On Recording Performance
or
Speech, the Cry, and the Anxiety of the Fix

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> *I buried my mother in February 2002. My sister asked me to organize and conduct the service for my mother's funeral. . . . Several weeks later my sister sent me an audiotape of the service. I had no idea that the memorial service had been taped. Frankly, I was horrified. . . . I didn't want to hear my voice, the auditory tracings of my lightheadedness, my disengagement as a strategy of control . . . my voice as tracing.*
>
> – Ronald E. Shields (379-380)

Muttermund

Mourning metes (out) speech. Not all the time, of course. But often.

When I first read Shield's moving mystory about the gestures of grieving his mother, I was struck by the intrusive role of technology—the recording of speech—and its punishing affects. Perhaps the confession of his horror has something to do with recording technology itself, which has often been hailed as a ghostly preservative, from writerly inscription to phonography, video, and more recently, the Internet. Shields uneasily discloses that he did not want to *hear* his own voice from the outside, as it might betray the repression of pain or the cordoning-off of affect in *script*. His horror is as much about the unwelcome revival of grief a recording can inspire as it is the mourning process of putting-away or making distant—of archiving. In this way, Shields registers the violence and aggression of recording as a kind of ghost busting, and the possibility of the replay as an unwelcome haunting.

As is often the case with traces, the traumatic truth of the taped tongue bespeaks the condition of performance as "twice-behaved behavior," as Richard Schechner once put it. A recording is meaningful, "but never for the first time. It means: for the second and *n*th time . . . " (Schechner, *Between* 36). And in meaning, something seems to get left out, absented, or whisked away, implicating a sense of loss. That sense is amplified in performances that we recognize as *prima facie* mournful, but I want to

suggest that there is a sense of loss implicated in the production of speech as such. For example, let's posit the body and its expressive intensities as a kind of recording machine. What if the body enacts a kind of meaty mimesis at the moment the vocal apparatus is capable of playback, as with the frequently unpredictable echolalia of an infant? As Roman Jacobson observed, it would seem "no limits can be set on the phonic powers of the prattling child" (Heller-Roazen 9), except, of course, the limits of a language learned as the infant babbles and slurs toward speech.[1] The infant's phonetic plenitude is, of course, assigned meaning by the maternal figure until it gives way to speech acquisition: first sound and expressivity, then comes meaning (see Kittler, *Discourse*). With meaning, voice gives way to speech as inscription, and with that shift something is given-up or lost. Daniel Heller-Roazen muses that this loss concerns a "limitless phonetic arsenal," which "is the price a child must pay for the papers that grant him citizenship in the community of a single tongue" (11).

Of course, a tape recording of the human voice is dissimilar to the inscription of speech from or on a body. But the point here is that both *are* playbacks (so to speak). As representatives of recording broadly construed, we can describe meaningful, bodily expressions as something of a traumatic echo. At one level or another, the invitation to assign meaning is always a performance of loss (also see Kanter). As "restored behavior," performance entails a kind of mourning—of Jakobson's "apex of babble," or of Shield's maternal body, or of a kind of momentary purity of affect—as it attempts to (re)cover. In this respect, what Schechner dubs restored behavior is what Freud set out more simply as *Nachträglichkeit*, the "afterwardness" or "belatedness" of the attribution of meaning in the wake of a shock ("From History" 7-122; also see Rickert 8-22). As a kind of fixing repetition, the inscription of recording—especially analogue recording, the kind that hisses back at us—intones a time delay.

The notion that recording is a metaphor for performance draws on Schechner's well-known distinction between something that "is" a performance and reading something "as" a performance (*Performance* 32). In this essay I evoke the *as* in two senses: first, I am interested primarily in the cultural performances of recorded speech as a simultaneously strange and familiar—or simply "uncanny"—object (Freud, *Uncanny* 123-162). Second, it is my experiences working with my practitioner colleagues, coupled by a somewhat obsessive fascination with the cultural fantasies of recording, that brought to me writing about speech/recording *as* performance in the first place. When I started my first job at the Louisiana State University in 2002, I was introduced to performance studies, and this primarily through an education at the HopKins Black Box Theatre. Each year the theatre's program features a full season of original faculty and student performances, including adaptations of literature, abstract

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[1] Here and throughout I distinguish speech from voice in terms of meaning. Speech refers, simply, to vocalized language, whereas voice indicates the sounds materially produced by the vocal chords. This distinction is tricky, however, because if a voice is determined meaningful by a hearer—even if it is nonsense—it is speech. So, for example, the babble of an infant is voice, but insofar as a parent assigns it meaning, it is also a form of speech.

performance art, and so on. After many semesters of taking it all in—of having my sense of sense assaulted, of having my representational assumptions questioned, of learning to let-go of linearity—I found myself perplexed by many of my colleagues' attitudes toward videotaping their shows. Despite months of staging, elaborate set designs, and countless script revisions, for most of my colleagues the shows were *not* to be recorded for posterity; the presumably "viral" character of re-membering by word-of-mouth was preferred to Memorex.

Shield's horror about the funerary recording, then, recalls an anxiety I have noticed in the performance studies theatre. I suspect the reasons for recording anxiety are manifold, but the one I float in this essay is a general, human unwillingness to forswear presence and admit the belatedness or the temporal delay central to all understanding.[2] In what follows I will suggest that recording unavoidably delivers affect to meaning/the signifier and, consequently, runs roughshod over our romantic fantasies of "liminality," which we are wont to ascribe to important performance events like a funeral service or a spiritual awakening or a rousing, aesthetic spectacle (Phalen 148-149; McKenzie 8-9). It's important, however, to make a sharp distinction between affect, which refers to bodily intensities, and emotion, which refers to the "sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of experience," usually with the assignation of *meaning* (Massumi 28). That is to say, recording "fixes" affect in a way that upends our assumptions about presence or in-the-moment feeling. We want our experience of presence, and we don't want re-presentation getting in our way. Or, at least, we don't want such perceived interference all the time, especially in those aesthetic contexts designed to question "The Fix."[3] As a form of inscription, making a record "succeeds in separating the source of 'knowledge' from the knower," as Diana Taylor puts it, and in a way that displaces affective relationally into what we might simply term "text"—the inexorable sentry of meaning (19). In other words, where embodied experience is concerned, words inevitably get in the way.

Because it seems to reflect a fear of fixity, perhaps recording anxieties are rooted in anxieties about speech itself, and that voice recordings *amplify* those anxieties (Gunn, "Answering")? This, at least, is my gambit: for the sake of discussion, let us assume a homologue between speech and performance. I'll get around to offering what I think are compelling reasons to do so beyond a common affectivity (although, it seems to me, that should be enough). In what follows, I offer that anxieties about speech recording are anxieties about death. To this end, I have no grand pronouncements about the field of performance studies, nor any prescriptions for resolving deep-seated, theoretical tensions. Like many folks, as both a writer and

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[2] The stakes here are classically Hegelian. As I've noted elsewhere, one might begin thinking about the subject as a form of relationality prior to representation, or one might begin by understanding the subject as a form of alienation. I lean toward the latter account, but am open to having my mind changed. See Gunn, "For the Love."

[3] "The Fix" is my slang here for Lacan's notion of the *point de capiton,* or the "button tie" that brings together signified and signifier into a kind of ideological quilt of meaning; it also has the connotation of drug addiction, of course, noting that blissful albeit temporary vein of stability.

reader I sometimes tire of this kind of ambition. Instead, what I have here are a few interesting stories, some theoretical lumps, and a handful of terms (some new and some borrowed), collected for the purpose of *redescription*. Ultimately, I endeavor to redescribe and hear performance *as* the condition of speech—a form of crying, to be more pointed—but to get there I want to focus on speech recording. For me, this redescription of performance as crying requires thinking about speech as a kind of parasite of meaning termed "language," a parasite that needs a body (Burroughs more famously called language a "virus," but I prefer the Lacanian organism; see Van Haute, 25). And as I detail below, like performance, speech needs bodies. Desperately. It cries for them.

Presence Affects

> Results obtained by my collaborators affirm the existence of the phenomenon, and unless the mind is immovably fixed on some preconceived theory, we seem to be faced with the inescapable conclusion that the voice-phenomenon confronts us with an autonomously existing world hitherto unknown.
>
> – Konstantin Raudive (303)

For the Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive, "dead air" was not necessarily a bad thing. Perhaps with the exception of local college and National Public Radio station broadcasts (respectively with their untrained "uh"-prone disk jockeys or those slow-speaking, commonly cold commentators), dead air is that unfortunate if not startling moment when a video or radio broadcast falls unexpectedly silent, rupturing the charged "flow" of a broadcast with a blank screen or an audible buzz of ambient hiss (Williams 179-187). As one of the earliest pioneers of capturing electronic voice phenomena (EVP), however, Raudive registered dead air as faint and often nonsensical messages *from the dead*, ghostly voices discernable only with an ear finely tuned to rapid, rhythmic streams of multilingual speech.

Inspired by the ghost voices accidentally discovered in the 1950s bird-song tape recordings by the Swiss artist Friedrich Jürgenson (Banks 77; Raudive 13-16), Raudive devised a series of controlled experiments in the 1960s in which he used a microphone and magnetic tape to record the dead air in a quiet room from two to ten minutes, which was then rewound, replayed, and scrutinized for audible messages from the deceased (Sconce 85). Raudive eventually moved on to finding EVP with a radio tuner and then a diode, finally publishing his findings in English as *Breakthrough: Electronic Communication with the Dead May Be Possible* in 1971. Apparently academics and paranormal investigators worldwide read the book, thereby spawning an EVP movement that was more recently popularized in the 2005 Hollywood horror misadventure, *White Noise,* and its jumbled straight-to-DVD 2007 sequel, *White Noise 2: The Light* (Bander 9; Sconce 85).

Although fantasies about voices from the dead are ubiquitous in the history of modern communicative technologies, few have explored why human speech is

celebrated as the primary means of communication with the dead today.[4] When Kate and Margaret Fox first started communicating with a ghost by means of "rappings" or knocks on tables and walls over a century ago, the messages were unquestionably inspired by the technological sensation of their time: telegraphy (Braude 10-31; Peters 94-96). After the advent of phonography, telephonics, and the radio, however, ghostly voices began making calls and broadcasts from the hereafter and have simply never shut-up.[5] Despite the popularity of spirit photography then and the mysterious "orb" imaging of today, voices from the dead seem to have a larger purchase on the popular imagination (perhaps this is because ghosts had rather not be seen?; see Kaplan).

Indeed, the specter of Walter Ong (whose remains remain on the printed page) suggests that the spiritual purchase of speech is its "presence." While acknowledging that words are the most fundamental unit of communication, Ong argued they are assigned such a status because they are sonorous:

> Sound, bound to the present time by the fact that it exists only at the instant when it is going out of existence, advertises presentness. It heightens presence in the sense of the existential relationship of person to person (I am in your presence; you are present to me), with which our concept of present time (as against past and future) connects: present time is related to us as is a person whose presence we experience. It is 'here.' It envelopes us. *Even the voice of one dead, played from a recording, envelops us with his presence as no picture can.* (101; my emphasis)

Such a statement is loaded—one might say burdened with—the dreaded metaphysics of presence. As it happens, we might easily identify Ong's understanding of the "picture" as metonymy for writing, and thus find in his statement a rehearsal of the centuries old, apparently self-evident assumptions about writing and speech: the pickle of presence greets us here, as if to say, "hello, dear reader. Here is my phonocentric excess. Deconstruct me, won't you?"

Presumably, Ong's views on the presence of speech are suspicious because of their participation in a kind of cultural narcissism of the individual (Gunn, "Speech"). As Mladen Dolar puts it, it is in the metaphysics of presence that "the voice always presented the privileged point of auto-affection, self-transparency, the hold in the presence," while the written word represents a certain supplementarity, the mask or face of the immaterial soul's embrace (*A Voice* 37). Referencing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's views on the inferiority of writing to speech to articulate the viewpoint, Derrida argues that

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[4] Stearne's history of sound reproduction is a notable exception. Although he does not grant ontological privilege to any one of the human senses (e.g., the assumption that visual studies has trumped sound studies, and so on), Stearne does underscore the fantasy of "idealized hearing (and by extension, speech)" that underwrites discourse about the possibilities of new communicative technologies (15). From Plato onward, hearing and speech are understood as "manifesting a kind of pure interiority," while seeing and vision concerns the outside and exterior. Consequently, the dead are often heard before—even without—being seen.

[5] As did fictional stories about this possibility; for an amusing account of deadly phone calls see Hartenau 63-69.

> expression is the expression of affect, of the passion at the origin of language, of a speech that was first substituted for song, marked by *tone* and *force*. . . . The force of expression amounts only to vocalic sounds, when the subject is there in person to utter his passion. When the subject is no longer there, force, intonation, and accent are lost in the concept. (*Grammatology* 129)

Derrida erodes such convictions by suggesting that, like writing, speech is also posterior to the symbolic and, consequently, another form of inscription—a form which relies on something outside of language (spirit, deity, the transcendental signified) to stabilize meaning. Contra Ong, it would seem speech presences a subject no more readily or realistically than does writing; spoken or written, as a mark the letter is "always already" dead.[6]

Contrary to this often heard, straw-person critique of Ong (e.g., Sterne 14-19), however, the Jesuit was smarter than this. So, too, was Derrida, as his critique of presence is frequently misread and hastily deployed to kill off one's theoretical foils rather quickly (see Schaeffer and Gorman; also see Gumbrecht). In performance studies the assumed critique of the metaphysics of presence often mistakenly brackets the truth of *projection*, ignoring Derrida's work with ghosts in *Specters of Marx* and *Archive Fever*. Regardless of the truth or falsity of the attribution of presence to speech, human utterance nevertheless has what we might term "presence effects," which we respond to in meaningful ways.[7] Taking into account the Afterwardness of understanding, it may be that what we mean by "presence" is simply another word for *affect*, an experience of body-in-feeling before the fixity of representation. Presence, in other words, is the feeling antecedent to the Fix.

Speech as such harbors an affective/meaning or presence/absence ambivalence that has haunted a disciplined thinking about performance, particularly in respect to the traditions of elocution and oral interpretation before the less restricting moniker of "performance studies" replaced them (see Cohen 1-12; Jackson 1-39). Insofar as it is embodied, human speech was and remains the soft tissue swamp from which contemporary iterations of performance studies arose. For example, the reason theorists of performativity have fixated on J. L. Austin's understanding of the speech act has little to do with confusing performativity and the performative (e.g., Powell and Shaffer 7), but rather with what these cognate p-words share in common: speech (Austin 1-24). Speech relies on a signifying system, but requires a body to enunciate it, and thus betokens what Bruce Fink refers to as the "two faces of the subject," the subject of the signifier and the embodied subject of *jouissance*—or as I prefer, the bodily subject of affect (142-145). The consequence of both Austin and Fink's observations is simply that speech always relates a duality—it advances both a

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[6] Space limits any detailed discussion here, but I am referencing Derrida's description of the grapheme that makes all signs, in speech and otherwise, possible. See Derrida, *On Grammatology,* esp. 6-10.

[7] Indeed, in ways that Derrida believes can be productive, as with his work on "hauntology" (*Specters*; see Gunn, "Mourning Humanism").

semiotic and an affective character. In this formal respect, we might situate the object of speech not merely as a metaphor for performance broadly construed, but as synecdoche for the affective and embodied promise of human expression (as has been done, for example, in first amendment contexts). Such a view portends, however, a certain semiotic risk: the colonization of re-presentation, the sediment of textuality, the fixity of the symbolic.

We find the ambivalence of speech—as both body and re-presentation—reflected repeatedly in performance theory. For example, in Peggy Phelan's widely read arguments about writing and performance, the two faces of the speaking subject are located in the eventual character of the latter, which eludes the "constative utterances" of the former. Speech's ambivalence is also reflected in Diana Taylor's distinction between the disembodied knowledge of the archive and the ephemeral acts of the repertoire (Phelan 148-152; Taylor 19-21). If Phelan and Taylor are at all representative, the scholarly tendency has been to celebrate that which eludes the subject of the signifier in the sound and movement of bodies, often translated simply as *presence* (Phelan 149). In our image-saturated environment, however, what if "presence" is simply a synonym for "affect"? What if the *here* of presence is actually the *feel* of body?

Catholic Ears and The Archive Of Dead Air

> . . . as soon as there can be an exclamation . . . there can be a language, but not until then; a language in which one could not cry out would not truly be a human language at all.
>
> – Daniel Heller-Roazen (18)

Let me pick back up again with Raudive's spirited story. At a German book fair in 1969, English publisher Colin Smythe approached Professor Peter Bander and handed him a copy of Raudive's *Unhörbares Wird Hörbar* (*The Inaudible Becomes Audible* [1968]) with the suggestion that they may want to translate and publish it in English. The German-born Senior Lecturer in Religion and Moral Education at a Cambridge-affiliated college had just resigned to become an editor and translator at Smythe's publishing house. His initial response to the book was negative:

> Browsing through the pages, without actually reading the complete story, I formed the opinion that Konstantin Raudive, the author, had joined the host who are set on telling us that life after death is a reality which [sic] can be scientifically proven. I don't think I would have given the book a second thought but for the section containing letters and comments by scientists I personally know to be of the highest integrity, and incapable of supporting anything scientifically suspect . . . . (in Raudive vii)

Nevertheless, after translating a few of the "how-to" passages from the book, Bander decided they should not republish it and told Smythe so, whereupon the publisher produced a tape he had made following Raudive's instructions. Smythe insisted that

there was a voice on the tape and that he wanted Bander to listen to it. "As far as I can remember," reports Bander,

> I must have listened to the section on the tape which had been pointed out to me for about ten minutes, and I was on the point of giving up when suddenly I noticed the peculiar rhythm mentioned by Raudive and his colleagues. After a further five or six play-backs, out of the blue, I heard a voice. It was in German, and . . . I believe this to have been the voice of my mother who had died three years earlier. (Bander 10)

Astonished, Bander assembled a number of unsuspecting guests at his home for a dinner party and invited Raudive to join them. He wanted to make sure the voice phenomena were real, and he wanted others to confirm that his astonishment and growing convictions were justified.

The scenario Bander proceeds to describe in the preface to Raudive's *Breakthrough* is, rather unsurprisingly, reminiscent of a séance from the nineteenth century (a practice of holding hands to create a "current" of spiritual energy to help draw-down the dead). As John Durham Peters has argued, a centuries-old belief in "soul-to-soul" communication, rooted in the dialogues of Plato and extended through the work of Christian theology, was literally amplified to a popular, Spiritualist craze by the electronic innovations in the nineteenth century (63-108). The "dream that electricity can mingle souls" was exacerbated by the advent of telepresence—via telegraphy and telephonics—and led to a popular movement with mediums claiming to be psychic telegraph and telephone operators to the hereafter (94). It is not a surprise, then, that EVP "experiments" resemble a Spiritualist séance with "scientists" asking questions of disembodied spirits, only instead of a Ouiji board, tarot cards, or a crystal ball, the medium wields a microphone and an electrified recording machine.

Bander describes a group of twenty people sitting around his dining room table. On the table sits a reel-to-reel recorder, a microphone, and various instruments that are inspected and operated by a sound engineer. After a jovial and excited dinner conversation, Raudive tried three distinct methods of capturing dead voices over a period of some hours. First he tried simple microphone recording; ten minutes of recorded ambient air was scrutinized. To the disappointment of everyone, all that was heard was the deafening tick of a clock on the mantle. Raudive then tried recording the static of a radio tuned to an unused frequency. Still nothing. Finally, the Latvian professor resorted to his favorite, microphone-less method, the use of a germanium diode with a short, three inch aerial stuck into one of the tape recorder's inputs. At that point, late in the evening, guests expected nothing and began readying themselves to leave. But then:

> I think the tape had only been running about two minutes . . . when Dr. Raudive asked Stanley [the sound engineer] to play the recording back. With about twenty people talking and wishing each other a Merry Christmas, it was most surprising when four of them suddenly rushed to the tape-recorder. There, clear and without a shadow of doubt, a rhythmic voice, twice the speed of human voice said "*Raudive*

> *there*" . . . . there was a voice and it called the name of the one person who was most concerned with it all. (in Raudive xxi)

At that instant Bander became a true believer. He drew up a contract to translate and publish *Breakthrough,* which Raudive signed the very next day.

Reading the accounts of the early days of EVP research, one frequently encounters a similar narrative form: disbelief becomes profound conviction—"I was deaf, but now I hear!" Today we know that such conviction is built upon cognitive tendencies that prioritize sound as a stimulus.[8] Because humans are "the only species . . . wired to understand speech fully," argue Clifford Nass and Scott Brave, we depend on speech as a (if not *the*) principle means of identifying one another: personality, likeness and difference, competence, gender, and related attributions are made *involuntarily* by listening to someone's voice (1-2). Research on the brains of infants has demonstrated, for example, that we begin processing human speech very early in life:

> Even before birth, a fetus in the womb can distinguish its mother's voice from all other voices (demonstrated via increased heart rate for the mother's voice and decreased heart rate for strangers' voices). Within a few days after birth, a newborn prefers his or her mother's voice over that of a stranger's and can distinguish one unfamiliar voice from another. By eight months, infants can tune in to a particular voice even when another voice is speaking. (2)

Although early infantile perceptions of speech do not rely on a distinction between "inside" and "outside," we eventually learn to associate voice with "interiority": a voice indexes the unique consciousness of another person (Cavarero 1-16).

For decades researchers have demonstrated that the human brain, and the left side in particular, is so deeply dependent on speech for information that "people even process nonsense syllables and speech played backwards as if they were normal speech" (Nass and Brave 11-12). Nass and Brave argue that the brain has a "very liberal definition of speech" that predisposes listeners to regard "all speech . . . as a communicative act, and people will struggle through assigning meaning to sounds even when they are garbled or unclear" (11-12). In other words, when one apprehends sound she often attributes a sense of presence to it; if that sound even remotely resembles speech, her brain is likely to attribute consciousness to it. Apparently the brain makes these attributions even if one consciously resists it. Consequently, one might say that the attribution of *presence* is an unavoidably autonomic consequence of the affect of sound (see Lee and Nass; Loomis). For this reason, many have dismissed EVP as the aural equivalent of the Rorschach inkblot test, a mistake of projected presence that results from a "hard-wired" human tendency to find patterns in otherwise nonsensical visual stimuli (Banks 80; Nass and Brave 2-7).

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[8] Although to my knowledge there has been little research on the experience of deafness in infancy, I suspect many of the scientific observations regarding the influence of sound nevertheless obtain: sound is not merely heard, but its vibrations are also *felt*.

In addition to our well-documented and researched cognitive tendencies, however, the vocalic attribution that underwrites Raudive's postmortal preoccupations also participates in the emotional processes of projection. As a common defense mechanism, projection typically refers to a practice whereby "qualities, feelings, wishes or even 'objects' which the subject refuses to [recognize] or rejects in himself, are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing" (Laplanche and Pontalis 349). Projection, in other words, is the psycho-affective counterpart to cognitive attribution. As Joe Banks has detailed, studies from Gestalt psychology identify projection as a central mechanism of listening, such that our cognitive tendencies to "read familiar shapes into clouds, or melodies into the monotonous rattle of a train" are motivated by "emotional agendas," of which an individual may not even be consciously aware (78-79). For example, although an individual cannot help but recognize a pattern in a Rorschach inkblot, often the character of what she sees is shaped by latent and overt fears and desires. Hence, projection is not simply a process whereby an individual displaces things she does not like about herself onto another, but is at the same time a form of wish-fulfillment. From a secular standpoint, then, EVP is a practice of vocalic projection, which we can define as the attribution of speech agency to an otherwise agent-less sound or grouping of sounds on the basis of cognitive, psychological, and emotional predispositions.

Even noting and understanding these dispositions does not explain the desire that propels the skeptic toward true belief, nor does it explain how it was that well-educated scientists, priests, professors, and engineers heard polyglot poltergeists from the Beyond in dead air. Jeffrey Sconce advances one explanation: "Even if their messages were often bleak, the Raudive voices did speak of an immortal essence that transcends the alienating modes of Darwin, Freud, Sartre, and all other demystifying assaults on the transcendental dimension of the human psyche" (90). Sconce suggests that these voices seemed to promise hope in the increasingly gloomy intellectual climate in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Raudive tuned in when others were turned-off and dropping out; it was a time when existential outlooks reigned supreme, a war in Vietnam was seemingly endless, and a stabbing at Altamont—dubbed by some as the Western Woodstock—killed off the counter-cultural dream of a new Age of Aquarius (Wood 336-351).

Still, there is something about recorded speech itself that resists a familiar, party line, scholarly agnosticism. Dr. Raudive was an Oxford educated scholar, but he had a powerful desire to believe in *spiritual* speech. Indeed, Dr. Raudive's scientistic rationalizations for spooky speech invite incredulity:

> The main difficulty for effective research lie [sic] in the "listening-in" process. Because the ear has only a very limited range of frequency, I have found that it takes at least *three months* for the ear to adjust itself to the difference: to begin with, though it may hear speech-like noises, it cannot differentiate words—let alone understanding what they mean. . . . listening-in tests have shown that children and people with a musically trained ear have least difficulty in following the voices;

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> military-trained radio-operators achieve a high degree of accuracy and for some unknown reason specialists of internal diseases and Catholic priests also seem to be able to discern the voices with relative success. (20)

We know that if one stares at patterns in the wall long enough—even without the help of lysergic acid—she may soon see the visage of Deity (see Guthrie 1-38). But what about sound? Raudive's curious mention of the discerning yet catholic ears of priests does suggest another rationale for his gullibility, for it is an obvious one that many of us share: an unwillingness to accept mortality or, alternately, a strong desire for immortality. This fear or hope is that which motivates the metaphysics of presence, that familiar, soul-deep ideology of Western thought that privileges speech as *the* vehicle of spirit. Recording the speech of the dead is perhaps best understood as a peculiar form of writing, a feverish, magnetic scribbling toward presence and a defiant denial of death.

Murmuring House/Archival Womb

> The ultimate sado-militarist phantasm . . . : to pollute and destroy the body of mother, incarnation-representative of family life. Since he is incapable of recognizing such a horror, the Man produces it unconsciously by destroying the body of earth.
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> – Peter M. Canning (44)

Let me return again, this time to Ong's ruminations on the presence of speech. He says that "communication, like knowledge itself, flowers in speech" (2), and this is because "sound . . . advertises presentness" (101). And again, to recall an example no doubt Raudive would appreciate, Ong observed that "even the voice of one dead, played from a recording, envelops us with his presence as no picture can" (101). Given our "hard wired" projective habits, it's no coincidence that Ong's primary example of presence is recorded speech, and that this example is immediately yoked to death: Recorded speech cheats death. Despite Derrida's critique, it is commonly assumed that unlike the word or the letter—the parchment message and the email missive—speech is the bearer of life and the trace of the soul. It would seem that letter and image alike are dead, requiring the animation of spirit that speech betokens by default (Sterne 17).[9] As EVP makes clear, whether or not speech is truly alive (and not, say, just another form of writing) does nothing to deny its powerful, haunting purchase in the popular imaginary.

Ong's recourse to the example of speech from the dead also helps to underscore a point that numerous media scholars have argued in the past half-century:

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[9] Jonathan Sterne reminds us that theories of "religious communication that [posit] sound as life-giving spirit can be traced back to the Gospel of John and the writings of Saint Augustine" (16): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Also see Dolar, *A Voice* 14-17.

communication technologies—from writing on parchment to banging out email messages—amplify anxieties about death and our hopes for immortality. And as Jonathan Sterne has argued, none has been caught up with the figure of the soul more so than phonography. Of course, the double- and over-exposed accident of spirit photography had convinced some that the existence of ghosts was demonstrable with the image, yet owing to the strong association of human speech with presence, Victorian writers "believed there was something special about the relation between sound recording and death" (Sterne 291). The Spiritualist practices of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a direct consequence of vocal disembodiment; the intellectual leap from voices of the living traveling across a geographical distances to the speech of dead souls traveling across the spiritual plane is a rather short one (Sconce 59-91). As Sterne demonstrates, writers interested in sound recording

> repeatedly produced tracts on the possibilities for hearing voices of the deceased as some kind of guarantee or signature for the cultural and affective power of recorded sound. The chance to hear 'the voices of the dead' as a figure of the possibilities of sound recording appears with morbid regularity in technical descriptions, advertisements, announcements, circulars, philosophical speculations, and practical descriptions. (289)

Telepresence promised communication with deceased loved ones; sound recording, however, promised a new form of archival immortality—one that escaped the deadness of script to dwell in the interior presence of recorded speech. "Death has lost some of its sting since we are able to forever retain the voices of the dead," read one early response to the phonograph (Sterne 308). In an 1877 reaction to the news of the invention, *Scientific American* declared that "speech has become, as it were, immortal" (Sterne 298).

To the cognitive and psychological predispositions, as well as the logocentric habit of associating voice with presence, then, we should add that EVP intrigues listeners because it amplifies fantasies of immorality through its use of the new writing technology of sound recording. And as sound recording became increasingly portable, the louder speech announced its (ever-)presence. In his landmark study of the human sensorium, *The Presence of the Word*, Ong heralded the arrival of the "new orality" in reference to recording technologies at the same moment when historians began the oral history "from below" project, an endeavor to cheat death in the name of Humanity by *going to* and capturing the verbal stories of the isolated and forgotten who lived through history's worst hits. This was only possible with the invention of portable recording machines; only in the late sixties could Dr. Raudive conduct his EVP experiments in Peter Bander's dining room. With portability, History's archive was freed from bricks-and-mortar buildings in a way that also freed bodies from the sarcophagus, and in so doing, it seemed, the soul from this mortal coil.

The association here drawn between death, portability, and sound is not only figural, but in some sense literal. Sterne argues that sound recording arrived shortly after the historical moment when there was a profound need for transporting and preserving the dead soldiers heaped-up by the Civil War. Matthew Brady's widely

publicized pictures of piles of (posed) dead bodies could have only intensified the zeal for the preservative properties of chemicals (see Panzer). "Recording," writes Stearne, "was the product of a culture that had learned to can and to embalm, to preserve the bodies of the dead so that they could continue to perform a social function after life. The nineteenth century's momentous battle against decay offered a way to explain sound recording" (292). Thus, when the phonograph arrived the American public was already primed to think about recording as a way to prevent soul-rot. This is why the trope of "voices of the dead" began to appear in writings about phonography and continues to reappear today (Gunn, "Mourning Speech").

Because of the intertwined history of canning, chemical embalming, and sound recording that Sterne tells, taped voices of the deceased are unmistakably associated with mourning. The preservative impulse to record the human voice consequently leads also to the archive, usually understood as "a place where documents and other materials of public interest are preserved," but also increasingly recognized in the theoretical humanities as a memorial to the dead and departed and a repository of mournful inscriptions (Manoff 10). The idea of an archive usually entails a pilgrimage, a religious form of traveling to an auratic site to re-member something that has been forgotten or something that has died. "At the heart of the archive," argues Ann Cvetkovich, "are practices of mourning, and the successful archive enables the work of mourning" (271). Voices of the dead, collected first on records, then tape, and today in digital form, enable the auditor to do a kind of mournful labor. When we reckon with EVP as a practice of vocalic projection, it is apparent that Raudive and his colleagues had caught a strain of archive fever. By amassing an archive of the voices of departed loved ones they were not simply mourning the deaths of others, but the inevitable, impending arrival of their own.

According to Freud and countless thinkers after him, mourning is better understood as the ability to detach oneself from a loved object (usually a person) by working through and filing-away the mnemic traces and memories of that object (243-258). Insofar as the archive is simultaneously a memorial and a storehouse, however, Derrida has argued that the labor of mourning encouraged by the archive is inherently paradoxical, at once driven by the violence of putting a corpus to rest as well as the drive to re-member and revive (29-30). In this respect archives are simultaneously ghostly prisons and visitation parlors. Because for Derrida psychoanalysis was principally preoccupied with processes of remembering and forgetting (e.g., "repression," "projection," and so on), it thus

> proposes a new theory of the archive; it takes into account a topic and a death drive without which there would not in effect be any desire or any possibility for the archive. But at the same time, at once for strategic reasons and because the conditions of archivization implicate all the tensions, contradictions, or aporias we are trying to formalize here, notably those which make it into a movement of the promise of the future no less than of recording the past, the concept of the archive must carry in itself, as does every concept, an unknowable weight. (*Archive* 29-30)

Such an unknowable weight nevertheless leaves mnemic traces and "inflects archive desire or fever," metamorphosing the mournful labor of the archive into a kind of melancholy, an abject inability to detach oneself from the beloved object because something *about it*—that is, something *around* it—eludes us. However metaphorical, "archive fever" is the restless, ceaseless process of memory itself; the archive is not a thing or a place, but a doing, a putting away and a taking-out; it is repression . . . and the return *to* the repressed.[10]

Perhaps nothing betokens repression more than the return announced in the English translation of Raudive's archival achievement: *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead.* Reportedly based on an archive of over 100,000 audio tapes, almost 300 pages of the 400-page book consists of transcriptions of voices that have broken through from a "hidden world" to ours, interspersed with brief commentaries from Raudive. His first example is indicative of the mournful work of the archive and the drive toward origins it represents:

> Amongst roughly 72,000 audible voices the "mother-motive" is statistically the most frequent. My mother appears in manifold forms and uses various languages, including some she did not know during her lifetime; Spanish, Swedish, and German, for instance; but most of all she uses Latgalian, the dialect of Latgale, a Latvian province. Usually she addresses me directly and personally, but sometimes other entities report her presence, introduce her or give some messages regarding her. [offset] A female voice: "Tava mate!" (Latvian: "Your mother!") "Mote te atrudas. Tekla." (Latg.: "Mother is here. Tekla") . . . At times she uses very tender terms in addressing me: "Kostulit ta tove mote." (Latg.: "Kostulit, this is your mother.")

Although Raudive's voices frequently brought unpleasant or confused messages, their capture always registered the delight of discovery in a manner that underscored a quest and longing for the good, comforting voice, embodied by mother's speech, which is a delight that is similarly reflected in Ong's arguments about the presence of the word. Owing to the privileged status of human speech, the audio archive is the mother of memorials.

There is an archival association to be made between the womb and the tomb by means of speech. Previously I noted the research of Nass and Brave that suggested the human voice is the first medium for identity in the developing child. Insofar as she is the primary source of sustenance inside and outside the womb, the mother's voice—as Kate Bush once sang—"stands for comfort." Following the work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, Adriana Cavarero stresses the primary bond of life is a pre- or anti-logocentric relation in infantile vocality, a sort of primary plenitude of

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[10] It is in this sense that I read Diana Taylor's distinction of the archive and repertoire, which is "certainly not sequential . . . . Nor is it true versus false, mediated versus unmediated, primordial versus modern. Nor is it a binary" (22). Archive fever points up the inherent ambivalence of the archive and the repertoire and their deep, mutual implication. If it is the case, however, that performance challenges the archive through the repertory, then we should probably locate its politics on the side of deconstruction.

babble that precedes the introduction of *logos*, and thereby the social world of negation, of "thou shalt not!" (131-151): echolalia. In the theoretical humanities, the idea that maternal speech is the original site of social relationality and therefore subjectivity has been termed the "acoustic mirror," a concept that was developed by Guy Rosolato, a psychoanalytic theorist and critic, in the 1970s. As later elaborated by Kaja Silverman, the acoustic mirror refers to a pre-verbal form of identification that precedes image-based identification (in Lacanian argot, the so-called mirror stage). Because

> the subject lacks boundaries [as an infant], it [does not] yet have anything approximating an interiority. However, the foundations of what will later function as identity are marked out by these primitive encounters with the outer world, encounters which will occur along the axis of the mother's voice. Since the child's [symbolic] economy is organized around incorporation, and since what is incorporated is the auditory field articulated by the maternal voice, the child could be said to hear itself initially through that voice—to first "recognize" itself in the vocal "mirror" supplied by the mother. (Silverman 80)

Raudive's mother is his first example and "statistically the most frequent" for a reason that is determined in infantile life. The violence of the archive—the death drive central to its practice—is reflected in the violence of independence central to subjectivity itself: self-consciousness entails the realization that one is not one's mother, but rather a separate entity with a voice of his or her own (Lacan 3-9). The pleasures of learning of one's independence is simultaneously a violence of separation from the maternal bosom. This is, at least in part, why psychoanalyst Melanie Klein has argued that living ethically is fundamentally mournful; the responsible life is a continual (largely unconscious) reparation toward a maternal figure (*Selected* 211-229).[11] In this sense, Raudive's *Breakthrough* might have simply been retitled, *Regression: My Mother*.[12]

By transposing the infantile scene of maternal sonority with its later-in-life surrogate in romantic love—that is, by substituting the comfort of the maternal voice with the speech of a lover—Geoffrey Sax's 2005 EVP thriller *White Noise* captures the ambivalence we have toward human speech, as well as the paradox of archive fever, in a stark and helpful way. In a pivotal scene from the film, Sax and screen writer Niall Johnson movingly capture this longing for the good or maternal voice in the desperation of a widower: Jonathan Rivers (played by Michael Keaton) is a successful

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[11] In infancy vulnerability is measured in the assignment of meaning; when a baby cries, mother must assign that speech a signifier. She must decide, "oh, is my baby hungry?" or "oh, baby's teething!" as the tot remains helpless on its back. This is the foundational, primal vulnerability of speech: the cry in need of the signifier.

[12] Perhaps this tome on the angelic mother should be suitably read-up against its postmodern counterpart, Kathy Acker's *My Mother: Demonology*: "My mother wanted to command me to the point that I no longer existed. My father was so gentle, he didn't exist. I remained uneducated or wild because I was imprisoned by my mother and had no father. My body was all I had. *A a a a I don't know what language is. One one one one I shall never learn to count* " (10).

architect who tragically loses his wife Anna (played by Chandra West) in what is initially presumed to be a car accident. One day at work he is followed by Raymond Price (played by Ian McNeice), an EVP expert who eventually tells Rivers that his wife has been sending him messages from beyond the grave. Rivers is incredulous, but eventually gives into his desire to communicate to his wife and visits Price at his home, which is cluttered with boxes of videotapes, cassettes, and disks of all sorts, and stacked-high with various kinds of electronic equipment. They sit together in a parlor in front of a bank of screens and computers and, in a tone that reflects Ong's wide-eyed excitement about the possibilities of new sound technologies, Price explains to Rivers the fundamentals of EVP detection. As Rivers sits dumbstruck, Price retires to another room in search of a Sony mini-disk:

> RIVERS: [yelling toward another room] Is this your job, or hobby, or what?
>
> PRICE: [off-screen; laughs] I think obsession would be more appropriate, Mr. Rivers. Ah—here we are [returns to frame/screen with disks]. Now they don't always appear visually the first few times. We tend only to pick up their voices, and people can find that frustrating. But when it works, and you see the faces of the people you're able to help . . . nothing, believe me, nothing comes close. [inserts disk into player]. Mr. Rivers: do you want to hear your wife?
>
> RIVERS: [long pause] yes. [Price presses the play button]
>
> VOICE OF ANNA: [static; garbled voice] Johnathan [inaudible]. Johnathan [garble].
>
> RIVERS: [weeps].

Notably, in the scenes in which Price explains EVP to someone he stresses the primacy of voice: when the dead first reach out to touch someone, they do so in speech. Further, in the film speech is used to establish the uniqueness of a visitor. When Price, Rivers, or others *see* the dead on a screen, it is difficult to determine identity (for example, later in the film when the presumed face of Anna appears on a snowy television screen it turns out to be the face of someone else).

Although Rivers announces his desire is to *see* Anna, Price urges Rivers to believe him and attend more studiously to sound as the authentic stamp of communication. Once he hears the voice of Anna, Rivers' tears suggest that he realizes Price was right after all: a voice is what he longed for, a comforting voice sounding his name affirmatively, as if to say "I'm alright . . . [and therefore] so are you." This regressive narcissism of EVP enthusiasm is in a sense reflected in a familiar, cheerful refrain: "Sometimes you want to go/where everybody knows your name/and they're always glad you came" (Portnoy and Angelo). As I soon detail, however, if you play that cheerful refrain backwards the threatening "bad voice" of Satan emerges to dispel the hospitable fantasies of narcissism.

Voices From The Groove

> And so I began descending, *as in my dreams*, walking down the spiral staircase that led to the witch's library. Many rooms lay off those steps . . . . I was in a church named The Church of Death, the label of all churches, which was a large library. Its priest, who was standing on a tall ladder, was moving monster Holy Bibles, which were only movie posters, around the walls. . . . I walked on . . . .
>
> – Kathy Acker, *My Mother: Demonology* (261)[13]

Just five minutes from the protagonist's first contact with his wife's voice in the film *White Noise*, the dead voices get nasty. Presumably days later in the diegesis, a disconcerting harmony is intoned during River's second visit to Price's home. Price claims that he has discovered a new communiqué from Anna, which he amplifies and runs through a sound-filtering program on a computer:

> RIVERS: So, will I get to see her this time [on a television tuned to static]?
>
> PRICE: Uh, no, no, this will just be sound [again, the primacy of speech over image is underscored]. You have to be a little patient, that's all. Trust me John, this is just the beginning. Sit, here, now [pushes button]. If you want to hear it again just press that key. I'll be back in a moment [leaves room]
>
> VOICE OF ANNA: Johna-[unrecognizable]
>
> UNCOGNIZEABLE VOICE: [female scream of agony]
>
> CHORUS OF ANGRY VOICES: Bastard! Bastard! [unrecognizable but angry voices, some obviously backwards]
>
> PRICE: [abruptly returns to room, taps computer keys]
>
> RIVERS: Who was that?
>
> PRICE: Eh, it's ok, ok. Ah, we have some very bad people out there. But, um, you just have to press that [hits key], and they're all gone. . . . they can't all be nice. They can't all be Anna.

Quickly the good voice yields to a bad, threatening voice and Rivers is confused. His certainty about hearing Anna is unsettled, as speech gives way to the disturbing excess of something in the voice more than the voice, something we experience as mystical or religious or, as seems more frequently these days, untrustworthy and demonic. As Nass and Brave's work on brain research suggests, it is this need to fix an identity to this something more in voice that *White Noise*'s filmmakers exploit to create a sense of horror. The truth is, while the Fix is comforting it is always temporary, contingent, and never finished, and reckoning with this truth can be horrifying.

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[13] Acker is cleverly referencing the "Dream of Irma's injection" and other dreams discussed in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*; the "spiral staircase" can be read as the throat.

Of course, the differential basis of meaning would suggest that there is no good voice without a bad one. There is controlled speech and then there is voice that comes up from one's lungs, throat, and mouth uncontrollably: hiccups; laughter; sneezes; cries of pain; or the alternately silly and disturbing bleating of orgasmic release. As the psychoanalytic theorist Mladen Dolar has argued, voice is thus fundamentally ambivalent and much less stable than we tend to assume:

> for psychoanalysis the auto-affective voice of self-presence and self-mastery [is] constantly opposed by its reverse side, the intractable voice of the other, the voice one could not control. If we try to bring the two together, we could tentatively say that at the very core of narcissism lies an alien kernel which narcissistic satisfaction may well attempt to disguise, but which continually threatens to undermine it from the inside. (*A Voice* 41)

The "good voice," rooted in maternal sonority, can give way to the bad voice, that which undermines the taken-for-granted self-transparency of the Self.

For Steven Conner, one can locate the source of the unsettling or bad voice in the need and helpless displeasure signified in the cry of the infant:

> The baby is hungry and cries; hunger for young humans is inseparable from crying. No hunger for humans without crying. The cry is the response to the hunger and the means employed to defeat it. . . . The voice is the means—the sole means—that the baby has to escape from so much suffering, and reach and fetch to it the comfort and sustenance. But the voice is also the voice *of* the infant's suffering and need. When the cry does not bring instant relief, it becomes the symbol of unsatisfied desire, even the agency of the frustration of this desire. (30-31)

Thus the bad voice is initially not so much from the scolding or "no!" from without, but from one's own mouth in infancy. As the child ages and matures, she "comes to recognize [her] own voice as the good voice," as an elementary (and necessary) form of narcissism, and she begins to project the bad voice onto outside sources (32). The "bad voice" is always coming from someone else, and, at least in part, this is another reason why many people detest hearing recordings of their own voices: such recordings betray aspects of self, memories, and feelings that we would rather keep to ourselves (Conner 7).

In the recorded voices of popular culture, the repressed often seeks return through reversal. In everyday life the repressed returns involuntarily in slips of the tongue, but in more extraordinary practices like EVP experimentation, sometimes the repressed returns in unsettling messages from Hitler—in some sense the opposite of mother (or at the very least closer to Faye Dunaway in *Mommy Dearest*). Although mother always comes through first, Raudive reports that of the many famous dead statespersons with whom he intercoursed, "the German dictator *Adolf Hitler* manifests most frequently." Raudive explains of Hitler:

> one gains the impression that even in the transcendental dimension he now inhabits, he shows exactly the same traits that characterized him on earth: self-glorification (megalomania), persistence in pushing himself forward and a certain

> spiritual depravity—all sharply rejected by other voice-entitles. To illustrate the situation, two examples: [offset] "Hitler Pack te." (Germ., Latv.: "Here Hitler is [of the] rabble.") "Kosti, te Hitler baigs." (Latv.: "Kosti, here is Hitler uncanny"). . . . Utterances from Hitler or about him could fill a separate book. (88)

Shortly after the publication of Raudive's *Breakthrough,* a controversy broke-out in the UK on the pages of *Psychic News*, a low-circulation newsletter read by paranormalists, psychics, and Spiritualists (Bander 77-87). For some Spiritualists, Hitler's visits to Raudive's tape recorder were simply too much to take; a number of them denounced EVP wholesale. "The Raudive voices stem from discarnate entities living in a lower astral hell," some argued, and thus should be shunned (Bander 83). In May of 1971, Gordon Turner wrote in the *Psychic News* that "there is a direct link between fascism, black magic and contact with impersonating earthbound entities who deliberately pervert others. . . . If," he continues, "the Raudive voices are stemming from a paranormal source, then I would regard some of the references to Hitler as significant and dangerous" (Bander 83-84). After the controversy with the Spiritualists, EVP enthusiasts did not like to discuss "bad voices," only the good ones. Many regretted Raudive ever mentioned them, and much like the Price character in *White Noise*, they sought to delete them or explain them away.

From the publication of *Breakthrough* to present day, however, the "good voices" of EVP have found their most constant and conspicuous cultural counterpoint in *backmasking*, a term that refers to both the practice of encoding secret messages in music as well as figuring out ways of decoding them. Laura A. Brannon and Timothy C. Brock summarize the practice for a college textbook on persuasion:

> Messages embedded in rock songs are supposed to be evident when the music is played backwards. When the recordings are played normally (forward), critics claim that the messages are heard subliminally (backmasking). The typical criticism is that youthful listeners of rock music are unknowingly "led down a path of loose morality and behavioral aberration. Belief in the effects of backmasking is so strong that Arkansas and California have passed bills demanding that records and tapes with backmasking have prominent warning labels. Indeed, the state of Texas and the Canadian parliament have funded investigations of backmasking. (283)

Most histories of backmasking locate its origin in the rumor panic that began with the Beatle's 1966 *Revolver* album: Stoned out of his mind, John Lenon accidentally played some tracks the band had laid down for the album backwards. He liked the sound, and with the encouragement of producer George Martin, convinced the band to use some backwards elements on the album. The song "Rain" features the backward lyric, "sunshine/rain/when the rain comes, they run and hide their heads" (Stevens 149-156). The conspicuous, strange sound inspired fans to play subsequent records backwards on their turntables, and consequently, the hunt for secret messages on record albums commenced. (In fact, music fans and artists have become so comfortable with the unusual timbre of backwards sound that, today, "scratching" has become its own musical technique and is ubiquitous in certain strains of hip-hop and dance music.)

Unlike the miraculous voices emphasized by EVP enthusiasts, however, the voices found by backspinning DJs were understood not so much as coming from the dead as they were understood as *deadly*. Michigan radio personality Russ Gibb helped to ignite an urban legend when a listener phoned to request that he play the Beatles' song "Revolution 9" backwards. He did, the message "turn me on dead man" was heard, and many fans were consequently led to believe in the rumor that Paul McCartney had died and there was some sort of conspiratorial cover-up (Searcey A1). Gibb's stunt also fed into a growing evangelical Christian, "anti-rock" movement, which was further exacerbated by Lennon's claim that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus" and that "Christianity will go" (Sullivan 313). In the span of a decade, concerned parents and fearful young people were being told by groups like the Parents Music Resource Center and the Majority for Musical Morality that they should ban albums like Styx's *Kilroy was Here* (1983) because they contained "secret backwards messages" encouraging drug-use, suicide, and the sacrifice of household pets to Satan (Holden par. 1).

In the Deep South, especially, scenes from my own personal past were common in church youth groups. When I was twelve years old (I think), an itinerant preacher showed up at Rockbridge Baptist Church in Centerville, Georgia, where I had been taken by my grandmother ever since I can remember, to give a series of presentations on the harmful influence of rock music (if readers were wondering about the personal motives of this essay, here they come, straight outta childhood trauma). The preacher argued that Satan understood the powerful effects of music and designed the beat of rock specifically to pound sinful messages into the heads of unsuspecting, hormone riddled teens. I remember that, for me, the chilling highlight of these sermons came on the second night of a series of presentations. On the altar at the front of the sanctuary the preacher had assembled a turntable and placed a microphone up against its built-in speaker. After a brief sermon about the Satanic beliefs of Jimmy Page, his obsession with the infamous occultist Aleister Crowley, and the sexual debauchery of Robert Plant, the preacher placed a copy of *Led Zeppelin IV* on the turntable and played the song "Stairway to Heaven," creating a memorable scene that resonates with Erik Davis' reportage of the backmasking craze on television:

> Some evangelical TV broadcasts from the early 80s even include top-down shots of the minister's DJ decks so that viewers can admire the technique of squeezing sense from sound. However, while rap and all the sampled music that follows it treats the vinyl LP as an open form capable of multiple meanings and uses, Christian turntablists remained *literalists*, convinced that they were revealing a single "fundamental" message intentionally implanted in the grooves by a diabolical author. (127-128)

Although these "DJs for Jesus could not agree on the exact wording," most of them focused on the devil (128). After the song had continued for over four minutes or so, just after Bonham's drums kick in, Plant sings

> If there's a bustle in your hedgerow

> Don't be alarmed now
>
> It's just a spring clean for the May Queen.
>
> Yes there are two paths you can go by
>
> but in the long run
>
> There's still time to change the road you're on.

The preacher applied pressure with his forefinger to the center of the record and the turntable sloweeeeed toooooooo aaaaaaaaaaaaaa stooooopppppppppppppppppppp. Then he began to reverse the music with his finger and played the record back toward the beginning drum-crash. There was a rhythmic swooping of crisp gibberish. He played the verse again forward, and stopped at the proverbial choice of roads, but this time right before he played the record backwards, the preacher told us what we should hear: "Satan . . . my sweet Satan . . . six six six." Sure enough, we heard it. All of us. At twelve years of age I was terrified, crying, surrounded by a congregation full of preteens and their parents (presumably in the back pews so that we would feel marooned in the messianic message and answer the altar-call). It was because of these presentations that I was eventually "born again" at the age of thirteen, haunted by and ashamed of my secret love of Black Sabbath and Duran Duran. Obviously the technique so typical of EVP "proof," in which the auditor is told what she is going to hear before she hears it, was also at work in backmasking. Vocalic projection requires a priming pedagogy for hearing angels and demons; once one is told what to hear, the spirit or demon appears, seemingly clear as a bell . . . and sometimes straight outta hell.

Despite the fact that in controlled research settings there is "no evidence that listeners [are] influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the content of backwards messages" (Moore, "The Case" 326; also see Broyels), and despite a flood of firm denials from the accused musicians, a full-blown Satanic rumor-panic in the 1980s and early 1990s helped to sustain a widespread belief that rock musicians were channeling demonic forces through secret backwards messages on record albums (Gunn, "Prime Time"; Vokey and Read). One of the more famous media events involved the heavy metal band Judas Priest, who were taken to a Nevada court in 1990 for the suicide attempts of two young men by their parents (both of whom died, one instantly, the other later from complications). The parents alleged that the song "Better By You, Better Than Me" contained the subliminal encouragement "Do It," which caused the young men to pull the triggers (Moore, "Scientific"). Numerous experts for the defense explained how vocalic projection works—mostly from a cognitive perspective—and the case was eventually dismissed for lack of merit.

The Judas Priest trial came at the time when the Compact Disk was becoming the dominant musical medium. Cassette tapes, like the eight track tape, helped to shrink the vinyl market—but it was the CD that finally put record albums to rest. Consequently the hyped dismissal of the trial effectively squashed the rumor panic surrounding backmasking, and it virtually disappeared from the popular imagination

in the 1990s. The bad, reversed voices of backward living, just like Raudive's maternal broadcasts from Beyond, grew silent.

Backmasking and other forms of vocalic projection have recently reappeared in popular culture in part because of a nostalgic resurgence of vinyl production among "alternative music" fans and artists, a nostalgia that is motivated by the archival impulse to both return to and escape from the sonorous womb/grave. With Compact Disks, many audiophiles have lamented the loss of "the warmth and richness once common to stereophonic sound" (Furchgott 1). Certainly the term one sees repeated over and over in connection to the vinyl LP, "warmth," refers to an empirically verifiable sound, yet as a libidinal *topos* and a term in close figural proximity to fetishization (signaled by the substantially higher price and LP-only tracks), warmth is code for projection as well; although it is not the case with the tinny, flat sound of an MP3 file, with a decent amplifier, only the audiophillic music snob can tell the difference between the chill of Compact Disk and the heat of vinyl.

Cheaper computing technologies have also cultivated a new interest in different forms of vocalic projection. The wider availability of sound manipulation software, for example, has encouraged a "reverse speech" movement to flourish on the Internet. Originally inspired by the backmasking panic, David John Oates developed a strain of psychotherapy that encourages the analyst to examine the speech of clients in reverse in search of backwards messages from the unconscious (Oates). The film *White Noise* also stimulated renewed interest in EVP phenomena in the popular media, and its DVD release features a number of how-to segments that updates techniques for the digital age. Popular Internet web sites, such as *Jeff Milner's Backmasking Site*, or *BackmaskOnline.com*—whose tagline is "more backmasking clips than you can shake a stick at"—has also succumbed to archive fever, transforming the once-terrifying voices of reverse speech into the comfort of amusement. To the classic, gloomy examples from the albums of the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and the Electric Light Orchestra are stored more cheerful and inspiring messages. (Former) teenage pop princess Britney Spears sings, "with you I lose my mind, give me a sign," but backwards, Jeff Milner reveals, she issues a delightful invitation: "sleep with me, I'm not too young." In the final instance and example, the audio archive remains both a grave and a womb.

Black Box: ~~Abandon All Hope~~ You Can Never Go Back

> Art transforms language into rhythms and transforms 'aberrations' into stylistic figures. Art is the 'incestuous' side of language, as reflected in its dependence on the mother's body . . . .
>
> – Julia Kristeva (109)

> If media are anthropological a prioris, then humans cannot have invented language; rather, they must have evolved as pets, victims, or subjects. And the only weapon to fight that may well be tape salad.
>
> – Friedrich A. Kittler (*Gramophone* 109)

In the spring of 2004, Patricia A. Suchy's installation/performance, *13 Ways to Kill a Mockingbird*, tenanted Louisiana State University's HopKins Black Box Theatre in Baton Rouge. Recording anxiety was a central theme to both the performance and installation: looping video clips of students talking about Harper's novel played throughout the theatre in various places; participants were video-interviewed prior to the performance while exploring the installation (these videos were replayed in subsequent performances); inside a wardrobe labeled "Mayella Ewell's Cheifrobe of Wonders" a film titled "The ABCs of *To Kill a Mockingbird*" offered small film vignettes preceded by a title, such as "G is for Geranium," which depicted a pair of hands clipping a flower with scissors. Unquestionably, however, the most intriguing and disturbing use of recording was Suchy's restaging of Martin Arnold's 1993 experimental film piece titled *passage a l'acte*.

In *passage a l'acte*, Arnold extends a 28 second breakfast scene from the classic film version of *To Kill a Mocking Bird* into an unnerving, six-minute "remix." By quickly playing the film segment backwards and forwards, Arnold manipulates image and sound in unexpected rhythms, such that

> a simple breakfast scene [becomes] a surrealist nightmare. . . . While "Mother" sits with a frozen smile and Father . . . reads the paper, sonny boy gets up from the table and opens and closes the screen door repeatedly. The slamming of the door sounds like gunfire, hinting at an unnamed aggression occurring somewhere just outside this sacred space of the '50s home and perhaps at disturbing forces at work within this family. (Morris, par. 4)

With live actors, in *13 Ways* Suchy replicated Arnold's film work in excruciating detail—including installing a screen door in the theater to create the same, violent and unnerving percussive effect (indeed, in the theatre the slamming of the screen door *did* sound like a gun firing; Suchy 6). Both Arnold and Suchy's "remixing" get at the Real by critiquing visibility *through sound*; in re-presentation the audience is made aware of the unconscious optics of the archival impulse, as the sounds of bodies in motion—of speech—become increasingly grotesque. Seeing the embodied and paradoxically "live" remix of *passage a l'acte* in *13 Ways* makes us more aware of the dominant role of the acoustic field in Arnold's piece, as well as in the original film itself. Of course, it is impossible to describe the way in which the actors in Suchy's scenario were moved around by sound, articulated by the slow, staccato moans of speech, and how each violent slam of the screen door marked the cut of sound into the biological body. Unlike the visible connotations of postmodern "pastiche," the citationality of the remix—the sonorous repertoire of archival repetitions—captures the relation between the Real and the voice, the unspoken and the marked, and the interplay of silence and speech.

"I'm not sure why I wanted to attempt to restage Martin Arnold's experimental video . . . with live bodies," reports Suchy. But it did nevertheless have everything to do *with bodies:*

> As a director, I am fascinated by the differences in my responses to the live bodies of performers during rehearsals and the strips of restored bodies I cut and splice together on Final Cut Pro. I wanted to juxtapose these two kinds of bodies, and I suppose as well to critique, apologize for, and parody my own predilection for working with cinematic bodies so much these days, with a sideways glance at my colleagues who tolerate, sometimes just barely, the amount of technology I keep dragging into the Black Box. (Suchy 6)

"Technology" is code, of course, for the ways in which machinery amplifies human perception and, in this case, attempts to archive the event. In *13 Ways* Suchy seems to suggest she wanted performance practitioners to confront their anxieties about recording. Her "live" replication of Arnold's remix brings our attention to the condition of *Nachträglichkeit*, the belatedness of understanding and the mismatch of voices and bodies that renders "restored behavior" the condition of all performance (indeed, all experience); at some level, we are all automatons . . . *so to speak*. We are comforted by fantasies of immortality and, when it is pointed out to us that our daily behaviors—our daily performances—are inscribed, we are dispirited (in more ways that one).

The warbled and staccato speech of the actors in *13 Ways* also confronts the auditor with the love/hate objects of this essay, the good voice and the bad voice. In both Arnold's film and Suchy's restaging, the comforting linearity of white vernacular is upended in stuttering and backwards speech: "Well, hurry up Scout!" is met with the slurring "wah wah wah wah wah hur hur hur hurry wah wah hurry up up up uppppppppppppppppppp," drawing the auditor's attention to the role of the physical body in making sound as well as the fact that the body is easily fucked with—especially when it's recorded. The audience yearns for the Fix, to project meaning and label the voices once and for all: are these good voices? Are these bad voices? Unable to decide, the scene becomes uncanny. The slamming door and ticking, puppet-like bodies remind us of a primal vulnerability—which is where, of course, all of this is going: back to mother, back to the womb, back to the grave. Back to the impossible.

The good voice and the bad voice, heavenly music and demonic growls, are simply alternate ways of reckoning with the mixed affects we have toward the human voice as such. Recording technologies amplify this ambivalence, plugging us into what Derrida has described as an archival impulse, an aggressivity or drive toward control. But recorded speech is also an unnerving reminder of the belatedness of understanding. *You can never go back.*

You can never go back, but playback is compulsive. Perhaps this is because the appeal of the return to the womb or grave or harmony that never was is a yearning inspired by wonderful, horrible encounters with the Real, that gap in human symbolicity that always suggests there is more than can be made into meaning, there is a "something more" that we experience as an affective irreducibility. I'm referring, of course, to the Lacanian conception of "the Real," which is most closely encountered (though never directly) in human speech.

In his classic study of communication technologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* Friedrich A. Kittler suggests sound recording is closer to the Real because of the bodies it betokens (15-16), suggesting, again, that what father Ong termed the "presence" of speech is something like *the body in feeling*; the embodied experience of "now" is really a kind of spectral non-language, an affective experience of some elusive aliveness. Unlike other forms of inscription, such as typing (which he aligns with the symbolic) and cinema (which he aligns with the imaginary), Kittler argues that sound recording inscribes all sounds in the microphonic field in potentially unnerving ways: hisses, pops, a clock ticking on the mantle, or perhaps voices of the dead, are amplified to the naked ear. So, too, are the quivers of the larynx, which can betray the limits of control. Speech recordings can reveal that the measured voice is actually plaintive, or that canned laughter is simply another way to shriek.

Let me turn (again) to the body as an (or the) end, to the body as a recording machine (an answering machine, if you want, with performance becoming something like the outgoing message). Suchy's staging of *passage a l'acte*—of embodying, citing, inciting—is an acoustic mirror that enables us to hear our projections and to sense the way in which body eludes meaning even when we think we know the message. We often press the body-in-feeling into fantasies of presence, but the truth is that we can never quite catch up to ourselves. This is why I think that the haunting character of performance is rooted in the capacity of animals who speak and the loss speaking entails. We give up a body when speaking; we give body to perform. Understanding inscription as mournful, at some level, means that working-through the performative idiom as a hauntology does not necessarily result in an (un)onto-epistemological "methodology" that enables one to adjudicate who or what is sufficiently "haunted" (see Powell and Shaffer).[14] Taking cues from the uncanny effects of recorded speech,

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[14] For the final lecture of a graduate seminar titled "The Idiom of Haunting," I draw on Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, Phalen's *Unmarked,* and Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* to make the case that performance studies can be fruitfully understood as a "hauntology." Although space prevents a thorough discussion (for my course blueprint, see Gunn, "Mourning Humanism"), by arguing performance studies is a hauntology I mean to suggest it is a representational economy of the "in between," or as Phelan puts it, an economy in which the "reproduction of the Other *as* the Same is not assured" (3). Insofar as hauntology would recommend an ethical disposition of "hospitality" or even being a "hostage" to the Other (recalling, in my view, Klein's ethics of reparation), the moves I make in this essay characterize the haunting of performance as a form of crying, in a sense aligning a critique of the speaking subject with Phelan's critique of the visible. In their essay "On the Haunting of Performance Studies," Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer also claim hauntology for performance (Powell was a student in the first seminar on haunting I offered at the Louisiana State University). The argument they advance to support their claim, however, differs substantially from my own: rather than a disposition or way of seeing/hearing (*theoresai*), Powell and Shaffer argue that "haunting" qualifies as "a method of engaging performance studies practice and discourse" (11, n. 5). As a method, haunting "requires" scholars to adopt "individual positions" that are "necessarily haunted" and should understand the work of

as well as our tendency to project fantasy onto such recordings, the haunting of performance is the location of the strange in the familiar—or should I say, the *familial*?

As noted earlier, Melanie Klein argued living ethically was to recognize, at some level, one's responsibility for sadism and violence, particularly toward a maternal figure (or better, a maternal figuration) early in life. "The irrevocable fact that none of us is ever entirely free of guilt," said Klein, "has very valuable aspects because it implies the never fully exhausted wish to make reparation and create in whatever way we can" (259). Jodi Kanter's recent work has shown us how "performing loss" on the stage and on the page rebuilds community through creative forms of reparation. Suchy's *13 Ways* was an (in)direct encounter with race-based lynching and a complicated navigation of the twisted relations of race in a certain cultured space (Louisiana). But I would push toward seeing all performance, like human speech itself, as an encounter with loss, an ambivalent fixing-the-unfix, as it were. The haunted condition of performance is a reckoning with the body—fundamentally or in the last instance, the maternal body and the unavoidably infantile rejection of mother for a sense of autonomy and independence. Thereby performance is a form of mournful speech. And in this way, to perform is to cry.

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mourning as "productive and," more pointedly, "not in terms of melancholia" (11, n. 5). Also, as a "method" haunting "requires that concepts such as presence, ontology, [etc.] . . . be rethought in a way that allows for a difference to emerge" (10). To be properly haunted, Powell and Shaffer claim one must adopt an ethics of hospitality and assume "the responsibility to wait for the ghost." They argue that "Derridian ethics demand that, in order for justice to emerge, the audience and performers must engage each other openly and without expectation, in the here-and-now of performance" (16). Finally, they conclude that "concern for the other dictates that the event must also be experienced out of a concern for future generations of others" (17). It seems odd that a manifesto about hauntological performance "requires," "demands," and "dictates" scholars, performers, and audiences to be and think in predefined ways. Perhaps Powell and Shaffer would have benefitted from a closer reading of Phelan, which is also suggestive of an alternative approach veering toward method, but not prescriptively so: performative writing. She argues that the "act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself" (148). Powell and Shaffer charge Phelen's approach to performance scholarship as "[sealing up] performance in the metaphysical trap of ontology through a transcendent agent or subject," arguing that Butler has the more "properly Derridian" perspective (7). A more charitable and accurate reading of Phelan's theory of writing toward performance would demonstrate, however, that she is pushing for quite the opposite. Understanding why this is the case is made easier when one notes Phelan's understanding of performance is building on the Lacanian distinction between the "subject of the statement" and the "subject of the enunciation," the latter of which betokens the subject of the unconscious and which/who emerges only in a disappearance or "fading" (*aphanisis*). The Other is not just "out there"; it haunts within, too (See Dolar, "Cogito").

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