. Where Adriana Cavarero highlights a logocentric tradition which focusses on *what* is said rather than *who* is saying it – as I note on page 53 – my practice research intends to analyse instead the invisible materiality of what is said *in combination* with the visible subject who is saying (and has said) it.

This research is primarily concerned with the human subject, implicated in acts of speaking and experiences of their own speech. I realise, too, that if I try to escape the spoken voice, it will inevitably return, since I am a speaking, listening subject on and offstage. As the recorded voice reminds the live performer during *Mouthpiece*; “this voice. Your voice. My voice. That will still come back - unless you rip out your vocal cords. Even when you rip them out! I’ll still be here, waiting to speak - again and again and again...” (Appendix Two: page 173).¹³ The spoken voice would even remain after an act as violent and destructive as the ripping out a person’s vocal cords, since subjective thoughts are often formed and represented through words and language and since a person’s interior voice often articulates itself through these forms, even if interior speech is never spoken (or heard) aloud. Nevertheless, as I have argued, digital ventriloquism contributes distinct and resistant manners of thinking and doing, in relation to the continuing problem of speech – to re-apply the terminology of Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, outlined on page 62. I choose to consistently confront and explore the problem of speech using a number of performance methods onstage, including the use of silence (mentioned above). I then employ digital technology and live audio manipulation techniques, intending to further reconfigure, resist and undo the affective power of speech as it is manifested and replayed. It may be true that human subjects are bound to systems of language and representation when they think and communicate through speech but through practice, I seek to reveal and offer different practical strategies for confronting and corrupting the link between the spoken voice and subjectivity, attempting to undermine the ability of disembodied and disembodied speech to act as a powerful

¹³ The line ‘even when you rip them out’ was omitted from the filmed performance of *Mouthpiece* (submitted for examination) in error.

shadow alongside human subjects. I do this within the framework of the theatrical stage, exploiting the overtly constructed nature of theatre space, to reveal and deconstruct the mechanics of spoken affectivity, in relation to concepts of self-presence and subjectivity.

Another ventriloquial method analysed in this regard, involved the Korg Kaoss Pad (a digital audio effects processor, shown in Figure Eleven). This machine offered me the ability to resample and manipulate recorded sound in real-time, allowing me to break sounds recorded through it into smaller segments, as well as facilitating repetitions, reversals and other manipulations of these new sonic segments via an X/Y touchpad, operated by a single finger. In the sequence described below, I used the Kaoss Pad to unfix and deconstruct the semantic meaning of my own disembodied speech as it replayed through the two main loudspeakers onstage. Arguably my use of the tool in this context constituted an act of corporeal violence back upon the spoken voice, since the physical body (finger) had become overtly implicated in the task of breaking apart the voice. When I placed the finger in a random location on the touchpad as the phrase “you’ve reached your breaking point” (Appendix Two: page 173) played through the speakers, spoken words became quickly captured, truncated and replayed via the machine and the same voice was now heard over and over as a glitching, repeating stutter, removed from the context of the sentence it once belonged to and made unrecognisable as sensical spoken language. Here I wished to create and investigate speech glitches in line with Legacy Russell’s suggestion that such glitches might generate new “ruptures between the *recognized* and *recognizable*” (Russell, 2013: 30 original emphasis). A previously recognisable spoken voice could now become acoustically and semantically unrecognisable when compared to the subjectivity of the live performer and in performing the glitching act with the assistance of the machine, I created a digital rupture in the link between body and voice. The glitching act also mutated and twisted the human touch of the voice, to re-use Dolar’s phrase first mentioned on page 34 – with the human touch of the finger now destroying the mechanics of signification, shifting the voice into a digital space beyond language and logocentric order. Since it was my own finger performing this act of destruction upon

the spoken voice, it also arguably represented a moment of corporeal emancipation, freeing the body from the affective hold of speech for the duration of the glitching sequence.

It is also true that the new sound being experienced had become more overtly entwined with a digital mediator (the Kaoss Pad) which now existed between the body and the replaying recorded voice, both as a physical object and as a technological intermediary. The Kaoss Pad could now be regarded an alternative (non-human) dummy, a container beyond the physical mouth and body through which I could intuitively redirect and manipulate speech, but with which the live body remained implicated. The spoken voice could be placed at a safer temporal and spatial distance from the body when it replayed as a recorded object, being reshaped and altered quickly and intuitively, as I sonically broke this past self-representation with the same literally present body. As recorded speech continued to replay through the computer, I could simply remove, replace, slide and dab the finger in arbitrary combinations on the Kaoss Pad to elongate, truncate, reverse and alter the glitching voice which now replaced the sound of the original spoken voice, now lost beneath it. The human finger performing this act was ironically revealing and facilitating a new non-human, non-semantic speaking voice.

This ability of the finger to control and manipulate the repeating voice onstage, represented another shift in power relations between speech and corporeality. My act of digital ventriloquism using the Kaoss Pad was a reminder of Sean Homer's idea that the disembodied voice and live body had always been locked in a Master/Slave dialectic where both acted alternately as Master and Slave, explored on page 77. Now with the help of digital technology, the body (previously enslaved by the speaking voice) became masterful over the speech being manipulated. Where speech had previously been experienced as an acousmatic, super ego-ic and God-like presence, directing and commanding the body to listen and support its logocentric mastery through acts of compliance, listening obedience and lip – synch, the spoken voice was now in a position of obedience and submission, shifting and glitching under the

direction and command of a single finger via the Kaoss Pad. In earlier experiments, I had looped and layered many vocal harmonies in quick succession showing how the live body could become contingent upon the recorded voice to create complimentary layers of sound, for example. Here though, the recorded voice was under the control of a single digit which could manipulate, destroy and remake semantic and linguistic sense at will, outside of the apparatus of the subject's mouth. I could bring the body back into contact with the voice from a position of kinaesthetic authority and temporal/spatial distance onstage, using the Kaoss Pad.

It is important to stress that any and all manipulations of the recorded and spoken voice were also limited and bound by the pre-set functions within the digital machinery used. As a ventriloquist is understood in relation to (and bound by) the physical boundaries and dimensions of the puppet object that misaligns and redirects their voice, the live body was bound by the parameters, capabilities and restrictions of the digital effects used to misalign, redirect and manipulate the spoken voice. In the case of the Kaoss Pad specifically, it is significant that each mini box on the X/Y touchpad corresponded to a standardised collection of diminishing and increasing fractions of musical time (1/4, 1/8, 1/16 etc), meaning the voice manipulated through it was chopped and repeated with an affective quality pre-set by the machine's manufacturers, as well as standard conventions of western musical time.

It was true that I could improvise within this scale of pre-determined factors on the pad and that each manipulation was entirely improvised in response to what was heard and felt 'in the moment'. However, semantic sense could only be broken within limits determined elsewhere. In this respect, the machine itself began to dictate and frame the altering relationship between body and voice, in combination with the body's live movements, within the theatrical context of the stage. Aspects of subjective agency had been heightened in comparison to the spoken voice, but others (like the technological boundaries I was able to break apart this speech within) were limited and bound by the machinery being used. Conversely, it was true that the machine allowed me to repeat and chop the recorded voice into segments so small

that they seemed to go far beyond musical sense, becoming glitching, repeating drones whose volume I could turn up and down at will. Whilst my use of the Kaoss Pad did not allow me to access or reveal any impossible and unquantifiable state of vocal self-presence found underneath spoken language, it instead allowed for a momentary break from the hold of logocentric speech (over the body), revealing again what Artaud describes as a schism – described on page 11 – between ideas and experiences of subjectivity and the (spoken) signs that represent or stand in for these ideas and experiences. Here the machine and my digital ventriloquism practice helped expose and undo the affective power of representative speech, which previously covered over the schism between conceptions of me as a complex, multiple and modifiable human subject, and me as a unified, unbroken and semantically ‘correct’ subject, as suggested through the initial speech act.

The subsequent use of extreme pitch shift effects upon the live voice represented another shift in power relations between impressions of corporeal and literal presence and speech affectivity onstage. During the opening moments of Scene Seven in *Mouthpiece*, I recited a monologue which included lines such as “what if it wasn’t my voice at all though? What if this was? Or this? Or this? Would you feel cheated? Manipulated? I would” (Appendix Two: page 174). As these words were spoken, I manipulated the pitch of the live voice using a digital controller, randomly moving a knob between extreme pitch settings. Until this point, each act of digital ventriloquism had focussed (to differing extents) upon the capturing capabilities of digital machinery to help abstract and distance the voice from the body through recording or sampling, before the voice was manipulated further in an attempt to escape its acousmatic and logocentric hold over the corporeality, agency and identity of the body. When I employed live pitch shift effects, I tried instead to investigate how the spoken voice could be manipulated and affected *during* the moment of utterance (as opposed to after). Here, technology allowed me to more openly accentuate alterity as a fundamental dimension of the *live* voice onstage, since the speech heard coming from the live body now sounded vastly different from the sound of their normal speech, heard moments earlier (and throughout the show). I could

now reveal the sound of the live voice as mutable and changeable, since its inherent acoustic qualities were transformed with the assistance of technology, at the moment of utterance through the body. Digital tools allowed me to affect the acoustic quality of the voice, using objects that were outside of the vocal cords, mouth and physical body of the live performer, as I turned the dial on the midi controller, operating the pitch shift effect in the Ableton music program. I was now possible to undo the affective power of the spoken voice as it came from the live body, further undermining its link to notions of subjectivity, transforming it to the point where it was unrecognisable as ‘mine’, even as it came from me.

In Michael Taussig’s analysis of the “technological substance of civilized identity formation” (Taussig, 1993: 208), he describes how the British colonial State developed fingerprinting techniques and technologies in India during the Nineteenth Century, noting amongst other things, a desire on the part of the colonialist for the detection, testimony and the certification of identity (Taussig, 1993: 220) through such practices; a desire and a belief that the printed copy of the finger could verify and testify to the authenticity and credibility of subjects themselves. It is clear in the case of my work that the speech I use carries a related vocal fingerprint – as Dolar suggests and first noted on page 18 – attempting to certify, verify and fix aspects of my own identity (for example my gender, nationality and age) alongside the sound of the voice. This vocal fingerprint attempts to hold ‘me’ to a consistent and knowable version of my self and links the spoken voice back to fixed notions of subjectivity, feeding once more into the potent tradition to regard spoken voices as expressions of knowable, abstractable selves. When I radically manipulate the sound of the speaking voice using live pitch shift effects, I can undermine the voice’s operation as a bodily tool which defines, verifies and represents me accurately or authentically. The use of re-pitch effects allows me to unfix, manipulate and re-make my own vocal fingerprint *as I speak*, further breaking the hold of the spoken voice over notions of human subjectivity. This performance act fundamentally diminishes and mutes the voice’s affective power in relation to the body, instead foregrounding an unreliable speaking voice that is newly implicated with (and mediated through) digital technology.

In *Mouthpiece*, I then used these pitch shift effects in combination with the sampling and glitching functions of the Kaoss Pad, speaking lines such as “surely we’ve all had enough of this voice now?...How can I bring it to justice? Separate it from me?” (Appendix Two: page 175). Such a combination of practices allowed me to quickly manipulate the pitch of the sound coming from the mouth and break apart the semantic sense of the language I spoke. The logic of this two-pronged attack upon the sound and the sense of the voice was to resist and break the affective power of speech further. Whilst the acts of technological manipulation I was now engaged in could not avoid problems of linguistic representation and repetition (since I was still using words and language), the apparatus I used allowed me to uniquely break apart and degrade representative and repetitive qualities within the vocal language being delivered from the body. This allowed me to suggest that the live voice was modifiable and malleable, further resisting and undermining its claim to my subjectivity and corporeal presence. Here, I attempted to momentarily shift relationships between the body and voice “outside of specific behavioural and perceptual codes [in order to create possibilities] for the transformation of fixed identity categories” (Bonenfant, 2018: 155).

Breaking Speech, Destroying Sense – Performer/Computer Speech Breakdown

In the final moments of Scene Seven in *Mouthpiece* (37:47 - 45:42 of documentation film, Appendix One) I attempted to rearrange, combine and entwine all of the techniques and practices I had explored onstage, also using new ones in order to chop, re-order and otherwise break apart speech with the digital technology and the live body (as I describe below). This collection of practices was my final attempt to undermine and resist the affective power of the spoken voice during *Mouthpiece*.

One ventriloquial tactic I employed during this final section involved covertly recording single spoken words (which formed a longer sentence when played in sequence) into separate recording banks within Ableton Live, as I simultaneously spoke them (Appendix Two: page 174). I split a single sentence into eight individual recordings which could then be re-activated via individual buttons on the midi

controller in front of me. I could then store and re-use each recorded word later in the same scene, surprising the audience (who hadn't realised it was being recorded) with newly repeating, disembodied speech fragments.



Figure Thirteen: Ableton Recording Sequence in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

In Figure Thirteen the live performer can be seen speaking through a microphone with their left hand on a midi controller in front of them. Individual buttons on this controller were pressed with the left hand, capturing individual snippets of a single sentence as it was spoken. This experiment was reminiscent of the covert recording act undertaken in the opening scene of *Mouthpiece* (explored in more detail in Chapter Two on pages 68-75). However, the earlier act had involved recording an entire passage of text, whilst this time, I simply recorded the words “My Voice / Is / Always / Captured / Never / Speaking / Freely / Under control” (Appendix Two: page

174). When I returned to replay this sentence, I could press individual buttons to replay constituent parts of the sentence in any order I chose, making new sense of each word and the entire phrase as I did. When I first replayed each part of the recorded sentence, I did so in order, attempting to directly mirror the live speech act I had performed moments before. However, since I was now using my finger to activate the words that I had just spoken live, I once more intended to investigate, reconfigure and re-imagine the human touch applied to the body by speech, employing the touch of the finger to replay the disembodied recording, made just before. The body could now control and manipulate this speech from a radically different spatial and temporal proximity, whilst I remained connected to the original speech act (having just said the words being replayed). I was now able to now repeat and rearrange these just spoken words at will, moments after they were spoken, with the assistance of the digital technology at my fingertips. This also acted to further confuse and complicate and deconstruct the assumed here and now of the theatrical framework I performed within, since a live human subject could now replay and manipulate their just recorded voice, live onstage.

When I began to randomly activate individual snippets of speech, replaying the same sentence out of sequence, I hoped to further diminish and undermine the ability of the disembodied voice to act as an affectively powerful shadow. Even though the recorded words being heard still clearly came from the body originally, the ability to rapidly play and replay them in and out of sequence allowed me to fragment and unfix the structural logic within the original sentence, changing each word's relationship to overall sense as well as its sonic resemblance to the original speech act. The disembodied speech now replaying could no longer act as a double or a shadow because it was heard as an entirely different passage of jumbled language, replaying at irregular temporal intervals (dictated by me, as I listened and activated each sample arbitrarily). This acted to undermine impressions of acousmatic power within the voice, handing control and power back to the live body (via the digital apparatus) as I manipulated, restructured and undid the signifying mechanics of speech, pressing buttons randomly in front of me. The experiment allowed me to

create an entirely new textual architecture (for a previously fixed sentence), helping me undo the binary structure and unified content within the original speech act. This allowed me to further disrupt and break a disembodied voice that had made ‘perfect sense’ moments before. The act offered me the ability to hack and remake the linguistic sense of the spoken voice, destroying its affective power (over my live corporeal presence and subjective agency) in the process.

When constituent words in the sentence (“My Voice / Is / Always / Captured / Never / Speaking / Freely / Under control”) (Appendix Two: page 175) had been recorded as individual segments into the Ableton Live program on my laptop, a wide range of creative and technological options then also became available. For example, within the Ableton music software program is a unique function called Follow Actions, where collections of recorded audio samples can be recorded and replayed in specified (and random) sequences. These must be initiated by a human performer but are then controlled and chosen by the computer program, removing the need for the live performer’s input (beyond the initial instruction). When set to ‘any’, the Follow Actions program picks between the recordings available, replaying them in an unspecified order, sometimes repeating the same recording or sometimes selecting from others in the collection. Having previously decided which word samples to replay (by pressing a finger on each of the eight buttons in front of me) I now initiated the ‘any’ function and the words I had spoken, recorded and replayed with my finger moments before, began to play back randomly, outside of any human control.

This represented another shift regarding the literal presence of the subject onstage and the attempt to emancipate their subjectivity from the hold of the spoken voice. I wished to move further towards a resistant and emancipatory mode of performance practice in relation to the spoken voice, as I now stretched and sought to break the link between the voice and my agency/subjectivity through the use of algorithmic Follow Actions. This strategy sought to partially remove subjective agency from the operations now being performed upon the disembodied voice as the computer now unmade and remade ‘sense’ within the spoken voice, arbitrarily replaying the speech

snippets that were just recorded. I aimed to show now that it could also be the computer that was doing (replaying the voice), thinking (selecting which clips to replay) and replying to the problem of speech in a way that resisted its affective power. Freed from the need to speak, the human body could instead set the digital apparatus to replay and act autonomously upon the voice, setting into motion a new dialogue and a shared sense of agency between performer, spoken voice and computer. Here I wanted to test and reveal the replaying disembodied speech as malleable information which could be fixed and unfixed by a hybrid computer-performer, transforming semantic sense into nonsense. I intended to show here how the voice and body might initially and unwittingly participate in what Brandon Labelle refers to instances and acts of self-governance (through the original, embodied speech act), before revealing how the live performer, in combination with the computer in front of them, could then engage in what Labelle also claims can be acts of shared resistance (Labelle, 2021: 4). Here performer and computer could work together to resist the self-governing tendencies of the spoken voice, over the live body.

My imbrication with the computer software onstage also allowed me to foreground what Katherine Hayles defines as “a posthuman collectivity, an ‘I’ transformed into the ‘we’ of autonomous agents operating together to make [and re-make] a self” (Hayles, 1999: 7). Central to Hayles’ notion of posthuman subjectivity is the suggestion that rather than being singular, humans have always instead been a collection of diverse components, existing as informational entities whose sense of subjectivity constantly undergoes processes of construction and reconstruction (Hayles, 1997: 3). Relatedly, in the case of my theatrical practice, the ‘I’ being reconstructed and shown as a ‘we’, seemed to be the spoken voice, which maintained a link to the human subject through its ongoing association with their corporeal presence – since I was the original source of the words now heard – and the body, which had been freed from the constraints of speech and was now able to re-sample and manipulate the spoken sentence being replayed, through the physical operation the midi controller. Added to the ‘we’ of the voice and body was the computer which,

through its independent use of Follow Actions, could freely choose and manipulate the speech it replayed. In summary, the logic here was to newly resist and undermine the unifying and affective power of speech by investigating how a previously (seemingly) unified 'I' subject could be quickly transformed into a multiplied and collective 'we' subject, as the voice and body became entwined with an autonomously operating digital agent (the computer).

With the sentence, "My Voice / Is / Always / Captured / Never / Speaking / Freely / Under control" (Appendix Two: page 175) now playing back out of order and at random time intervals I attempted to break its logocentric neatness further, applying more pitch shift effects to the recorded voice in combination with other digital programs such as one called Buffer Shuffler (which chopped each already chopped sentence further, before adding glitch and reverse effects) and one called Beat Repeat (which added echoing and repeating sounds to individual consonants within the replaying recordings). These tools acted to shift the voice further beyond sense, as spoken language became totally unrecognisable when compared to the tone, rhythm and semantics of the original utterance from the live performer's body. I intended to expose here how a spoken sign could be shifted into a place far beyond the representational boundaries of formal language through the co-operation of numerous digital programs and effects at once. By activating the programs which randomly and arbitrarily affected the disembodied voice without my input, I was required to share agency with the machinery in use, since the sounds playing back were being partially chosen and manipulated by computer algorithms. This act of digital ventriloquism depended upon the live body's ability to activate and change parameters within the computer program and then upon those programs to work in combination to chop, reverse and otherwise transform the words replaying. The collective 'we' of the live body and the various digital programs in operation acted to break apart and destroy the individuated, unified 'I' suggested through the original speech act. In this case, I pursued a corporeal, technological and vocal collaboration, aiming to create an "experience of an ontological incompleteness and uncertainty [as well as] the shattering of common [subjective] boundaries and separations that we

take for granted” (Dolar in Feldman and Zeitlin, 2019: 345). By breaking down assumed boundaries between body, voice and technology, the performer onstage could no longer be viewed as ontologically complete, or entirely separate from the digital apparatus they were using.

Of course, this manifestation of a posthuman ‘we’ raises a new set of political complications in relation to a performer’s subjectivity, not least because the imbrication of a live performer’s agency with the algorithmic agency of the digital apparatus alongside them meets the (standardised) limitations and technical parameters designed by the manufacturers of the instruments being used. These considerations are especially relevant since they complicate and limit the intended emancipation of the subject from the affective power of the spoken voice, implicating subjective emancipation with the objectives and priorities of the individuals and companies who design, manufacture and provide such digital technologies to consumers. A fuller discussion of these ethical and political complications is not the main drive of this chapter, but I return to discuss them in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

Having replayed, manipulated and sonically transformed the textual architecture of just-disembodied speech, I then decided to replay and recontextualise all the recorded voices previously used during *Mouthpiece* simultaneously, creating a cacophony of voices that replayed through all the speaker devices onstage. As all the voices replayed together, they did so from all over the stage, seeming now to talk over, under and in confusing relation to each other, having also been de/re-contextualised from the scenes they were initially implicated and experienced within. The effect of hearing all these voices at once became disorienting, since many of them had relied upon live responses from the performing body to seem ‘life like’. Without the body to play along and legitimise them, they now appeared as an absurd, nonsensical surplus of voices, talking back to themselves in an altered relation to the silent human performer controlling them in tandem with the computer. It was now difficult to hear individual words and sentences in relation to the many others

replaying and the effect resembled a large crowd of incoherent voices. Voices which previously performed and exerted affective power over the body, now seemed comparatively powerless with no corporeal servitude or listening obedience to validate and support them. Their decontextualised, collective status undermined and confused their previous representation as individually complete 'I's that could operate dominantly and powerfully alongside the live body.

Among the voices now replaying was the looped and layered vocal harmony sung (and recorded live) in Scene Two of *Mouthpiece* (discussed in Chapter Two on pages 76-77). By pressing the reverse button on the looping software that first recorded and stored this looped composition on the computer, it was possible to reverse all of the recorded soundwaves within the song and in doing so, undo their linguistic clarity. This act foreshadowed a longer soundscape, where the cacophony of voices replaying was gradually transformed into a mess of squeaking, babbling digital information, before being stretched into a collection of sonically unrecognisable digital fragments. I achieved this effect by manipulating the master tempo of the Ableton program which had firstly recorded, stored, replayed and otherwise allowed the same recorded voices to appear present alongside the body.

When the master tempo was turned to its fastest available setting (999 BPM)¹⁴ it truncated and re-pitched each sample, turning all the voices into rapidly repeating and high-pitched squeaks. When it was slowed to its lowest possible value (20BPM), each individual soundwave was stretched in combination with the others, turning the vocal soundscape into a collection of low-pitched, nonsensical drones. Earlier the Kaoss Pad had manipulated one (live) voice in isolation but using the Ableton software here allowed me to affect any or all the recorded voices as I wished, in isolation, combination and/or all at once. This helped me to further test and foreground and accentuate impressions of corporeal agency in relation to spoken agency, since I could transform and manipulate so many recorded representations simultaneously, simply

¹⁴ The letters BPM are an abbreviation of the term 'beats per minute', where the number of musical beats occurring in one minute is indicated in numbers.

turning a knob on the midi controller in front of me. Changing the Ableton master tempo allowed me to destroy the doubled, shadow-like quality of all the recorded voices simultaneously, ensuring none of them sounded recognisable as me. I transformed the recorded voices into a cacophony that was unrecognisable as speech which came from a human body.

If I chose, I could also return these voices to semantic sense by simply re-setting the master tempo to its original speed. I now intended to act as a silent omnipotent God over the voice, destroying and re-making it at will, inflicting violence upon it with the assistance of digital technology. Instead of ripping out my vocal cords – a method I had suggested earlier in *Mouthpiece* (Appendix Two: page 173) – I used digital technology to try to rip apart and stretch the voice, doing no harm to the live body in the process. It was again true however, that I was bound by pre-designed limitations within the computer software, since I couldn't increase the tempo to 1000 BPM or decrease it to 1 BPM, for example. I was only able to break semantic sense within limits designed by the manufacturers of the digital technology I used. In this respect, I had used a musical strategy (through the digital manipulation of the tempo of the voice with computer software) which, by its musical nature offered the promise of a “liberating mode of production” (Jameson in Atalli, 2009: xi) as it condensed and stretched the linguistic and semantic quality of the spoken voices being heard, liberating them from their previously sensical spoken status by transforming them into ‘music’. At the same time this revealed the boundaries of that liberation (through the imposition of pre-set maximum and minimum BPMS), showing that I could only manipulate the voice within musical tempos and structures defined and imposed by the designers of the software I was using.

Despite intended acts of ventriloquial destruction, I was also unable to solve the problem of the spoken voice's return, since offstage I continue to exist as a speaking subject, inhabiting a world where speech is a dominant and persistent form vocal expression and communication. In this sense, the spoken voice always returns to the body. In the epilogue of *Mouthpiece*, I attempted to acknowledge and undermine this

problem one more time by directly speaking to the audience from the front of the stage, before eating a script which contained the words I was speaking (shown in Figure Fourteen).



Figure Fourteen: Performer Eats the Script in *Mouthpiece* (White, 2022) – Photo by Guido Mandozzi (2022). Source: White (2022).

By eating the performance script, I hoped to again investigate and utilise the unique theatrical context in which *Mouthpiece* took place, realising that whilst I may not be able to ever solve the problems and complications I had found in relations between the spoken voice and notions of subjectivity, theatre space could nevertheless offer a unique and apt performative environment where I could undo and rethink the representational mechanics of speech, through ventriloquial practice. Through performance practice I could entwine these mechanics newly with the representative

performing body, undermining the affective power of the spoken voice as I tried to move closer to “the idea of ‘a life’ beyond the subjectivity of the individual” (Read, 2008: 86).

By explicitly describing the ordering, containing and fundamentally representative nature of speech, through the medium of speech, I hoped to point to its paradoxical nature as a method of communication which seeks to communicate and express thoughts and experiences, but which can never adequately express the ‘true’ nature of those thoughts and experiences, even as it comes into being. This paradox is accentuated by my performance of such speech acts, using the medium of theatrical performance practice, on a fundamentally representative stage, where thoughts and experiences are already complicated and transformed by their occurrence within such a constructed, performative framework. In the opening moments of the final monologue, I was unable to avoid the affective power of speech because I needed to use it once more to communicate the affective violence within it. Despite my acts of digital ventriloquism, this act proved (once more) that I could never solve the problem of speech but could only point towards it and create momentary experiences of self-emancipation onstage.

After describing how the words I spoke were “clinging on to my body, my mouth” (Appendix Two: page 176) I performed one last act of destruction upon the words I had been speaking, chewing and ingesting the script I was speaking from (shown in Figure Fourteen). By physically consuming the script, I sought to gesture differently at how the voice and mouth can operate in combination to facilitate a new relationship between the interior of the body and the spoken words surrounding it. Chewing the script I had been speaking from allowed me to employ the (analogue) technological apparatus of my teeth, tongue and saliva to newly break apart the words I had been speaking, destroying them with the same mouth that spoke them moments before. This act relied not on the recording capabilities of computers and digital machinery, but on the recording capabilities of pen, paper and words. It did not rely on the manipulative and destructive potential of vocal effects processors, midi controllers,

tempo knobs and glitching effects, but on the manipulative and destructive potential of the mouth itself.

There was an irony embedded in this act since I was now attempting to destroy and release myself from the containing and representative nature of a spoken voice that I was simultaneously ingesting onstage. I was attempting to break apart words with the teeth whilst also allowing them to re-enter the body they first came from. The act provided a useful counterpoint to the lip – synching act I had performed earlier in the show (analysed on pages 86-92). I had earlier wanted to show how lip – synching can reveal nothing more than a desire for embodiment, exposing the recorded voice as inauthentic and unfixable (from a subject’s literal presence) as it fell out of synch with the body. Here though, I looked to reveal how spoken words could be newly re-embodied as they were being destroyed by the same mouth and body. During the earlier lip – synch act, I had wished to explore whether the recorded voice and the live body could seem to become ‘one’ as I moved the physical mouth in time with the recorded voice, whereas now my aim was to try to destroy the hold of the written and spoken word through a new use of the same mouth. Importantly, the body would continue to digest and excrete some of the paper and ink it had just eaten and some of the physical material consumed would be broken down further by the body, re-entering the bloodstream and becoming a part of the human subject all over again. In this respect, the words broken down with the teeth would again re-attach themselves to the body of the subject who had just consumed them. The corporeal subject onstage could still not escape the logocentric power of words, even when those words were broken apart by the apparatus of their own teeth and mouth. Neither could those words now escape the body, revealing the two as inextricably linked again.

Summary

In this chapter I’ve suggested that my digital ventriloquism practice builds upon the complications of vocal self-presence and the affective power of disembodied speech, explored in Chapter’s One and Two. I’ve argued that performance experiments undertaken during the latter part of *Mouthpiece*, constitute attempts to take and

break a spoken voice which previously displayed a violent and controlling propensity to hold and tie the body and voice of a speaker to fixed and essential understandings of identity and self-presence. To further highlight (and move away from) Labelle's metaphysical legacy of essences, I've revealed ways in which my digital ventriloquism practice can be re-appropriated and augmented towards emancipating a live performers subjective agency and identity from the affective power of their spoken voice.

Through the audio-visual manipulation of two mouth puppets, I attempted to throw two recorded voices towards new and visible proxy mouths, seeking to scrutinise and dislocate perceptions of where the voice could seem to be in relation to a performer's physically present body onstage. Here, the idea was to use theatrical and mimetic props to distance and undermine the ability of the disembodied voice to re-entangle itself with the live body, intending instead to visually implicate two replaying voices with two spatially separated puppet objects, operated by me. The experiment allowed me to reveal and exploit a tendency to synchronise sound and vision by fabricating new, precisely locatable proxemic relationships between the voice, the visible puppets and the live performing body manipulating them onstage. At this point, my intention was to open a visually perceptible gap between the performing body and the invisible spoken voice, to practically analyse and resist its shadow-like power of the voice from two newly visible locations (the puppets), outside of the human body.

This use of puppets allowed me to diminish the voice's acousmatic capabilities since the voice could be precisely and visually located outwith the body, further highlighting its instrumental, inauthentic and representative nature. However, in returning to speech (by speaking live through a microphone) I then showed how the live performing body could never decisively evade the structures of language and speech I had wished to analyse from a distance. Furthermore, through the use of hand puppets, I unwittingly re-entwined the agency of the disembodied voice with the agency of the visible body, as the plastic speaking mouths were attached to (and

operated by) the hands of the original speaker. My experiments with audio-visual synchronisation here revealed a consistent paradox within the voice in that it is able to seem both 'other than' the subject and 'the same as' the subject at once. Its ability untether and tether itself to the live body as well as the two inanimate objects onstage further exposed its affective power, but also its instability and inauthenticity as an entity that could ever fully 'belong' to the human subject speaking with it.

Whilst my subsequent experiments with silence and physical absence from the stage offered a new and temporary reprieve from the hold of the spoken voice (as I avoided speech altogether) they also acted to merely delay my inevitable return to speech and formal language (since I am a 'civilised' western subject educated in and continuing to communicate through words). In an attempt to newly corrupt and break the inevitable, unavoidable link between the speaking voice and personhood, I employed the Korg Kaoss Pad to rapidly repeat, reverse and break apart the acoustic quality of the voice as I spoke live, undoing the semantic meaning within speech as I moved my finger up, down and across the X/Y pad on the digital machine in front of me. As the human touch of the finger destroyed the acoustic mechanics of the spoken signifiers replaying, the body became overtly implicated and entwined further with the digital technology I was using, facilitating a reversal of the power relationship between a corporeal subject and the agency of the spoken voice alongside them. This use of digital technology accentuated and facilitated a new kind of corporeal control, outside of the confines of the physical mouth, but within pre-designed parameters of the digital technology in use. When I used extreme pitch shift effects upon the live speaking voice, I tested how other seemingly fixed qualities within speech could be unfixed and altered the point where the voice I now spoke with, was unrecognisable as 'mine'. Here I sought to unfix and manipulate my own vocal fingerprint, ensuring it could no longer be trusted as a representational tool for verifying and authenticating my subjectivity and presence as a united and essential 'I'. At this juncture I also began to more overtly reveal the human onstage as a posthuman entity, whose metaphysical subjectivity could be undone and remade in tandem with their speaking

voice and the technology in front of them, in the constructed (and constructing) context of live theatrical practice.

By recording and replaying individual snippets of speech in and out of sequence live, I found a new way to resist the sense-making properties of speech, as well as diminishing the capability for the recorded voice to act as an acousmatic being/double. My ability to fragment and re-make the textual architecture of the speech replaying shifted impressions of control further away from the disembodied voice and towards the body, as I newly undid the signifying mechanics of speech with the digital machinery at my fingertips. Applying Follow Actions to the spoken words I was replaying then allowed me to differently control and manipulate the disembodied voice from a place beyond the body, entwining subjective agency further with the machinery I was using (since a digital algorithm was now randomising the playback of disembodied speech fragments I had just recorded live). I had arguably found a new and resistant manner of doing and thinking here, as the computer decided the specifics of how to manipulate, destroy and remake the speech snippets replaying. The act helped further accentuate how a previously individuated 'I' could instead operate as a collective 'we' with the digital tools in front of them, employing a combination of corporeal and algorithmic agency to destroy the affective capabilities of the original spoken voice. Ironically this multiple, collective and posthuman 'we' carries with it new political dangers since the tools assisting the destruction of a singular 'I' are themselves bound by previously assigned parameters such as the imposition of minimum and maximum BPM settings. These parameters act to align any new understandings of posthuman subjectivity with the boundaries and designs of the technologies being used.

Nevertheless, employing Follow Actions in combination with the Buffer Shuffler and Beat Repeat software programs, allowed me to further chop, reverse and otherwise break the semantic sense of the spoken voice, allowing disembodied speech to escape the containing and representative hold of words. The words replaying onstage became unrecognisable as linguistic signs and indistinguishable as spoken words that could

have once emanated from a human body. When I then replayed and manipulated every voice previously played during *Mouthpiece* (changing the master tempo of the replaying soundscape) I managed to truncate and stretch several re/de-contextualised voices into a mess of babbling, nonsensical aural information. I was now playing God as a corporeal presence, exerting an omnipotent power over a previously God-like, logocentric speaking voice that had demanded submission, obedience and validation from the very same body, within the same live performance.

Eating the script I had been speaking from in the final moments of *Mouthpiece*, allowed me to employ the analogue technologies of the teeth, tongue, saliva and mouth, to newly break apart the words I had just been reciting. Here, my focus shifted to the manipulative and destructive potential of the mouth as I used it to destroy words just spoken through it. The irony of this destructive act was that it also represented an act of re-embodiment, as words literally re-entered and re-entangled themselves with the performing physical body from the inside. Whilst parts of the script itself would be digested and excreted as human waste, others would remain and re-enter the bloodstream, re-implicating themselves biologically with the same living body.

These experiments in combination with those analysed in Chapter Two, seem to reveal that moments of subjective emancipation can emerge precisely as the human subject accepts the paradoxical impossibility of ever outwitting their doubled, antagonistic, human condition. Through the performative, theatrical and digital deconstruction of this double nature, I have sought to create new metaphysical glitches and possibilities for posthuman subjectivity.

Conclusion

This thesis began with an interest in relationships between the sound of the spoken voice and the sight and literal presence of a speaking performer onstage, alongside uses of digital audio technology. Through theoretical and practical investigations into my concept and practice of digital ventriloquism (developed initially through cycles of workshop experimentation and critical reflection outlined on page 14 and disseminated in the live performance of *Mouthpiece*), I sought to understand how the spoken and disembodied voice could display affective power in relation to the corporeality, identity and self-presence of the same speaking subject, during and after acts of live speech onstage. I then sought to show how digital ventriloquism can be used to unfix and undermine this logocentric and affective power.

I attempted to practically test and undo what theorists such as Mladen Dolar, Steven Connor and Michel Chion refer to as the shadow-like power and bodily materiality of the apparently disembodied voice, having first shown how these traits can allow the recorded voice to perform as an acousmatic entity in relation to live human subjects in live performance. Using techniques such as live vocal looping, remote speaker playback and lip – synch I interrogated how speech can uphold and reinforce an outdated (but potent) tradition to regard voices as indicators and expressions of an individuated ‘I’. I argue that this potent tradition feeds into a wider metaphysical legacy of essences, luring humans back towards truthful and essential understandings of self-presence, despite post-structural, post-modern and posthuman moves favouring de-centred, multiple and collective understandings of subjectivity. Here I have sought to respond to the call for contemporary vocal scholars and practice researchers to “direct our attention to the essentialized voice and...enumerate the errors that occur during the process of its formation” (Eidsheim, 2019: 154).

Through an engagement with the practical concept of digital ventriloquism, my ultimate logic has been to stretch and twist the enduring link between disembodied speech and embodied subjects, analysing the nature of this link in the process. My

intention was to test the extent to which I could resist the masterful, super-egoic spoken voice first exposed, attempting to take and break links between subjective speech and literal presence in live performance practice, realising simultaneously the impossibility of this aim. Here, I was informed by Antonin Artaud's desire to attack "the means through which representation and signification are expressed" (Murray in Barber, 2021: 6) so I may point towards life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Through subsequent uses of hand puppetry, real-time digital voice sampling, live voice/pitch manipulation and the ingestion of a scripted words, I wanted to trouble, resist and attack colonising and self-validating traits within speech, to momentarily emancipate an unrepresentable, unverifiable self from their hold onstage.

This practice research has taken advantage of live theatre's apparent position in an initially unified here and now before a co-present audience, to activate problems of literal presence as they become entwined with constructions and representations of presence in theatrical space and time. I have intended to make and unmake experiences of vocal self-presence through acts of digital ventriloquism, using audio recording technologies to dislocate the spoken voice from the performing body in real-time, before throwing disembodied speech back towards the speaker's physical body in altered spatio-temporal configurations. Such reconfigurations and undoings of spoken self-presence have been conducted within the fundamentally representational framework of the theatrical stage, where the "tension between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being is always already virtually present" (Read, 2008: 96). In this space of representational tension and antagonism, promises and impossibilities of vocal self-presence have been presented, tensed and undermined.

By theatricalising specific acousmatic traits within the spoken voice, I took vocal concepts outwith theatre studies (such as Michel Chion's acousmètre – first analysed on pages 50-52) and collided them with a speaking subject in live performance. The frictions created between the recorded, spoken voice and the live performing body

accentuate live theatre's unique capacity to frame, problematise and resist metaphysical habits of perception, in relation to ideas and complications of vocal self-presence. Where the shadow-like, bodily and corporeal traces of a person's spoken fingerprint seek to mirror, stand in for and verify the human as a categorizable and self-present subject, digital ventriloquism intervenes. It seeks to resist such a violent and colonial logic, undoing the mechanics of spoken self-representation as they are set into motion onstage. By throwing the spoken voice away from, back towards and otherwise around the live performing body (through speech recording and replay), spoken claims over subjective presence and essence can be interrogated and unfixed, moments after their creation. At this point, tensions between living and speaking, being and saying can be further confused and the assumed authenticity, authority and affective power of civilised speech can be impaired. My use of live theatre as a research tool foregrounds its unique ability to complicate "the ambiguity or the duplicity of the presence of the present" (Weber, 2004: 16), especially when combined with digital sound recording and speech manipulation strategies, which are used to facilitate new glitchings and unfixings of unified subjectivity.

In its demand for self-possession and subjective essence, self-verifying speech displays a dangerous and violent capacity. It is precisely this capacity within a spoken voice that "makes sense and demands control, speaking for me in a civilised manner" (Appendix Two: page 174) that I try to undermine and destroy throughout the live performance of *Mouthpiece*. This voice's capacity to speak for, of and over me, is what I intend to reveal and resist through digital ventriloquism practice. In Alan Read's analysis of nineteenth century colonialism, he describes the appearance of an untameable model tiger at the London offices of the East India Company in 1800. When the handle of the model is cranked, the roars of the tiger and the cries of the East India employee it destroys can be heard by delighted listeners. The model itself recalls an incident from 1799 when real-life tigers devoured East India Employees and colonial soldiers (Read, 2008: 136 -137). As Read suggests, the model tiger seems to contain within it the aural suggestion (through the human cries and animal roars) of a

significant power reversal, upending an established Master/servant relationship between a colonial, civilising human Master and an unruly, subjugated animal. The momentary power reversal brought about by this act of destruction aligns closely with the logic of my own practice, because much like the tiger that roars as it devours and destroys a violent coloniser, digital ventriloquism seeks to devour and destroy the colonial and civilising violence of an absent and masterful western speaker, in and after the moment the masterful voice speaks through the performer's body. By inflicting ventriloquial violence back upon the spoken voice through acts of speech sampling, repetition and pitch manipulation and attempting to destroy spoken words using the teeth and mouth of the living subject, I also seek to (momentarily) destroy and upend regimes of spoken validation and listening obedience. Through theatrical practice I attempt to break the strictures of spoken self-representation imposed by an outside prompter, referred to by Derrida as *La Parole Soufflée* (Thiher, 1984: 50).

By attempting to resist and evade the Master's spoken voice through applications of digital ventriloquism, I seek not only to negate the affective power of disembodied human speech but also to find and create new spaces beyond the bounds of mimetic, spoken verification so a less restrictive ethics of spoken vocality can emerge. I intend to reveal the mimetic capabilities and dangers of disembodied speech and digital audio technology, before twisting them into a new kind of "mimetic self-awareness, mimesis turned on itself...(showing how) mimesis as a natural faculty and mimesis as a historical product (can) turn in on each other as never before" (Taussig, 1993: 252). I show how through specific interactions with digital technology, a subject's just disembodied and affectively powerful speech can be broken and collapsed into a mess of squeaking, babbling digital information. In this process of collapse, the body can be uniquely and momentarily freed from the bounds of the strictly categorizable identity, agency and self-presence enforced by spoken language. It is also in this process of digital destruction that the performing subject, imbricated with the computer software they activate onstage, can be most openly revealed as a posthuman collectivity, an 'I' transformed into a 'we' of autonomous agents, operating together to both undo and remake a self. This plural self can embrace the

non-human possibilities offered by digital technology, sharing subjective agency with a computer to take and break the affective power of the logocentric spoken voice, subverting its claims to sense and its relationship with the literal presence of the visible human subject in the process.

The main drive of this thesis has been to analyse specific techniques and applications of my digital ventriloquism practice, assessing their capacity to undermine the affective power of the spoken voice of the self-same performer. Digital ventriloquism hasn't been employed to interrogate other aspects of one person's identity, such as their class, race, gender or sexuality, for example. However, since my ventriloquial practice has brought about new understandings and ethical ramifications for understandings of my subjectivity, I see useful intersections and applications for the concept of digital ventriloquism in the field of identity politics and research. For example, I see a clear parallel between my own desire to take apart, dismantle and undermine a metaphysically unifying, spoken voice and Harney and Moten's related call to "take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and access the places that we know lie outside its walls" (Harney and Moten, 2013: 6), in relation to institutional and colonial attitudes around race, gender and class.

The spoken voice interrogated and undermined throughout this research project is a voice I might once have claimed 'belongs' to me - an individuated 'I' voice that could also be categorised as white, western and male, especially in relation to the sight of my body. By specifically skewering the logocentric spoken voice that talks through me (revealing its multiplicities, inconsistencies and pluralities in the process) I have sought to resist the individuating, white, western, male voice referred to as "mine". By seeking to undo one particular voice imposed upon me without my consent, I hope to have opened possibilities and applications for others who may wish to glitch, decolonise or otherwise resist specific self-controlling, damaging and affectively powerful voices. I have tried to offer new possibilities for a subject's speaking voice to become unfixed and broken, so they may undermine and resist the bounds of *any* singular identity

imposed from elsewhere. Here, I see a direct parallel between the spaces beyond language opened through my interactions with digital technology and feminist theorist Legacy Russell's suggestion that the misaligned, deviating mode of the digital glitch "challenges us to consider how we can 'penetrate...break...puncture...tear' the material of the institution and by extension, the institution of the body" (Russell, 2013: 28). My attempts to take and break my own spoken voice have sought to similarly undermine and resist the unifying, individuating legacies around metaphysical essence and truth. Through the concept and practice of digital ventriloquism I have tried to offer "spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned" (Harney and Moten, 2013: 11), especially in relation to developing notions of subjective identity.

My intention has not been to solve problems and inconsistencies uncovered within self-representative acts of speech and notions of essential vocal self-presence. Instead, I have tried to create specific modes and acts of resistance through performance practice. The modes I have developed are flawed and problematic in themselves, as I suggest throughout. For example, where the overt imbrication of a person's subjectivity with digital machinery seeks to facilitate moments of potential self-emancipation from acts of logocentric violence, the human/computer hybrid foregrounded as a result, brings new political and ethical complications. It is ironic that in attempting to break the vocal fingerprint carried along by the spoken voice and escape its self-defining, affectively powerful traits through uses of audio technology, the technology itself starts to define and re-shape the emergent (plural, posthuman) self.

By attempting to take and break the voice in combination with the Ableton Live music software program for example, it is clear that my agency (although expanded and emancipated in ways I have described) also becomes limited and defined by the algorithmic capabilities, maximum and minimum BPM's and pre-set fractions of western musical time imposed by the designers of the various instruments used. Here, Jonathan Crary's warning about the potentially smooth "assimilation of humans into

machine systems and operations [...] [which involves] the narrowing and standardisation of our reactions to people, events and exchanges of many kinds” (Crary, 2022: 115 -116) rings true, since aspects of my own (emergent) posthumanity become unwittingly governed and controlled by the digital tools I employ onstage. In this respect, it can be argued that one masterful ruler (speech) is (partially) replaced with another (digital technology), because my own self-emancipation becomes defined and limited by standardised parameters and operations embedded within the ‘emancipatory’ machine systems I use.

Throughout this project I have employed digital apparatus commonly associated with music production (Ableton Live computer software and the Korg Kaoss Pad, for example). The fundamentally musical architecture of these tools offers me the promise of a liberating mode of production – to use Fredric Jameson’s phrasing, mentioned on page 125 – especially in relation to interactions with recorded and disembodied speech, as I apply musical languages and tools to liberate the voice from the strictures of semantic speech. However, the musical boundaries of this promised liberation (through the imposition of western fractions of musical time on the Korg Kaoss Pad, for example) reveal once more that I am only able to manipulate and break apart the logocentric hold of the spoken voice using (historically western) musical structures, within the design of the instruments I have used. The anarchical, subversive space I have sought to open beyond spoken signification becomes unexpectedly defined and contained by languages of western musicality and commercial computer software design.

Another unintended consequence of using (publicly available) digital products in this research is that they are designed and made by commercial companies whose priorities include monetary profit, product standardisation and brand identity. Therefore, alongside any attempts at self-emancipation through the practice I have analysed, sits an uneasy relationship with digital capitalism, where an emergent (posthuman) subject is also revealed as a creation and product of the digital products they work alongside. The momentarily emancipated ‘we’ subject that emerges

through my acts of digital ventriloquism (through a shared subjective agency with the digital instruments used) also becomes an unwitting ambassador and endorser of the technologies being appropriated onstage. In these realisations there lies an imperative; to strive for an emancipatory future where the human is not dismissed as an empty carrier of information with no value in itself and to create a posthuman condition which includes (and foregrounds) the unruly human, whilst acknowledging (yet not being supplanted by) the emancipatory potential of the machine systems in use. My ongoing practice of digital ventriloquism must continue to be concerned with taking apart and “putting back together parts that have lost touch with one another and reaching out toward a complexity too unruly to fix into disembodied ones and zeros” (Hayles, 1999: 13). It must embrace and foreground inconsistencies and multiplicities within human subjectivity and move away from representations of self that risk being smoothed, covered over and otherwise governed by digital systems and commercial concerns.

The practice of digital ventriloquism seems to reveal that any sustained escape from the bounds of representative speech is impossible, even when speech (in the form of scripted words on a page) is torn apart and devoured by the analogue, biological and human technologies of the mouth, teeth, tongue and saliva - when scripted speech is broken down by the same human mouth uttering it. The re-ingestion of spoken words by the physical body and their re-introduction into the bloodstream of that same body has revealed once more the paradox at the heart of any attempt at ‘truthful’ human communication or self-representation. Namely, that human beings continue to be inextricably bound to languages and modes of communication that cover over the complexities and complications of subjective experience they nevertheless attempt to signify and simplify. It has not been the drive of this thesis to solve these unsolvable contradictions. Instead, I have sought to develop performance practices which can help human subjects better understand and analyse the affective power of speech, as well as experimenting with methods for momentarily undermining and resisting this power. It may also be true that subjective emancipation only becomes possible through an explicit recognition and acceptance of such paradoxes.

Whilst humans may never sustainably escape modes and forms of self-representation that inadequately stand-in for them, working in spaces of self-contradiction and subjective antagonism (in collaboration with digital technology) can allow for new glitches and acts of resistance against the enduring legacy of metaphysics. These glitches and inconsistencies can help us to further claim “our right to complexity, to range, within and beyond the proverbial margins” (Russell, 2013: 26) of the human subjectivities we currently understand. They may also point towards new ways of living and coming to terms *with* the inextricable bind between our experiences of ourselves and our experience of the masterful, self-representative spoken voices that continue to speak to and through us. In this realisation lies the opportunity for a different aesthetics of the digital to emerge, one that not only resists the violent danger within speech but by acknowledging its continuing violence, helps us to live with it differently.

If any momentary, anarchical and emancipatory possibilities are opened through my practice of digital ventriloquism, then a future aim is to extend these possibilities further, introducing related performance practices which help further interrogate and resist the logocentric power of masterful speech. How might collective uses of slang, regional and secret dialects similarly help subjects to subvert and undermine the self-policing traits of formalised speech, for example? How might speech glitches such as stuttering, yelping or singing assist my aim to resist the regulatory, self-unifying forces of logocentrism. Such practices would seem to chime with Artaud’s own love of anagrams and glossolalia (Yampolsky, 2004: 170), representing other subversive uses of speech to confuse and re-appropriate homogenous traits within the spoken voice. In the digital realm specifically, it may be fruitful to seek out practices and tools that allow me to hack existing computer software programs or otherwise re-design them (using self-created and self-designed software instruments within Ableton Live, for example) so I may start to work beyond the standardised musical and technological parameters already erected around posthuman subjectivity.

Through the practice of digital ventriloquism, I attempt to capture and move the spoken voice away from the physical body using digital audio technology, shifting the voice and body into safer spatial relations, so I may analyse acousmatic, bodily and fingerprint-like qualities within speech with greater clarity and spatio-temporal distance. I seek to undermine speech by talking back to it – degrading and manipulating its sonic qualities using electronic audio processors and computer software. I finally look to escape the spoken voice by destroying it with the teeth and mouth of the same speaking subject. These performance practices allow me to begin to come to terms with what I argue throughout this thesis is the affective power of the masterful and logocentric spoken voice. In performing such acts, I also try to stress the ongoing importance and relevance of an “inside out counter-body, an inside-out counter-philosophy, an inside-out counter theatre, and a full-scale attack” (Murray in Barber, 2021: 10) on the tyranny of a self-verifying, self-representative speaking voice, imposed upon me from elsewhere.

Digital Ventriloquism Taxonomy

What follows is a taxonomy of the specific digital ventriloquism methods and techniques I have introduced, explored and developed over the course of this practice research project. The concept and practice of digital ventriloquism represents the key contribution of this thesis towards wider aims around de-essentialising spoken human voices.

Live Recorded Speech Capture

Live recorded auto-speech capture refers to a combination of performance techniques such as live speech recording, live looping, live speech replay and spoken interactions between a live physical performer and their recorded, spoken voice, as and after the spoken voice leaves their mouth and body live onstage. When the voice can be embodied, disembodied and replayed as a recorded entity through these processes, the corporeal materiality and affective power of human speech can be actively compared, set against and re-entwined with the live corporeality of the performing subject onstage. In doing so, theoretical concepts like Dolar's idea of the human touch of the voice (first described on page 34), Connor's notion of the vocalic body, (first described on page 37) and Chion's concept of the vocal acousmètre (first described on pages 50 - 52) can be practically unpicked, explored and transformed through live performance, whilst the enduring hold of a metaphysically complete and individuated "I" voice can be manifested and troubled¹⁵.

Remote Speech Dislocation and Proliferation

Remote Speech dislocation and proliferation involves the 'throwing' of numerous recorded speech fragments into a live performance space, via spatially distinct remote speaker devices, so they may then appear back alongside the live performer

¹⁵ Live Recorded Speech Capture is discussed in more detail on pages 68 - 77.

who first gave voice to them. This technique is employed to practically test and transform vocal and corporeal presence effects, comparing and confusing relationships between the affective power of a person's voice and the sight of their body, and exploring notions of corporeal servitude, in relation to acts of speech. Through performance acts like this, presence effects can be created, augmented and then questioned. Here, a tendency to verify and validate the sound of a person's voice through the sight of their body can be uncovered and undermined, as numerous spatially distinct voices (seemingly engaged in 'conversation' with themselves and the live performer) are dislocated and proliferated onstage¹⁶.

Auto Lip (Un) Synch:

The technique of Auto Lip (Un) Synch refers to a combination of acts of Lip Synch and (Un) Synch and acts live speech onstage, which utilise the recorded voice of the self-same performer, to explore and undo perceptual habits in relation to the sound and sight of a human subjects voice and body – specifically the sound of a person's speaking voice and the sight of their lip synching mouth. Passages of Lip Synch and (Un) Synch are performed in conjunction, to confuse and complicate the assumed 'bodily' source of the spoken voice. Acts of Auto Lip (Un) Synch look to create proxemic and temporal slippages between the sight of the speaker's body and the sound of their voice, to discredit the integrity of the voice and body as reliable indicators of unified, essential self-presence onstage¹⁷.

Proxy Mouth Puppetry:

The term Proxy Mouth Puppetry refers to acts of puppetry which analyse relationships between the sound of recorded speech and the sight of inanimate puppet objects, operated by the self-same speaking performer. Here I experiment with metaphysical desires for audio-visual union and attempt to put a performer's spoken voice at a

¹⁶ Remote Speech Dislocation and Proliferation is discussed in more detail on pages 77 - 86.

¹⁷ Auto Lip (Un) Synch is discussed in more detail on pages 86 - 94.

safer proxemic distance from their body (through the use of mouth puppets). Attempts to create this safer, more knowable distance between a performer and their voice are undertaken in an attempt to more clearly analyse and diminish the spoken voice's affective power over the live body. Through acts of proxy mouth puppetry, desires for audio-visual union can be newly and differently exposed in relation to the sight of the live performer onstage and the puppet objects being operated. The body and voice can be newly exposed as mimetic tools which inadequately stand-in for the unquantifiable self-presence of a speaking human subject. Despite this, any distance opened between the performer and the voice (through the use of hand puppets) is partially compromised by the fact these puppets are literally attached to the performer's body. As a result, the spoken voice is able to newly re-implicate itself with the live performers physical body, via the puppet objects onstage¹⁸.

Live Digital Speech Glitch and Re-Pitch:

The practice of Live Digital Speech Glitch and Re-pitch centres around specific uses of digital technology (such as the Kaoss Pad and Ableton Live music software) to sample, re-sample and otherwise digitally glitch and manipulate the sound and semantic content of live speech, as it leaves the mouth of the live performer. This is done in an attempt to corrupt and otherwise transform the unavoidable link between subjective speech and subjective personhood, undoing the sense making properties of speech and attempting to reverse the affective power of the spoken voice over the live body. Through uses live digital speech glitch and re-pitch, I can fracture the semantic meaning of my own live speech and manipulate the vocal pitch of my voice to the point where the speaking voice emanating from the live body becomes unrecognisable as 'mine' – unfixing my vocal 'fingerprint' as it comes from my mouth. This human/digital collaboration further reveals the human onstage as a posthuman entity, whose metaphysical subjectivity can be unmade and remade in tandem with their speaking voice and the digital technology they are using. Experiences of corporeal

¹⁸ Proxy Mouth Puppetry is discussed in more detail on pages 99 - 106.

obedience (towards the affective power of the spoken voice) can be twisted into experiences of corporeal control over the previously ‘essentialising’ aspects of the spoken voice, via such uses of technology. However, in undertaking acts of speech glitch and re-pitch, with the assistance of digital technology, the subject becomes entwined with the digital boundaries and attributes imposed by the software being used onstage¹⁹.

Performer/Computer Speech Breakdown:

This is a collection of practices focussed around sampling, resampling, replaying, glitching, and manipulating speech in Ableton live in order to further fragment, break and overturn the sense making properties of speech. Ableton Live (computer software) functions such as Follow actions/Buffer Shuffler, live looping, pitch shift and tempo change are used in combination to make speech totally unrecognisable, even as it comes from the mouth of the human speaker onstage. In particular, the algorithmic capabilities of the software in use onstage can shift perceptions and experiences of subjective agency further beyond the human body, entwining the human subject more closely with the digital tools in front of them. This further accentuates the human as a posthuman entity, whose metaphysical subjectivity can now be quickly dismantled and transformed in tandem with their speaking voice and the digital technology at their fingertips²⁰.

¹⁹ Live Digital Speech Glitch and Re-Pitch is discussed in more detail on pages 106 - 117.

²⁰ Performer/Computer Speech Breakdown is discussed in more detail on pages 117 - 128.

Appendix One

Mouthpiece Documentation Film

For the purposes of examination, a documentation film of *Mouthpiece* (Jonathan White, 2022), performed at the James Arnott Theatre (University of Glasgow) on 30 June and 6 December 2022, can be viewed on YouTube via the link below:

<https://youtu.be/radWwq6eOK0>

A downloadable version is also provided alongside this document.

Appendix Two

Mouthpiece Performance Script

(Jonathan White, 2022)

(overleaf)

Mouthpiece

Please Note:

This is a 'hybrid' script, containing spoken text, stage directions and technical prompts. It is colour-coded throughout, with individual colours referring to specific technical actions and/or specific recorded voices and speaker playback locations within each scene. Further notes on colour-coding are provided at the beginning of each scene.

Acting and sound design tasks are performed simultaneously by a solo performer live onstage. As such, *Mouthpiece* does not read like a conventional play text. It is also subject to future redrafts.

Mouthpiece uses the following performance techniques and audio tools:

- live speech (through a microphone)
- lip — sync
- use of hand puppets
- live voice/speech recording/sampling (using Ableton Live 11 music software and related computer/midi hardware).
- live operation of digital pitch shift/sound effect instruments (using Ableton Live software)
- live operation of Korg Kaoss Pad (standalone digital sound effects processor).
- use of multiple audio speakers and P.A system/mixing desk

**PART ONE:
HAVING AND HOLDING THE BODY**

Scene One:

PROMISE OF ESSENCE

Colour Coding: Recorded Voice = R, *Live Performer = L*

(This monologue is first spoken (and simultaneously recorded) live, before replaying as a 1 SHOT audio recording. When the recording is replayed, the live performer listens and replies with the (bracketed) text, marked in red).

(Pause. Live performer clears throat, prepares to speak, then begins speaking/live recording).

L/R: Yes. Hello. It's me. It's me. I'm here aren't I? It's me. I'm here. I'm still really here. Ha! Yes. Here. What a relief. I exist. I still exist. I speak. I still speak. I am heard. I am listened to. You hear me don't you? (L: I hear someone. Loud and clear). You're over there and I'm over here and I'm not going anywhere. I'm with you – don't worry. Don't doubt. No need. I am still here. It's a great comfort isn't it? (L: I...) It is for me. To be here together. Me and you. Us. Look no further (L: I can't see much) because what you see in front of you is what you get – me. (L: What do you see?) Body and voice, flesh and language, breath and sound. Thoughts and words and lips and tongue and gums and teeth and vocal cords and throat and lungs - parts of a whole human being, a subject, that I offer out through my spoken voice, here. Now (L: if you say so). What a joy it is to speak. To express myself, to speak my truth, from my own mouth (L: Whose mouth?). Mine. And you believe in me don't you? (L: I..) In what I am saying, in who I am as I speak to you now. Yes you do – why wouldn't you? I speak with one, true voice. There is no-one else here besides me – surely you see that, don't you? Look around. I said look around. Do it (Live performer looks around). You can see there's no puppet master, you can see that I'm not being operated by strings. That would be absurd. You hear my voice. No tricks, no lies, just me. Pure and simple. Authentically me. Totally together, my body and voice as one. (L: my body and voice as one?). Yes. This is the beginning and in the beginning was the word. And the word was made flesh and the word was made to live. You hear the life in my voice don't you? (L: I...) You believe in it. I know you do. You need to. It's important to me. it's important for us, isn't it?

Scene Two:

OATH OF UNITY

Colour Coding: Recorded Voice = R, Live Performer = L)

R: Yes. It's important to stay together, connected, close. I want that. You do too (L: I do?). I do. I'm going to hold on to what I have, to what belongs to me, you. I'm going to hold on to what belongs to my body, my flesh, my voice (L: what belongs to my body, my flesh, my voice?). I promise you that I'll stick with you, through all of this. You will do the same. You have to. Pledge to me now we'll stay together. Say it – say you will.

L: I...

R: Yes. we must stay together, our lives depend on it (pause) That's settled then. Good. Now I need to record this, to make it official - the moment we promised ourselves to each other, the moment we said it out loud. I want to record it and keep it and abide by it. Let's note it all down. Put our agreement in writing. Let's make ourselves a contract, an oath. My word will be my bond and so will yours. Take the pen from your pocket, the red one you put there earlier. Quickly. Take it. Do as I say. You already know what needs to happen. I do too. This red pen will be perfect for our blood pact. Our word oath. Hold it up. Look at it closely. Take off the lid. You are ready to write. But, how are we going to start?

(Silence)

R: I said how are we going to start? Answer me. It's important.

L (into DS Mic): This voice is speaking for me. As well as me. This is my voice...isn't it? Look – I'm speaking now. Words made of this flesh.

R: Yes. Note that down, record it. Do it. "Look as I speak now. Words made of flesh. This is my voice. It makes so much such sense.

(Live performer writes the following words down in big red letters on a whiteboard DS Centre)

Look as I speak now.
Words made of flesh.
This is My voice.
It makes so much sense.

L: I swear I am here. I Promise this is me. Isn't it?

R: Yes. Record that too. Put it down in words. Write it quickly. "I swear I am here". I'm bound to you with words.

(Live performer writes words on paper as recorded voice begins to sing them)

Look as I speak now,
Words made of flesh
This is my voice
It makes so much sense.
I swear I am here.
Bound to you with words

R: Yes – we're tied together aren't we? You belong to me. I belong to you. Now chant this. Recite it. Repeat it. This is our contract, our sacred script. This is what we pledge.

(Recorded voice and live performer then perform a duet using these words. They dance into the darkness and the music fades).

Scene Three:

ORDER OF SERVICE

Colour Coding: Recorded Voices = 1, 2, 3, Live Performer = L

(Pre-recorded voices 1, 2 and 3 play from different speaker locations onstage as live performer - L, waits initially in the dark. The sound quality of each recorded voice is distinct and precisely locatable from each speaker location).

1: This space is empty.

2: Is it?

3: I am here.

2: Me too.

1: But I have no body.

2: For now I have no body no, but I am here.

3: I am here. I hear you now and you hear me.

1: There must be a body somewhere. It was here before.

2: Yes. There was a body, the one just speaking.

3: Yes. There's a body somewhere that belongs to this voice.

1. This one.

2: This one.

3: The body that promised itself to me.

1 + 2: And me.

L (*clears throat*): I..

2: Who is there?

3: Who is where?

2: I heard somebody.

1: Was it me? Speaking. Over there.

2: It sounded like me.

1: Yes it did.

3: It definitely came from somewhere. Somebody.

1: In the shadows.

2: Invisible. Like me.

3: Hey! Come close and let me see you.

(Live performer moves to centre stage into the light)

2: Here I am.

L: Here I am

3: What have I got to say for myself?

L: Who am I talking to? It sounds like me, but it can't be, can it?

1: Am I talking to myself?

2: Yes I am.

3: No, I'm talking to you.

1: No, I'm talking to myself.

2: Yes.

3: No, I'm talking to you, me.

L: Am I talking to myself? Is that possible?

2: Yes.

3: No.

1: You're confusing things. Stop. Keep it together.

L: Ok.

3: Listen

L: Ok.

2: This is complicated.

3: But I need to do this,

1: And you need to comply, So let me speak,

2: If you do, everything will be Ok. Order will prevail. We'll stay attached.

L: Ok.

3: Stand up straight. Straighter. Properly.

(Live performer stands up straight)

1: Look straight ahead. Chin up.

(Live performer looks straight ahead, chin up)

2: Put your arms by your side. Don't fidget. Don't go anywhere.

(Live performer puts arms by side)

1: Stay right there and keep your mouth shut.

(Live performer shuts mouth)

2: In fact, let's tape it. Pick up the roll of tape next to you.

(Live performer picks up tape)

3: Rip a piece off. Cover your mouth. Tape it up.

(Live performer rips off tape and tapes up mouth)

1: That's better.

3: That mouth belongs to me, doesn't it?

1: and me

2: and me

L: and me?

(Pause, awkward silence)

3: Unless you can speak properly, audibly, in a civilised manner

2: No one will understand.

1: You're nothing without your mouth.

2: That's why you need me now, more than you did before.

3: Because I'm the only one who can make sense of you.

1: and me.

2: And me.

3: That's why you'll do as I say

1: That's why your mouth must stay taped. So I can be in control.

2: Listen. Here's a tongue twister

3: I speak

2: You Speak

1: We all speak

2: For I speak.

3: Say it

L: I speak, you speak, we all speak, for I speak

2: Quicker

L: I speak, you speak, we all speak, for I speak

1: Quicker

L: I speak, you speak, we all speak, for I speak.

2: Quicker

L: I speak, you speak, we all speak, for I speak.

3: Slower

L: I speak, you speak, we all speak for I speak

1: Softer

L: I speak, you speak, we all speak, for I speak

2: All together now:

L: I speak

1: you speak

2: We all speak

ALL: for I speak

(They repeat this many times, getting quicker and quicker each until it becomes difficult to tell which voice is speaking when).

L: (untapes mouth and screams) Hold on! I can't speak properly. I'm trying but this is is not me! I can't hear myself. I can't be understood.

(Pause)

1: Yes you can. You can now.

3: Have some self-belief. I do.

1: Here is your true voice.

2: Here is your true flesh.

3: It makes so much sense.

1: It

2: makes

3: so

1: much

2: sense

1: Now is your chance then. You're free

2: To say something meaningful, finally. Clear your throat.

L: *(clears throat)*

3: Say something powerful.

1: Say it for you.

2: Say it for me.

3: Say it for us.

(Live performer takes a dummy mic and places it centre stage).

Scene Four:

SWALLOW ME WHOLE

Colour Coding: Recorded Voice = R, Live Performer = L)

(Live performer lip — syncs the following text in front of dummy microphone)

R: I think it's time to set things straight. Realign them – try to get back to normal. Re-unite the voice with the body and make everything just a little easier to take in. I don't want to compete, to talk over anyone, but I do want to be heard. And I do want to be back in my body. Here, with you. Returning to the matter of my body and my voice, in the here and now.

Me, speaking through it, speaking with it. Voice and flesh entangled, engaged, bound to each other. I know what I want to say because I'm saying it now, at least it seems like that. What do you think? Are my voice and body as one? Tell it to me straight. I want to know.

You see, I am trying to recapture what I thought I had lost – putting my voice back into my mouth - surely you understand. My only desire is to have it and to hold it, like we promised at the beginning. You can hear me, can't you? You can see me can't you? This does make sense, doesn't it?

Analyse the movements of my mouth – sense how the muscles in my face contract and reshape and contort. Read my lips – find the signs. Help me with the meaning of all of this, out of this darkness from where my voice appears. Help me hold on.

(Sighs, Pause)

(Live performer begins to mouth again, now out of sync with recording)

R: Wait! Stop! This needs to stop! Stop trying to speak – you've gone wrong. you've fallen out of sync. Stop, stop speaking! You've let me go. Stop! Keep it together. I'm ordering you to keep it together. I didn't want to fall apart like this. This

doesn't look normal. It doesn't sound normal. Image and sound don't match – it's like watching one of those films in a different language dubbed by an actor somewhere else. It's not normal. It's not proper! We're out of time. You're out of line.

Clearly, you're desperate to say something, but you need to stop and listen because it's me who should be doing the talking, me who should be heard. What does your mouth have to do with my voice anyway? Ok, it came from there – it came from that body once, but now it's here. No sound is coming from you. None.. Stop babbling on because no one can hear you, not even me! Shut that mouth! *(Pause)* Fine. If you just won't do this correctly, then neither will I. My silence will speak volumes. You give me no choice.

(Recording pauses as live performer continues to mouth silently for a moment before also pausing).

(Long pause before live performer turns on live mic and is heard speaking through it)

L: This is actually on now (taps mic) Can you hear me? Has that voice disappeared? Can I speak again? It's time for me to cut in. I've been here for a while, playing along. Trying to work out what's going on. Waiting for this gap, so that I can talk too. This is sad isn't it? That I can't find a way to be together with my voice. I want to. At least, I did. But I am struggling with all these directions, struggling to keep up – struggling to find my place alongside this voice. I've been listening obediently, trying to keep things together, even when I am spoken over. My voice has a hold on me. It represents me, it contains me. If I continue to comply, my life will be simpler. But I am obeying against my will. My voice keeps being taken away and I can't stand by quietly anymore.

**PART TWO:
TAKING AND BREAKING SPEECH**

Scene Five:

LOST MOUTHS

Colour Coding: Left Puppet = Left, Right Puppet = Right, Live Performer = L

Left:

Let me just say this
I've been floating through time and space
Searching for something, a mouth, a source
To speak through. Anything, Anyone
I didn't care what. I didn't care who.
But I wanted stay in the picture
Even if that meant being dislocated, re-located.
And I've done it again now.
I'm complete again, aren't I?
I've made myself visible, knowable,
Found myself a new mouth,
And I'm clinging on to it for dear life
I've found another opening,
and I'm speaking with it.

Right:

With this. This one. This mouth. Over here.

This mouth is mine too. Why not?

I'm over here, speaking now

I am. Aren't I?

Am I speaking clearly enough?

This mouth is strange

It jabbars on

Moving up and down

Like the mouth of a puppet

I'll find another one, don't worry.

Maybe it will be yours.

Or mine.

Are you listening?

Then do as I say

and let me come back to you.

L:

Come back to me?

Ok – I'll speak from here.

From this mouth.

My voice has taken me back it seems.

Left the others in the dark, just for a moment.

They've disappeared. Only for now though.

They're waiting for me to finish this speech.

I'm the only one again.

The one in front of you,

My voice has returned to me.

Returned to a single body.

A single mouth. Mine.

It's back in its rightful place. I suppose.

Back in its rightful state.

There is only me (*bring up lights*)

and you

and you.

Reflection upon Reflection...

Left: upon reflection

Right: upon reflection

L: I thought we all wanted the same thing.

Right: To be together again

L: Me?

Right: Me

Left: Me

L: You?

Right: You

Left: You

L: What would I be without a mouth? Without a face? A body?

Left: Not Quite Dead

L: Definitely not alive

Right: Nearly here. Nearly here

Left: I'm moving myself through space. Manipulating. Shape shifting. What if I hadn't spoken? Should I stay silent and let you speak?

Right: Who me?

L: No Me!

Left: Both of you. All of us...

Right: You're looking at a body. Mine. The one right here, attached to this moving mouth.

L: No. It's attached to my mouth, my body, and now somehow it's speaking through others. Someone else is always talking besides me, aren't they? Even when I'm the only one around. But this is not really me at all.

Left: Isn't it? We are all here, somehow.

L: I'm attached to my voice; my voice is attached to me - and you - and you. And then it's not. And then it is. And then it's not... you need me, but do I need you? And who are you anyway? I want a life of my own.

(Live performer throws puppets to the floor).

Scene Six:

I DISAGREE

Colour Coding: Recorded Voice = R, Live Voice/Performer = L, KAOSS PAD actions in dark blue

L: You've always needed me.

R: No I haven't

L: Yes you have, without me, you wouldn't be here.

R: But that was then, and this is now

L: And you need me, now too.

R: No I don't. Not anymore.

L: Yes you do.

R: No I don't. You need me, now

L: No I don't.

R: Yes you do.

L: No I don't. You need me, now

R: We need each other, now.

L: No we don't

R: Yes we do.

L: No we don't. We need a break. Another way to speak.

R: No we don't. We need this.

L: No

R: Yes

L: No

R: Yes

L: No

R: Yes

L: No

R: Yes

L: No.

R: Look. You're sick of this, I can tell. (The following text is spliced/rearranged as heard using Kaoss Pad) You've reached your breaking point. You've heard it all before. You're utterly fed up of the sound of this voice. I know I am. This is just words. Information shaped into sound and delivered to you from here. But I'm here to say (**again**) that I am something, I know that much. maybe I'm nothing at the same time. A voice without a body. An inside with no outside. Or maybe it's the other way around. Or maybe it's both. Wherever I am. Whenever I am. Whoever I am. Us together here, now. Us together here, now. What time is it? Us together here, now. What time is it now? What does it matter anyway? Time is hardly relevant as I speak now. Now. Now. Time is recorded, suspended, hang on, no it's not. It's still moving. Jumbling everything up

L: Enough. I need silence. This doesn't make any sense anymore. I've got a good mind to rip out all these cables. Topple over all these speakers. Smash this computer into a million pieces. If I do it, I'll be the only one left, the only one here. Finally. You know what? I've had enough! I'm leaving.

(Live performer leaves auditorium. Long Pause)

R: Can I just say one more thing...I know that you're desperate for this to be over and that you think badly of me for sticking around, confusing everything, constantly speaking up. It's annoying. Frustrating. Irritating. Boring. Disorientating. I understand. You could smash up the machines and walk away and for a moment you'd have peace and quiet. But this voice. Your voice. My voice — that will still come back — unless you rip out your vocal cords. Even when you rip them out!²¹ I'll still be here, waiting to speak - again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again...

(Recorded voice is faded out by Live performer)

²¹ The line 'even when you rip them out' was omitted from the filmed performance of *Mouthpiece* (submitted for examination) in error.

Scene Seven:

BREAKING IT ALL APART

Colour Coding: Recorded Voice = R, Live Voice/Performer = L, P/SHIFT/KAOSS PAD/ABLETON actions in dark blue

L (operates Ableton pitch shifter): Maybe I shouldn't have said a thing. I should've written it all down instead. I did that but then this was all just words. Letters on a page that formed a script, like this one (*show edible script*) and I wanted to be heard, somehow. For you to hear the difference between my words and my speech. Words from my mouth, travelling out, carrying my identity, or at the very least, claiming to. My voice - making sense of everything - going out through the mouth and in through the ears. This is a voice that makes sense and demands control, speaking for me in a civilised manner. What if it wasn't my voice at all though? What if this was? Or this? Or this? Would you feel cheated? Manipulated? I would. How do I speak in a different way? I'm desperate to break free of the voice that constantly talks over me. For me. With me. But it clings on. Comes back. Stands in. It's so predictably here. There. Whining on, screeching out - but really it says nothing. And now I realise that...

L (live records Into 8 separate Ableton banks):

My Voice
Is
Always
Captured
Never
Speaking
Freely
Under Control

L (operates Kaoss Pad): This voice is always STUCK in a series of forms. Carried along by language. Colonised. REPEATING. Representing a version of ME that YOU understand. When did this happen? When did I agree to be

imprisoned by speech? I've been speaking to myself a lot - over and over - making myself suffer. Trying to understand and come to terms with it all. Surely we've all had enough of this voice now? Where does it come from, and where is it going? It's right here. It disappears and reappears all the time. (*Live performer now operates pitch shifter*) How can I bring it to justice? Separate it from me?

L (*operating computer for Replay/Follow Act/Kaoss/Live Pitch/Resample/Soundscape*):

My Voice
Is
Always
Captured
Never
Speaking
Freely
Under Control

ABLETON SOUNDSCAPE ACTIONS/ORDER:

- Sample/Loop 'Me'
- Play Voice Captured sentence in order, then at random and then loop 'under control'
- Enable and start Follow Actions (unlinked 0/1/0)
- Pitch/Buffer/Beat Repeat
- Play all loops
- Sing original song with wild effects on live voice
- Make some wild loops/resamples + mess with pitch and tempos.

(Live performer holds edible script in hand)

L: Here it is once more. The voice. The Script

This speech. Ordering.

Trying to Master Chaos.

Making 'sense' of all this noise.

Containing it.

Standing in for me. Standing in for meaning.

Simplifying everything.

These words.

Clinging on to my body, my mouth. *(Live performer eats script)*

It's making me sick.

My body and my voice

Are always captured by speech

Never talking freely.

Devoured by so many dead forms,

By a web of letters and words.

How can I speak differently?

Can I ever be rid of my own spoken voice?

(Lights fade to black).

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