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Piercing the Page / *Peter Stastny*

Introduction

Il reste alors à *parler*, à faire *resonner* la voix dans les couloirs pour suppléer l'éclat de la présence. (Le phonème, l'akoumène est le *phénomène du labyrinthe*.) Tel est le *cas* de la *phone*. S'élevant vers le soleil de la présence, elle est la voie d'Icare.

It remains, then, for us to *speak*, to make our voices *resonate* throughout the corridors in order to make up for the breakup of presence (to supply the force of presence). The phoneme, the *akoumenon*, is the *phenomenon of the labyrinth*. This is the *case* with the *phone*. Rising towards the sun of presence, it is the way of Icarus. Derrida, *La Voix et le Phénomène*

The final words of Derrida's *La Voix et le Phénomène*, exuding a strong odor of melted wax and singed feathers, evoke the failure of Icarus' vision. The ideal of *presence*, Husserl's "presentation of being" (*Gegenwärtigung*), is countered by the inevitable destruction of the *phone*, the spoken word, by the lifelessness of the written. What is it about the *Lebendigkeit* (aliveness) of the speaker that concerns us, what about his or her *presence* that disrupts our dispassionate consumption of texts?

The problem of an "authentic" amplification and resonance of a presence in our readings seems less severe as long as authors of texts remain identical with the owners of the imagination at stake. But with Freud and other writers of psychoanalytic/psychiatric case histories, the owners of imagination, i.e., the patients, have ceased to be the authors. The moment an analytic listener represents the psychoanalytic discourse in writing, the patient's voice can be said to be severed from its own text. Freud was apparently troubled early on by the violence he inflicted on the patient's production of texts by enveloping it in his own. In the introduction to his first major case history, "Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse" (Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria), he states:

Die Veröffentlichung meiner Krankengeschichten bleibt für mich eine schwer zu lösende Aufgabe. . . . Die Schwierigkeiten sind zum Teil technischer Natur, zum anderen Teil gehen sie aus dem Wesen der Verhältnisse selbst hervor. Wenn es richtig ist, dass die Verursachung

der hysterischen Erkrankungen in den Intimitäten des psychosexuellen Lebens der Kranken gefunden wird und dass die hysterischen Symptome der Ausdruck ihrer geheimsten verdrängten Wünsche sind, so kann die Klarlegung eines Falles von Hysterie nicht anders, als diese Intimitäten aufzudecken und diese Geheimnisse zu verraten. . . . es bliebe ganz vergeblich, wollte man die Erlaubnis zur Veröffentlichung von ihnen selbst erbitten.

The presentation of my case histories remains a problem which is hard for me to solve. . . . The difficulties are partly of a technical kind, but are partly due to the nature of the circumstances themselves. If it is true that the causes of hysterical disorders are to be found in the intimacies of the patient's psychosexual life, and that hysterical symptoms are the expression of their most secret and repressed wishes, then the complete elucidation of a case of hysteria is bound to involve the revelation of those intimacies and the betrayal of those secrets. . . . it is certain that to ask them [the patients] for leave to publish their cases would be quite unavailing.¹

Here Freud still seems mainly concerned about the issue of betraying the patients' trust by divulging the very secrets that fueled the hysterical neurosis to begin with. He assumes that the "nature of the circumstances themselves" would render it futile to even attempt to reinsert the patients as authors in the analyst's text by asking "leave to publish their cases." But only a few lines further he begins to imagine a direct relationship between the patient and the analyst's text:

Ich kann es natürlich nicht verhindern, dass die Patientin selbst eine peinliche Empfindung verspüre, wenn ihr die eigene Krankengeschichte durch einen Zufall in die Hände gespielt wird. Sie erfährt aber nichts aus ihr, was sie nicht schon weiss.

I naturally cannot prevent the patient herself from being pained if her own case history should accidentally fall into her hands. But she will learn nothing from it that she does not already know.²

The rather arrogant prophecy that the patient "will learn nothing . . . she does not already know" of course implies that she will learn nothing about her analyst, since that would have been carefully omitted from her case history, and that everything concerning her "hysteria" has already become conscious in the process of analysis. Yet if Dora, the patient in question, were to have become a student of literature and an analyst of texts herself, she indeed might have learned a great deal more about her analyst cum author than he dared to imagine. She might have

noted, for instance, a peculiar omission, an incompleteness (Unvollständigkeit) as Freud refers to it, in her case history. He intentionally deletes all “interpretation to which the patient’s associations and communications had to be subjected” (Deutungsarbeit, die and den Einfällen und Mitteilungen der Kranken zu vollziehen war). Had Dora been given the opportunity to close the associative circle, had she herself posed the labyrinthine question of her presence in her own case history, she might have been treated to an account of Herr Doktor’s painstaking efforts to obtain a “high degree of trustworthiness” (einen hohen Grad von Verlässlichkeit), but would she have learned to trust herself? In other words, would she have found herself in Freud’s text, as if discovering herself in a mottled mirror, and in so doing, learned to rely on the truth of her own text as much as on Freud’s claims to objectivity?

Freud’s efforts to preserve and solidify his theoretical edifice by supplying case-historical evidence completely avoid these questions. His main objective remains that of publicizing his method and its findings in order to establish them as significant contributions to medical science. Dora’s voice and her presence in the text remain irrelevant as long as her “complex” (her symptoms in consort with compelling associations and memories) is sufficiently elucidated. Instead of achieving the status of evidence, Freud’s case histories have become pillars of antithesis to traditional scientific thinking. But they have nonetheless contributed significantly to the emergence of a new “scientific” method that departs radically from traditional approaches.

Since Freud, scores of analysts and, more recently, literary critics, have become interested in the patient-as-text (i.e., the case history), which results in the patient-as-author being submerged in a process of therapy that leaves him speechless in his soliloquy. The patient-as-text has become indiscernible from the analyst-as-text—a narrative that is severed from the anguish and suspense of its production. But is the failure of the clinical text in embodying the spoken voice, *la voix phénoménologique*, simply of the same order as the failure of any other text in representing its protagonists’ desires and torments with appropriate tropes? And even if that were so, is not its failure an even more dramatic one by virtue of its purported aim to transmit the meanings of states of mind and affects?

In journalistic interviews, as in the analyst’s writing, the mode is *reportage*; it is about the observed *and* the observation; it is about *rapport*, about *empathy*, qualities that are thought to enter into the text, to resonate, as if a report of a *joint presence*, the reporter’s and his/her object’s, the analyst’s and his/her patient’s, could be written. This seems to be exactly what is thought to distinguish case-historical writing from other, less

sanctified sorts of texts. One wonders whether the elusive qualities of suffering are sufficiently fluid and perdurable to make their way through the meanderings of the analyst’s mind into his writings, thereby affirming a living stronghold for the patient-as-author in the text. Suffering and empathy, these Janusian twins, neither existing without the other—can they indeed establish this supreme channel of authenticity, extending from the dreams of one to the writings of another?

The question also poses itself whether this should be precisely the matter not to be expected in the text. Rather than seeing it as a failure of the text, it may well be one of its virtues that it cleanses us from the unarticulated rumblings of the heart. It comes as quite a surprise that even Freud, the great geographer of the unconscious, considered that the overwhelming presence of the original subject and the highly empathic description of emotional states distracted him from his goal of clinical objectivity and generalization. What seems desirable, then, is a kind of purified description of *psyche* devoid of the moanings and groanings, the twitchings and contortions, the hesitations and eruptions the owner of said psyche might be engaged in while producing his/her psyche-as-text. The psyche as an abstracted distillate of subjectivity would lend itself perfectly well to a reasonable production of texts by analysts. The content, i.e., the psyche, is thus wrenched free from its unnecessarily lively container, who can be safely discarded in the service of objectivity.

And yet the intrigue of examining the relationship between the patient-as-author and the patient-as-text remains. Patienthood can be seen as many things, with sometimes dizzying shifts of significance. States of submissiveness and domination, eroticization, dependency, merging, and mirroring have all been considered as facets of *transference*, the incomplete, fantasized, anticipated semblance of a relationship, based on affective and other mnemonic residua. This incessantly yearning figment of union is stimulated by the analyst’s presence, but even more so by his/her simultaneously incisive and elusive remarks, his/her interpretations. Having been wounded and healed over and over again, the patient, by virtue of his/her transference relationship and its ultimate resolution, should arrive at a “superior state of integration within itself and the world.” However utopian such a state might seem, throughout this tedious and painful process *authentication* of the self is a crucial feature in the pursuit of therapy. It is a process of verification and reaffirmation that is never abandoned throughout the entire psychotherapeutic discourse.

To posit authentication as inherent to all psychotherapeutic endeavours demands excursions into the conceptual realms of *narcissism* on the one hand and *authenticity* on the other. Refraining from both a widely

encompassing historiography and a structural definition of narcissism, I will content myself here by referring to Kohut, the pivotal writer on the subject within the psychoanalytic tradition. Kohut sees narcissism as both “resistance and driving force in psychoanalysis.”³ According to him this holds true not merely for “narcissistic personality disorders” but also, by deduction, for those endowed with “mature narcissism.”

The proper appreciation of the role played by narcissism in human life demands that we posit a separate line of development for it, leading from archaic to mature forms. Specifically we postulate two lines of development (one from archaic to mature narcissism, the other, side by side with it, from archaic to mature object love), not a single line of development (from narcissism to object love).⁴

Within this dialectic between the constricting, paralyzing narcissistic “armor”⁵ or “crust” and the progressively liberating self-investment of maturity lies the essential effort of establishing, maintaining, and continuously reaffirming one’s presence, one’s authentic identity.

Simply juxtaposing the words *narcissism*, *authenticity*, *identity*, and *individuality* causes a mindboggling eruption of philosophical query. For our purpose in demonstrating the ineluctable desire to affirm, to root, to evoke, and to vocalize an individual’s selfhood, to authenticate oneself (as I have chosen to abbreviate this complexity), let it suffice to address only a few ideas concerning individuality and authenticity. The notion of individuality gave rise to an obscure work entitled *Philosophie der Individualität* (*Philosophy of Individuality*) by the equally obscure German philosopher and psychologist Richard Müller-Freienfels, who emphasizes the “non-delineable nature of individuality” (Nichtabgrenzbarkeit der Individualität). He summarizes his chapter dedicated to this issue as follows:

Nichts scheint dem naiven Realisten und leider auch den meisten Philosophen klarer und fester umgrenzt als das Ich; deutlich scheint es der übrigen Welt gegenüberzustehen. Indem wir jedoch das Ich unter seinen verschiedenen Aspekten auf seine Grenzen hin prüfen, zerfließen uns diese wie Nebel; je genauer wir nachforschen, um so tiefere Zusammenhänge entdecken wir zwischen Individualität und mancherlei überindividuellen Subjektivitäten ja selbst der Gegensatz zwischen Subjekt und Objekt gerät ins Wanken. Wir mussten erkennen, dass alle Erscheinungsweisen der Individualität niemals die reine Individualität, sondern stets nur deren Inbeziehungstehen mit Ausserindividuellem und Überindividuellem zeigte.⁶

To the realist, and unfortunately also to most philosophers, nothing seems clearer and more firmly delineated than the self; it seems distinctly to be facing the rest of the world. But as soon as we begin to examine the self with respect to its boundaries these dissolve like shreds of fog. The more carefully we investigate, the more profound the relationships we discover between individuality and a whole array of supra-individual subjectivities, the more the contrast between subject and object becomes blurred. We must realize, that all appearances of individuality are never pure individuality, but rather representations of its relationship to extra- and supra-individual matters.⁷

If we may leap from this statement regarding the amorphous nature of individuality to the individual’s subjective experience of the same, it becomes quite easy to see why such a lack of structural boundaries may result in our perennial need to reaffirm the same. This of course occurs in spite of the philosophical impossibilities that arise to confound us. Incidentally, a pervasive and profound lack of self-definition would certainly be considered a paramount symptom of a “narcissistic personality disorder” by Kohut and most practicing psychotherapists.

In the first half of the twentieth century authenticity is Adorno’s domain. His *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (*Jargon of Authenticity*) demasks authenticity as false consciousness buttressed by a new German vocabulary in the service of the new, post-World War II ideology. His concern focuses on the observer, the reader, and the listener, as they are confronted with ubiquitous and multiform presentations of “Eigentlichkeit.” As a most impressive example of an “authentic” presentation, Adorno quotes Heinz Schnitzke from his “Drei Grundthesen zum Fernsehen” (“Three Basic Tenets of Television”) in his analysis of a televised sermon.

Hier bekannte sich ein geistlicher Sprecher mehr als zehn Minuten lang in einer einzigen, dabei niemals wechselnden Grosseinstellung aus sich selbst heraus in existentieller Weise. Und infolge der hohen menschlichen Überzeugungskraft, die er ausstrahlte, wurde sein durch seine bildliche Gegenwart bezeugtes Wort nicht nur vollständig glaubwürdig, sondern man vergass darüber sogar die vermittelnde Apparatur ganz und gar, und es bildete sich vor dem Fernsehschirm zwischen den zufälligen Zuschauern ähnlich wie im Gotteshaus eine Art Gemeinde, die sich unmittelbar dem Sprecher gegenüberstellt und durch ihn an den Gegenstand der Predigt, das Wort Gottes, gebunden fühlte. Es gibt für diesen überraschenden Vorgang keine andere Deutung als die, dass es eben vor allem auf den sprechenden Menschen ankommt, der mutig und bedeutend genug ist, sich selbst

mit seiner ganzen Substanz und Existenz in die Bresche zu stellen und allein der Sache, die er bezeugt, und den Zuhörern, mit denen er sich verbunden weiss, zu dienen.

Here a clerical speaker declared himself from within, in existential fashion, for more than ten minutes in a single and never-changing close-up shot. And due to the high degree of human persuasiveness that he emanated, his words, affirmed by his pictorial presence, became not only completely credible, but one even entirely forgot thereby the mediating apparatus. One could say that a kind of community, like that in a church, was formed among the haphazard television watchers, who faced the preacher directly and through him felt bound to the topic of the sermon, the word of the Lord. There is no other explanation for this astonishing phenomenon than that it relies primarily on the speaking person, who is courageous and important enough to step into the breach with his entire substance and existence, and to serve alone the cause which he affirms and, at the same time, the audience which he is connected to.

Adorno adds: "This is a wireless commercial of authenticity" ("Das ist ein funkisches Commercial der Eigentlichkeit"),⁸ thereby unmasking this enthusiastic report with facility. However, a residuum of self-assertive language must remain even after the most stringent Adornian effort to strip from it every shred of protofascist jargon, in order to serve the purpose of an ever incomplete self-authentication.

For our topic we are equally intrigued by the presumed experience of the preacher or the patient, speaking the word of God or the unconscious, as by the parallel experience of the viewer/listener or the analyst. The fate of such vocal self-assertion and the challenge it poses to any written text are the main considerations of this essay. The scream, the recorded voice, and the insult present themselves as epigrammatic and exaggerated versions of self-authentication. They appear to contain the possibility of transcending the isolation of the individual and thus are a jarring threat to anything written about them.

The Scream

The struggle with this phenomenon begins with the word itself. The 1914 edition of the Oxford Dictionary mentions a primary meaning: "To utter a shrill piercing cry, normally expressive of pain, alarm, mirth or other sudden emotion." A *shout*, on the other hand, is a loud vehement cry expressing joy, grief or pain, fear, triumph, warning,

encouragement; also, "a loud cry to attract attention at a distance." And third, a *shriek* is a "shrill, piercing or wild cry, expressive of terror or pain." Such poor differentiation (at least according to this septuagenarian dictionary) between "scream" and "shriek," with mere "wildness" distinguishing the latter, is embodied in the confusion regarding the appropriate translation of the Norwegian title "Skriek" of Edvard Munch's 1893 painting and woodcut, one of the most familiar images associated with the phenomenon at hand. A much older scream, the scream of Laocoon, has transpired through the ages, to be heard now faintly, now louder, in sculpture, painting, literature, and criticism. According to Virgil, Laocoon was a Trojan priest of Apollo, who warned his kinfolk with the words:

Equo ne credite, Teucri.
quidquid id est, timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.
Trojans, do not trust in the horse!
Whatever it may be, I fear the Greeks,
even when they bring gifts.⁹

Then Laocoon proceeded to pierce the ample belly of the wooden horse with his spear, to prove his point. For this he was fated to die an ugly death along with his two sons. They ended up being throttled by two terrifying snakes that emerged from the sea just as they were offering a bull to appease Neptune.

Ille simul manibus tendit divellere nodos
perfusus sanie vittas atroque veneno,
clamos simul horrendos ad sidera tollit,
qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram
taurus et incertam excussit cervice securim.

He struggled with his hands to rip their knots,
his headband soaked in filth and in dark venom,
while he lifts high his hideous cries to heaven,
just like the bellows of a wounded bull
when it has fled the altar, shaking off an unsure ax.¹⁰

Little of all this is evident in the most famous rendering of the Laocoon myth, the marble group dating from the first century B.C. by the Rhodian sculptors Agesandros, Polydoros, and Athenodoros, now on display at the Vatican. Neither struggling with his hands nor wearing a headband soaked in filth and dark venom, Laocoon certainly does not bellow like a wounded bull (see figure 1). The question why the Laocoon of the Vatican group, in

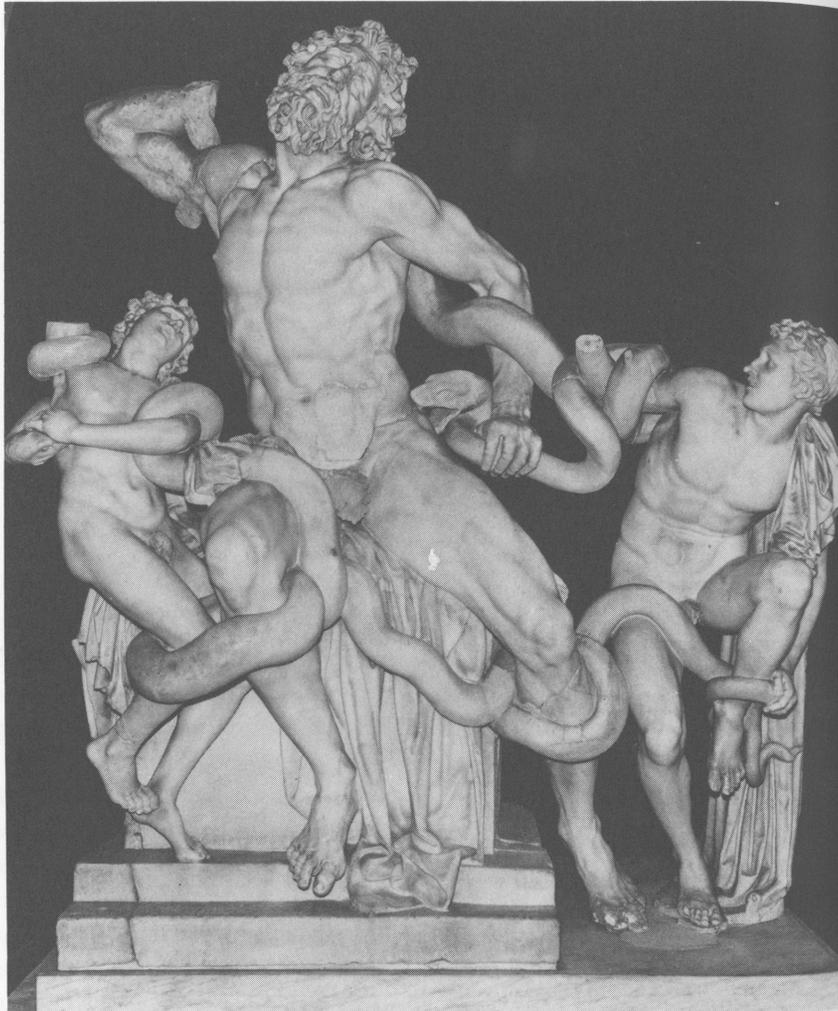


Figure 1. The Laocöon, Rome, Vatican Museum. Reproduced here courtesy of Lauros-Giraudon/Art Resource, New York.

clear contradistinction to Virgil's description, does not scream, kicked off a series of treatises, of which Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocöon; or about the Boundaries of Painting and Poetry* is a most impressive example. Lessing offers two major arguments to account for the divergence between sculpture and verse: he posits the scream as antagonistic to beauty according to the Greek ideal of pictorial representation, but follows up with a second line of thought, accommodating a more modern idea of beauty as subservient to truth and expression. Assuming that the extremes of expression, a scream, for instance, are also the most transitory, they should therefore be omitted from a work of art, so that their continuance would not thwart the spectator's imagination or displease him by an unnatural appearance. (To compare Lessing's view with even such pedestrian expressions as the smile in a family snapshot, just as transitory an activity as screaming, and yet seemingly much less "unnatural," will demonstrate his bias against the unpleasant extremes of emotion.)

In contrast to Lessing, who does not deny that an effective representation of a scream, and obviously all other, less dramatic forms of expression, is possible, if not desirable in visual art, Schopenhauer claims that a screaming Laocöon could simply not be wrenched from a block of marble. Only a Laocöon whose "voice got stuck in his throat"¹¹ could be accurately represented in a visual medium.

Das Wesen und folglich die Wirkung des Schreiens auf den Zuschauer liegt ganz allein im Laut, nicht im Mundaufperren.

The essence and consequently the effect of a scream on the audience lies exclusively in its sound and not in the opening of a mouth.¹²

Having made this rather radical statement, Schopenhauer flounders quite a bit in the following passages. He concedes the effectiveness of screaming in literature, staged drama, and even concedes that the lack of sound coming from instruments does not constitute a problem when representing musicians, as long as their task does not require undue "distortion of body and mouth."¹³ He tries, but ultimately fails, to establish the scream as a category apart from others in its representation. In so doing he reverts to an aestheticism that considers distortion excessive when the sound associated with it might be disturbing, and its inadequacy as representation correspondingly more apparent, but would probably be content with the image of a whistler or of someone simply uttering a word.

The debate on aesthetics between Lessing and Schopenhauer regarding the striking absence of screaming in the Laocöon group can be readily expanded to include the question of the expressibility of pain in general.

In her remarkable book *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry implicates physical pain as actively destructive of language in that it “bring[s] about an immediate reversion to a state *anterior* to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.”¹⁴ As such, the prelinguistic relationship between screaming and physical pain remains an utter challenge to all visual and literary art. When Schopenhauer gives the Rhodian sculptors credit for avoiding the representation of a screaming Laocoon, by representing his efforts at screaming as if blocked by a marble palate and tongue, he does so assuming that true artists succeed by recognizing the falsity of their art rather than by feigning some sort of truth. The inadmissibility of a screaming Laocoon is not so much a question of an aesthetic ban or Greek Stoicism, but rather a question of transgressing boundaries by eluding them. Since sculpture can neither augment nor emphasize human suffering by approximating a scream—the severest and most inarticulate form of expression—through a kind of realist formalism, it does so by the affirmation of the scream’s extinction. It buries the scream in marble.

With the exception of works written to be performed by actors, one thinks of Sophocles’ *Philoctete*, where the author has the actor scream quite unremittingly variants of Ah! Ah! Reu! Ahtattai! Oh! Oh! Moi! Moi!, the scream has quite boldly defied representation. But the question of whether a scream constitutes a distinct category of expressivity that resists art (and destroys language) was reinvoked by Edvard Munch in his “Skriek.” To Munch, synesthesia seems to contain the answer to the question raised, or possibly to render its posing irrelevant. In the first monograph about the Norwegian artist, which appeared in 1894, only one year after Munch painted the first version of “The Scream,” Stanislaw Przybyszewski wrote:

Jede Vibration der in höchster Schmerzextase blossgelegten Nerven setzt sich in eine entsprechende Farbempfindung um. Jeder Schmerz ein blutroter Fleck, jedes langgezogene Schmerzgeheul ein Gurt blauer, grüner, gelber Flecken.

His landscape is the absolute correlate to naked sensation; each vibration of nerves exposed in the most painful ecstasy is transposed into an appropriate sensation of color. Each painful sensation a blood-red spot, every drawn-out howl of pain a belt of blue, green, yellow spots.¹⁵

Munch himself seems to have been inspired by a personal experience of synesthesia, as shown in his inscription on the margin of an earlier

work, “Fortvilelse” (“Despair”), an obvious precursor to the “Skriek”:

I was walking along the road with two friends—the sun was going down—I felt something like a breath of melancholy. The sky was suddenly blood-red—I stopped, and leant against the fence, dead tired—I saw the flaming clouds like blood and a sword—the bluish-black fjord and town—my friends walked on—I stood there, trembling with anxiety—and I felt as though nature were convulsed by a great unending scream.¹⁶

Grant that hue and movement of color can resonate with perceptive qualities of the spectator to an extent unthought of prior to Munch and modern Expressionism. Grant further that thereby even a scream can be rendered as palpable material in a painting, this by no means affirms the possibility of its survival in the written text. Drawing from my experience as a psychotherapist, I have had the opportunity to examine this latter eventuality more closely. Out of all the people that have presented themselves to me for purposes of psychotherapy, one woman stands out in my memory. She was a student who came to me because she was having increasing trouble working. Alarmed teachers and colleagues had urged her to seek help and so she found her way to the clinic where I was practicing at the time. She came to see me twice weekly for about two years with sustained regularity. With the exception of a single night, after she had taken herself to an emergency room in utter despair, she was never hospitalized and continued to attend to her life uninterrupted, albeit only with great effort. She accepted psychotropic medication only for a very brief period of time and without any apparent benefit. In spite of her extraordinary intellect she was unable to pursue her studies and terminated therapy rather abruptly, announcing that she intended to return to live with her parents in another part of the state. I have not heard from her since.

It is the experience of having been *in the presence* of her screams—endless, terrifying shrieks, bellows and howls, high pitched and tearful, utterly agonized and at no time liberating—that must have pained my ears, scarred my sensory cortex, leaving behind a mnemonic flame alive enough to attempt a recollection. Not to say that it was her screaming alone that plowed this forceful trace, but that was the music to which she sang her text. And soon her screaming also became the churning march of my helplessness, my endlessly futile attempts to reach her, to make some sort of difference in her life. She screamed, I was to learn, only in my presence or alone in her apartment. That her screaming remains the most outstanding feature of her presentation is of itself remarkable. It must

have been able to impress with a force equal to that with which it obscured, serving as a screen of sound to stave off the outside world. Yet it was not constant screaming that might have started from the minute she entered the room to when she closed the door behind herself. Nor was it unintelligible, primal screaming without words. Phrases loudly spoken would escalate further in volume until the effort interfered with longer statements. Single words were shouted, sometimes progressing toward a drawn-out nonarticulated scream, often ending in a whimpering sound. Never were there ululating sounds that were not in the service of words.

Were one to superimpose the sessions like hundreds of transparent slides, one might get the following kind of view: a hard knock and the door opens forcefully without awaiting my answer, a rushing entrance along with a furtive glance, maybe acknowledging my presence, then crouching into her favorite position in a niche beside a washbasin framed by two metal closets. There is no greeting and mine is ignored as she begins to speak, rapidly as if each word were chased by the one following. At times she makes an effort to deny my presence, keeps talking, looking down; then my words get louder, more insistent, and she stumbles in her speech as if tripwired in the flow of her uttered pain. She is never soothed, always aroused, in trouble, ready to attack. Since she perceives every movement toward her, beside her, as arrows aimed directly at her, each "hit" results in a higher pitch of voice, a further retreat into her contorted body as naked as a porcupine lacking spines.

The room is small, maybe six by ten; I sit beside a desk, closer to the window behind me than to the door. Her niche is to the right of me, closer to the door. Sometimes she emerges from the metal protection offered by her niche in the center of the built-in closet, and stalks out the boundaries of our common space. Astonishingly she can take possession of the space to the point of moving in on me, closer than is comfortable. At other times she retreats, presses against a wall, squeezes in a corner, fights for her space, particularly whenever I intrude with words. My sentences are negative, jarring her vision, her spoken way: she ignores, I maintain, she refutes, I maintain again, and violence sets in. Rapidly rising, her voice takes over, fills the room, in fact destroys the spaciousness of the room. Each uttered sound, each loudness a volume of its own, carries its own weight, envelops her with an invisible screen. Now she moves closer again, stands right by me, maybe a foot away, less, hovers over me, and yells. No need to confirm that I am actually paralyzed by her scream. She simply screams and therefore is. Now I am the porcupine without quills. They are ensheathed by my therapeutic stance, and I retreat, awaiting for her to settle down, to acquiesce. Her screaming is negation, negation is

her being: "MY NO MUST STAND," she yells out frequently. Maintaining that she would quite simply be destroyed should anyone approach her to console her fear, achieving nothing but to conform and aggravate that same fear, she stays beyond compassion, untouchable and wailing all at once.

I am removed, no longer present to her screams, and so my text is a muted text. Why does this sound regretful, as if I were not perfectly relieved? Who needs to have this page scream as loudly and painfully as she did? And then they say: It is your job to have your eardrums pierced by her shrieks; we set you up to muffle what is shrill, to filter out the alarming noises that stem from somebody's soul, and you are not to bother *us* if you are floored as she pummels you with howls.

My colleagues sharing the same hallway of the clinic were often alarmed. They thought I needed help, more so than she. But soon they gave up their reassuring calls; the knocks on my door, which frightened her so much, ceased, and we were left alone again, with her screams and my gradually hardening ear. Intrusions would only raise the pitch and volume of her screams. Even though she desperately feared that someone outside the room might be gathering her words, she would still scream louder, as if her voice was meant to explode within the world she fought to ignore, bursting all ears that lent themselves, deafening even the most caring and shattering all frames. It is a rather stunning paradox that someone deathly afraid of everything outside would utter sounds quite publicly that are alarming signals to all listeners, attracting and repellent all at once. Such screams, emanating from behind closed doors, signify violation, mortal danger, even death. And I, the one in her physical presence, must be the perpetrator, the one she tries to paralyze by waking the world to witness the crime, but also the one she desperately is trying to attract, so that she can be soothed, liberated from her pain.

An early moment of her treatment ought to be recalled, a point at which I realized to what extent my words were weapons, penises too, inasmuch as they were weapons, and not simply satisfying tools. One day she sat on my cold plastic tile floor holding herself as tightly as she could, burying her upper body in her lap, and rocking, shaking ferociously. Within this quivering she sobbed, further withdrawing from the world. Witnessing this utterly pathetic creature on the floor, feeling shaken by her trembling, her sobs, I intervened by saying the obvious: "I guess you must want to be held right now." A dagger could not have pierced her more forcefully. She looked up, her face panic-stricken beyond belief, as she started yelling: "NO, DON'T TOUCH ME, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TOUCH ME, YOU WANT TO TORTURE ME, TO KILL ME, NO, NO . . ." and retreated

into the furthest corner of the room, shriveling up, glued to the wall, perfectly convinced that she would be annihilated right then and there. And I had merely uttered words to soothe her. Not loud, not forceful, but clear and direct. This is how I learned that my words could kill, and this may also have been the time when I began to know that she would kill me, if I ever actually moved toward her to touch her physically. And that is possibly why the paralyzing power of her screams remains burning in my mind, fueling my desire to part with it, by having it resurrected in my text, having my page shiver with her screams.

When she turned into this amorphous creature in retreat I could forget that she was a woman and I a man. Then I seemed simply a terrifying gargantuan adult/parent, hovering over an infant, an embryonic self. But there were other times when she reminded me rather strikingly of her womanhood. Those were the instances when she appeared with her breasts wrapped tight with bandages, flattening and armoring her chest all at once, and, even more dramatically, when she inserted a rolled-up stocking into her crotch as if to simulate a penis. So equipped she screamed much less, made contact, even smiled and joked with me. Her womanhood, it seemed, must have felt like nakedness to her, as if she had no skin between her self and the world. A transsexual gesture, and there she was, more solid than before.

I will not expand on this rather striking feature to draw conclusions of any kind regarding feminine psychology in general. Mentioning it serves merely to underline that ultimately when she screamed, she did so as a woman, and when I heard her, I did so as a man. This was not particular to our relation: the history of screaming has traditionally been deeply intertwined with the history of women, whose voices grew louder than their texts, in the male imagination. Women scream during labor, they scream in a “grand paroxysme” of hysteria as described by Jean Marie Charcot in 1877. (Incidentally, the sighing, somewhat halted scream of the hysterical seizure or syncope was used to differentiate it from an actual epileptic fit.) Women also scream as mythological figures: as Furies, when taking revenge, as Harpies, when haunting the living with the cries of the dead, or as Sirens, when luring warriors off their intended path. But most often they scream in the face of actual danger, fearing pain, suffering. They also scream out of pleasure. For a woman, to scream can be a sign of deterrence and of resistance, but also an indication that a part of pleasure finds its way into the heart of the pain, an often lethal admixture, perpetuating the cycles of dominance and submission. This feminine dialectic of screaming, embodying the intrusion of pleasure into pain, of rebellion into submission, has found expression in the Jewish

laws governing marital life, possibly the most intricate body of laws attempting to regulate sexual matters.

In a Jewish marriage the groom is required to furnish his betrothed with a *ketubbah*, a document that records his financial obligations towards his wife in case the union be dissolved. The *ketubbah* was apparently instituted for the purpose of protecting the woman “so that he shall not regard it as easy to divorce her.”¹⁷ There are, however, a number of instances when a woman forfeits her rights to the remuneration spelled out in the *ketubbah* and can thus be divorced with greater facility. The women listed in the *Mishnah*¹⁸ who are to be divorced without receiving the *ketubbah* include “a wife who transgresses the law of Moses,” for example, by “having intercourse with him during her menstruation, making vows and not fulfilling them (or) conversing with every man,” and, *Reb Tarfon* adds, “also one who screams.” “And who is regarded as a screamer? A woman whose voice can be heard by her neighbors when she speaks inside her house.” The *Gemara*¹⁹ explains further what is meant by a screamer: *Reb Judah* in the name of *Samuel* thinks this refers to a wife who “makes her voice heard on sexual matters.” Another explanation is a “wife whose voice during intercourse in one courtyard can be heard in another.” This last passage gave rise to a rather curious argument: *Rashi’s* commentary asserts that her screaming must be due to painful copulation, and the *Gemara* proceeds to wonder, if this is so, why it doesn’t fall under the rubric of physical defects that might be responsible for her pain. And since physical defects are addressed in a subsequent *Mishna*, the *Gemara* rejects this explanation for her screaming and returns to the earlier definition given by *Reb Judah*.

The question remains, what kind of screaming did *Reb Tarfon* mean? The *Gemara* quickly rules out that her screaming might be due to excessive pain during intercourse, since such pain would indubitably arise from a physical defect on the part of the husband, an assumption that never gets elaborated further. *Rashi* extends *Reb Judah’s* interpretation of a screamer as a wife who “makes her voice heard on sexual matters” toward a rather astonishing scenario by stating that “as (the husband) speaks to her about intercourse she argues with him, which is heard by the neighbors, and (therefore) embarrasses (the husband).” Could *Rashi* be implying anything else than the refusal of the wife to satisfy the husband’s wish to have sex? Yet she is not punished merely for refusing intercourse, but primarily for raising her voice and making her refusal known publicly, for embarrassing her husband by demonstrating that he has lost control over her. This clearly challenges the concept of the *ketubbah* as protective of women’s rights, for the first public sign of resistance leads to a stripping

of whatever protection she might have enjoyed had she kept her voice down, or better yet, simply submitted to her husband's wishes. In all this it seems clear that no one dared to associate her screaming with pleasure. But would not that be the perfect justification for punishing the screaming wife? Indeed we are left wondering what actually occurred in this courtyard between husband and wife. Just as my colleagues wondered what could possibly have been going on between me and my patient behind the closed door of my office.

The analogy to my patient is rather obvious. She too makes it known that an act of penetration is being committed. My presence, my voice, my injunctions, all jab into her space, forcing her to submit to a therapeutic discourse. But is my patient's screaming nothing but a woman yelling her refusal at the perceived perpetrator who is about to impale her on his words? And is my text then nothing but the marriage contract she never received, written by myself, with myself as counsel and sole beneficiary?

Just as my patient's screaming is more metaphoric than systematically representative of a relationship to the screaming of women in general, it also stands in a nonlinear relation to patienthood in general. The debate over the coercive nature of therapeutic discourse continues quite actively with rather dramatic polarizations. On the one hand, it is claimed that the coerciveness is inherent to the hierarchical gradient of roles in psychotherapy and as such can never be replaced by a symmetrically balanced, uncoercive relationship. On the other hand, theorists of the therapeutic process with a more humanistic bent continue to believe in such a possibility and posit it as one of the most desirable goals of psychotherapy. Traditional psychoanalysts regard the coercive aspects as analyzable parts of the transference relationship. Cure is then synonymous with their resolution. But regardless of what kind of a position we as therapists might take vis-à-vis the coerciveness of our interventions, the responses of our patients are rarely as dramatically illustrative of its perceivable presence in a discourse that is marketed as helpful as were those of my patient. Due to the particular nature of her disturbance, the patient I have invoked points to coerciveness with troubling impetuosity. In fact, she achieved such a thorough unsettling of my position as therapist that I often was convinced not only of my complete uselessness, but also of my highly disturbing noxiousness.

Clearly, in our encounter, we remained locked into a futile repetition of our role-appropriate behavior: she, the patient, screaming, begging, wailing for help, and I, the doctor, consoling, understanding, intervening. Rarely, if ever, were we able to go beyond these grotesque caricatures of ourselves and establish some semblance of a therapeutic alliance that

could have sustained a momentum towards greater integration, autonomy, or tranquillity on her part. As my words could not rescue her, much less can my text; it cannot even resurrect her or recover her scream. It can scarcely make her known. Instead, it mutes her, rubs her out, represses her most authentic presence.

The Tape Recording

Nowadays you can listen to a novel while driving along the Coastal Highway from Los Angeles to San Francisco; nowadays you can sit side by side with your analyst and view edited videotapes of your sessions; in fact, these might subsequently be released for consumption by a much wider public. But the power inherent in the recorded duplication of the human voice is hardly eroded. Indeed, its violent relationship to the written text is mostly neglected, if not outright denied.

A rather peculiar formation of texts published in the 1969 issue of *Les Temps Modernes* envelops the question of violence engendered by a recording device in a heated debate among leading French intellectuals without ever directly addressing the character of its relationship to the written text. The centerpiece around which the debate swivels is a dialogue anonymously submitted to the magazine, published under the title "Dialogue Psychoanalytique." It contains a segment of a visit by A. to his analyst, Dr. X, during which A. displays a tape recorder that he refuses to shut off throughout the entire interchange. In his letter, addressed to one of the members of the editorial committee of *Les Temps Modernes*, A. introduces himself and his text as follows:

Cher C. Me voici échappé de mon asile psychiatrique, évadé d'un troisième étage avec seulement une main cassée—et la police aux trousses. . . . Mais pas si cassée que ça, la main: voir le text ci-joint, qui contient, paraît-il, pas mal de *punch*. . . . Si vous décidez de le publier, il faudrait donner quelques précisions: j'ai 33 ans, je suis entré en analyse chez le Dr. X à l'âge de 14 ans. Il y a eu plusieurs interruptions, mais je n'ai pris la décision de suspendre définitivement, contre l'avis du Dr. X, qu'à l'âge de 28 ans. C'est trois ans après cet arrêt . . . que j'ai proposer au Dr. X la rencontre dont la fin est ici reproduite. Je croyais devoir lui faire part du résultat de mes réflexions . . . sur l'échec de ce qui avait été cette interminable relation analytique.

Dear C. I have escaped from my insane asylum, skipped from a fourth floor window with merely a broken hand—and the police at

my heels. . . . But not as badly as all that, the hand: see the enclosed text, which contains, it seems, a fair amount of punch. . . . If you decide to publish it, you would have to give a few details: I am 33 years old, I entered analysis with Dr. X when I was 14. There were several interruptions, but I took the decision to stop, against Dr. X's advice, only when I was 28. It was three years after having stopped analysis . . . that I proposed to Dr. X the meeting whose end is reproduced herein. I thought I had to share with him the result of my reflections . . . on the failure that this interminable analytic relation had been.²⁰

A. Is quite right when he advertises his text as not lacking punch, which can be demonstrated by countless excerpts similar to the following:

Dr. X.: Je n'ai pas l'habitude de la violence physique.

A.: Comment "la violence physique"?

Dr. X.: C'est une violence que de sortir cet enregistreur maintenant.

A.: Une violence physique? (Étonnement extrême)

Dr. X.: I am not accustomed to physical violence.

A.: What do you mean "physical violence"?

Dr. X.: To take out that tape recorder now is a violent act.

A.: A physical violence? (extreme astonishment)²¹

And yet the discussants, in their argumentation regarding the value of A.'s text, never address the central issue of *violence* as engendered by the refusal of A. to turn the recording device off. As such, the recorder, locked in the "ON" position, becomes a weapon that propels the analyst to intervene by finally calling the police and having his former analysand committed to a mental hospital. Sartre, Pingaud, and Pontalis wrestle with such favorites as "subjectivity" and "reciprocity," and the validity of psychoanalysis as praxis or theory or both. No attempt is made to understand the analyst's hypertrophical reaction to the tape recorder's presence. No understanding is sought about the fact that the patient's refusal to take off his hat or to lie on the couch would hardly have led to a comparably explosive situation.

What is it then about this magnetic strip that is so terrifying and so powerful? The inherent property of recorded speech as conclusive evidence, a property surpassed only by cinematographic recording, is of considerably higher value (e.g., juridically) than evidence presented in writing or by eyewitnesses. The ownership of recorded evidence can enhance the power of its proprietor over those who might be implicated by said evidence rather dramatically. In our case A. was obviously trying to collect evi-

dence about the ineffective or noxious aspects of his analysis and his analyst, concerning which the latter became rather defensive. This comes as no surprise, since in psychotherapy/analysis tape recordings of sessions have traditionally been within the purview of the analyst. Even then, in contrast to written notes, they require explicit permission given by the patient. I heard of a case recently in which a therapist treating a couple with marital difficulties discovered that the husband was clandestinely recording the sessions. This resulted in an angry expulsion of the husband from therapy and a refusal to ever deal with him subsequently, based on the conviction that he was a "sociopath" and therefore untreatable. One wonders whether, here too, the fact of evidence being gathered by a patient was not primarily responsible for the therapist's severe reaction.

It becomes clear that the category of recorded speech is set apart from the written, so much so that the former can become a most powerful weapon in the hands of those who choose to wield it, a method that violates without seeming physically violent. And yet, it may be precisely due to its *physical* attributes that the tape recordings constitute a "higher" sort of evidence, one which, when obtained clandestinely, represents a violation of the subject's constitutional rights. Murray Alpert, a neuroscientist and pioneer in the scientific use of the recorded voice for purposes of assessing psychopathology, states quite clearly in a 1966 paper: "Since the information on a tape recording can be described *physically*, the use of tapes may make it possible to isolate and characterize the cues which subserve clinical impressions."²² He implies that whatever physical data can be gleaned from written information (e.g., the frequency of certain words, or, in handwritten material, the amount of graphite used, the depth of impressions, etc.) are of inferior status to attributes belonging to the recorded voice, such as frequency, pitch, amplitude, pause duration, and their more complicated derivatives.

The running motor of the recording machine, empowered by a seemingly independent source—electricity—implies another phenomenon, which could account for the analyst's anxiety, clearly a significant component of his rebuttal. The simultaneous objectification of voice, establishing a connection to an imaginary public, an imaginary science, engulfs each word the very instant it is being uttered with a shroud of publicity. Ownership of the floating utterance, one that has not settled into a record other than memory, or the joint ownership of dialogue, is abolished once a metallic ear is set up within hearing distance. Magnetic tapes then constitute a sort of memory that is disturbingly unequal to what is remembered. The speaker loses out vis-à-vis his recorded voice; he cannot dub it later with his personal truth, his recollection of what was said. He is maimed

by temporality, whereas the tape recording remains perdurable across time, immune to intentional omission or to tamperings of the unconscious. It is therefore not simply the immediate insertion of a public, but also the establishment of a timeless dialogue, along with the ineffaceable signature of voice, that amounts to this penetrating class of evidence and causes high anxiety in those accused of unspoken crimes. In this context, A.'s capricious cynicism and the hostility with which he maneuvers his recording device become readily apparent when he retorts to the analyst's nth demand to disengage the device with: "Mais mon enregistreur n'est pas une queue, vous savez! C'est un auditeur qui nous écoute avec beaucoup de bienveillance" (But my tape recorder is not a tail (a penis), you know! It is a listener who listens to us with a great deal of benevolence/surveillance).²³ Here he invokes the machine as metaphor, from phallus to benevolent listener, split-off part-objects of the perpetrator/patient, and uses them in his attempt to topple the analyst's throne, to debase the production of psychoanalytic knowledge.

None of the three critics in *Les Temps Modernes* seemed interested in the relationship of the recorded voice to the written text, although they debated rather virulently whether there was any value to publishing the latter at all. This, however, pertains to our concerns in this essay, that is, whether the significance of the written text can be enhanced by reference to the recorded voice, aside from the assertion of the "superior" value of recordings for purposes of *evidence*. In "Dialogue psychoanalytique" the recorded voice appears only as a hypothesis, only as a threatened presence, an appearance relegated into the future, the anticipated doubling of the current dialogue. This reduplication, while assumed to exist concurrently, cannot technically be evoked without interfering with the process of recording itself. Most tape recorders cannot record and replay at once, and if they could, they would simply be re-recording the recorded echo of what is spoken and thereby create a reverberating sound, like the sound effected by delayed feedback in electronically amplified instruments. Therefore tape recorders can either passively attend to a conversation, as in our case, much like a cocked gun in the hands of a burglar (again the phallic metaphor!), or become protagonists in their own right, as in the final scene of Sartre's *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*. There the voice of Frantz remains the sole presence on an otherwise stark empty stage, announcing the end of the world: "Peut-être n'y aurait-il plus des siècles après le notre. Peut-être qu'une bombe aura soufflé les lumières. Tout sera mort: les yeux, les juges, le temps. Nuit" (Maybe there will be no more centuries after ours. Maybe a bomb will have extinguished all lights. Everything will be dead: the eyes, the judges, the times. Night).²⁴

Here the recorded voice announces an entirely different category of presence, one that transcends life but also obliterates breath, a material, metallic aliveness, the essence of a person, beyond his/her demise. No written text can surpass the extent of vivification inherent in the recorded voice, a perfect accoutrement for mausoleums, a vehicle for grief surpassing even the most vivid likenesses in its efficiency at reconstructing an image of the dead person. Presence in recorded voice is principally more ambiguous than in any other vehicle of narrative—film or written text—because the particular visibility of these mediums affirms at once the absence of the subject, whereas audio recordings merely distance the voice from its producer, without referring to his or her whereabouts. In fact, a more successful duplication or multiplication of presence becomes possible once technical difficulties such as distortion have been mastered. A recorded voice emanating from offstage is at once the most authentic representation of its author and a challenge to authenticity itself, an appropriation of space more complete and more indubitably representative than that available through any other medium. Examples of composers and performers using their own tape-recorded voices as musical instruments, a technique particularly evident in the work of Laurie Anderson, achieve a rather striking extension of self, a temporal and spatial expansion not only of abstracted sound, but of indisputably authentic utterance, of voice.

And yet, as one will commonly remark when listening to one's own recorded voice, a rather dramatic sense of alienation, of *méconnaissance*, accompanies such an experience. This failure of a person to identify with his voice on even the finest recordings is a physiological phenomenon, based on our mode of hearing our own spoken voice as primarily mediated through the bony structures of the head rather than the airspace between our ears and our mouth, which transports the sounds of our voices to others. Self-authentication fails when using the recorded voice as mirror, whereas it functions quite perfectly for purposes of objective representation of self to others. However, even there we must distinguish between familiar, i.e., recognizable voices, and those heard for the first time. It is clear that familiarity is a *conditio sine qua non* toward assuring the emblematic quality of human voice.

The Insult

He speaks plain cannon fire, and smoke and bounce,
He gives the bastinado with his tongue:
Our ears are cudgell'd, not a word of his

But buffets better than a fist of France.
 Zounds! I was never so bethumped with words,
 Since I first call'd my brother's father dad.
 Shakespeare, *King John*, Act 2, Scene 1

Thornton Wilder's "On the stage is always now" already sets the stage for a radical coexistence between audience and spoken text. Drama is then the most unmediated form of narration, invoking a gamut of audience participation that ranges from a distanced, passive boredom, through "free-floating attention" (Freud), to captivation and ultimately a kind of perplexity, a "Betroffenheit" (stemming from the German "betroffen," meaning caught, befallen, and concerned all at once). It is the latter moment that appears as a suitably extreme form of participation to once more illuminate the startling relationship between the spoken voice and the "clinical" text.

Peter Handke's 1965 play *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (Insulting the Audience) offers possibly the most fitting demonstration of said perplexity, and the most overt one as well. It is an all-out effort to displace the audience from their yawning recess in the obscure distance beyond the stage. Two kinds of instructions are set as a preface to the main spoken text: it is suggested that the actors immerse themselves in a series of audiovisual events that include church litanies, soccer cheers, slogans shouted at political rallies, interruptions of speakers at debates, the simultaneous translations at the United Nations, "Tell Me" by the Rolling Stones, the mockery of monkeys, and the spitting of llamas at the zoo. Further, there are three pages of stage directions in the following vein:

Wenn die Besucher den für sie bestimmten Raum betreten, erwartet sie die bekannte Stimmung vor dem Beginn eines Stückes. Vielleicht ist hinter dem geschlossenen Vorhang sogar das Geräusch von irgendwelchen Gegenständen zu hören, die den Besuchern das Verschieben und Zurechtrücken von Kulissen vortäuschen. . . . Auch im Zuschauerraum ist für gewohnte Theaterstimmung zu sorgen. . . . Sind die Türen geschlossen und ist das Licht allmählich erloschen, so wird es auch hinter dem Vorhang allmählich still. . . . Die Bühne ist leer. Während sie (die vier Sprecher) in den Vordergrund kommen, . . . wird es wieder hell, auf der Bühne und im Zuschauerraum. . . . Sie richten die Worte, die sie sprechen keinesfalls an die Zuhörer. Das Publikum darf noch keinesfalls gemeint sein.

As the audience enters the space assigned to them, they are encountered by the familiar ambiance that precedes the beginning of a play. Quite possibly one can hear from behind the closed curtain sounds

simulating movement and adjustment of props. . . . in the orchestra too one should instill the usual theatre ambiance. . . . Once the doors are closed and the lights lowered, the sounds from behind the curtain too diminish gradually. The stage is empty. As they (the four speakers) advance to the foreground, . . . the light comes on again, both on stage and in the orchestra. . . . They aim the words that they speak most definitely not at the audience. The audience can definitely not be meant as yet.²⁵

Then, after a brief interchange of curses, directed at no one, mumbled in random sequence, the actors begin to look at their audience, yet not at anyone specifically, and begin to speak *to* them.

Sie sind willkommen.	You are welcome.
Dieses Stück ist eine Vorrede.	This piece is a prologue.
	. . .
Sie schauen uns nicht zu.	You are not looking on.
Sie schauen uns an.	You are looking at us.
	. . .
Sie hören uns nicht zu.	You are not listening to us.
Sie hören uns an.	You are hearing us out.
	. . .
Sie werden von einem Ort zu verschiedenen Orten gehen.	You are about to go from one place to different places.
Zuvor aber werden sie noch beschimpft werden, weil auch das Beschimpfen eine Art ist mit ihnen zu reden.	But first you will be insulted, since insulting too is a way of speaking to you.
Indem wir beschimpfen können wir unmittelbar werden.	By insulting you we can become immediate.
Wir können einen Funken überspringen lassen.	We can make a spark spring over.
Wir können den Spielraum zerstören. Wir können eine Wand niederreißen.	We can destroy the playroom [i.e., the elbowroom]
Wir können sie beachten.	We can tear down a wall.
	We can notice you. ²⁶

These excerpts of the Handke play contain the two decisive moments that amount to the intended uprooting of the audience. First, there is a shift from the prefatory casualness of aimless insulting to the actors'

direct speech to the audience; second, and more important, there is the moment when the actors announce their intent to insult the audience. This, they feel, will add the extravagant dimension of *immediacy*, it will make sparks fly, elbowroom shrivel, walls crumble, until finally they will be able to notice their audience, to consider and esteem them, quite possibly to become one with them. Is this immediacy simply Wilder's contemporaneity, a rather obvious discovery when clutching a ticket stub, or is it indeed a revelation of unmediated presence? Could Handke really have aimed at surpassing even Peter Brook's mythological approximation of "The Immediate Theatre" as he describes it in his book *The Empty Space*?

All is not movement, all is not destruction, all is not restlessness. There are pillars of affirmation. Those are the moments of achievement which do occur, suddenly, anywhere: the performance, the occasions when collectively a total experience, a total theatre of play and spectator makes nonsense of any divisions like Deadly, Rough, and Holy. At those rare moments, the theatre of joy, of celebration, the theatre of exploration, the theatre of shared meaning, the living theatre, are one.²⁷

Quite possibly so. Handke's piece appears now, with hindsight, as a metapsychological critique of Brook's theater, even though it predated its formulation and undermined its possibilities. The audience is played with; the audience—not the actors, not the text—becomes the subject of the play, as it is taken on a roller-coaster ride on varying levels of experience and participation. If this is indeed so, it might imply that the insult contains an exquisitely more suitable potential to perplex and then to envelop the audience than that inherent in the touch, the conversation, the throwing of kisses or roses. Handke's insults engulf the audience in its entirety; no individual spectator is affected directly, picked out, dragged on stage, kissed, sat on, or insulted. "Sie sind keine Einzahl, sie sind eine Mehrzahl von Personen" (You are not singularly, you are plurally people).²⁸ Any act of severance would be nothing but a feast for the remaining audience. After merely a moment of tension—Will I be next?—the afflicted become part of the play and the rest can recline again comfortably. But here anyone and everyone is constantly "meant" and "addressed;" no one is spared. The audience is amalgamated and dissolved at once. Again, this is not achieved simply by exhortation, or subtle persuasion, or a dramatic imploration.

Ihr wart die geborenen Schauspieler. Euch steckte die Freude am Spielen im Blut, ihr Schlächter, ihr Tollhäusler, ihr Mitläufer, ihr ewig

Gestrigen, ihr Herdentiere, ihr Laffen, ihr Miststücke, ihr Volksfremden, ihr Gesinnungslumpen.

You were born actors. The joy of acting (playing) was in your blood, you butchers, you lunatics, you underlings, you who are stuck in the past, you herd of animals, you dandies, you filth, you foreign breed, amoral pack.²⁹

All this appears infinitely more immediate than any sales pitch or sermon could. Of course, many a preacher will call his congregation all kinds of names, but always in the name of a higher authority and never unconditionally. The parishioner's presence in church is already a condition for being absolved from all potential curses that might befall him, as is a pious life-style outside the church. For Handke's audience their presence in the theater as audience is the one and only condition for being insulted. It is the demasking of this condition by the so-called actors as spokespeople for the playwright that justifies their being insulted. Their only recourse is leaving the theater, and even then they will already have implicated themselves simply by having gone there.

In their particularly undeserved and unrewarding position, Handke's audience finds itself in nothing other than an excessively accentuated condition of being insulted. When examining this condition from a psychological vantage point, more profound clues as to its particular effectiveness in rendering a subject "subjected," "meant," or "affected" might emerge. Cursing at someone (or something) is said to be in linear derivation from a child's frustrated crying if deprived of a desired object. Once language sets in to supply words as carriers for frustration and anger in lieu of inarticulate tears and cries, the child formulates curses and expletive phrases geared toward affecting its subject as if he/she were being hit physically. M. F. Ashley Montagu makes this point in an early paper:

The verbal assault of swearing would appear to be a substitute form of physical assault. By knocking the enemy about, so to speak, in scurrilous language, by applying all the degrading epithets of which one can think, he is brought down, in imagination at least, to that condition in which in reality one would like to see him.³⁰

Yet other than making this claim and perseverating on the theme of the cathartic nature of swearing, Montagu does not offer an explanation as to why this should be possible. To rephrase this question, how can words become substitutes for physical assaults and affect the victim as if he were actually hit or even wounded?

For the answer we must take an excursion into the theories concern-

ing magical operations; and since childhood is the most magical of ages, the foundation to its understanding is set there. According to Jean Piaget, the seminal theoretician and observer of childhood development and behavior, the first utterances of children can be described as "egocentric speech." In it words are virtually omnipotent and relate to magical thinking. The child feels that it can twist reality by manipulating the word, it feels that nature exists as in its own order of ideas. It follows then that words can be fused with objects and their evocation will be seen as having a direct, unmediated effect on the object. To say "I want you to die" equals "You are dead" and both might mean the actual death of the object in the mind of the child making these statements. It is interesting that Raymond Hollander, in an important paper on "Compulsive Cursing,"³¹ considers the magical power of curse words, but only through their ability to "mobilize the most profound emotion" by virtue of being "confused with the thing (itself)" and thus standing for "mountains of meaning." He fails to consider the interpersonal dimension of cursing, which relies on the corresponding readiness of the victim to engage in the magic of this process, thereby providing the social justification for curses as effective carriers of rage and frustration. Childish delusions of omnipotence alone would certainly not be an explanation of cursing among adults, where the social conventions of magic are integrated as a hidden yet powerful substratum of the cultural experience.

Magic has long been identified as an essential quality of *spoken* language, be that in childhood, "primitive" societies, or the modern world. Authors such as Ogden and Richards,³² Malinowski,³³ and, more recently, Izutsu,³⁴ have established its firm place in any modern theory of language. Such utterances as spells, threats, and invocations, by priests and laity of all sorts, have been used as keys in the elucidation of the magical power of spoken words. Even the gods, whose words were pure magic, were not immune to angry threats and insults, as evidenced by the "sorcerers of ancient Egypt, [who,] not content to prostrate [themselves] before the high divinities humbly imploring their aid, often sought instead to prevail upon them by threats and intimidation."³⁵ Cursing gods and cursing priests gave rise, in declining omnipotence, to quotidian swearing with its sizable remnant of magical thinking, lacking which neither the curser nor the cursed would be affected by the power of the interchange.

Parallel to anthropologico-linguistic efforts, psychoanalysis has attempted to approach the root of this matter by ascribing a genealogy to adult swearing based on psychosexual antecedents in childhood. Early psychoanalysts beginning with Freud emphasized the sexual and "perverted" nature of insults, rather than their aggressive elements, the latter

merely being in the service of sexual impulses. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud states that "by the utterance of the obscene words it compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or the procedure in question and shows her that the assailant is himself imagining it."³⁶ This *evocative* quality of obscene language is taken one step further by Sandor Ferenczi, who assumes "that these words contain in themselves the power to force upon the listener a *regressive-hallucinatory stimulation of memory pictures*."³⁷ Here the evocative, stimulating power is presented as divorced and independent of any affective accompaniments embodied, for instance, in vocal emphasis and gesture.

One is tempted to settle for this as an explanatory model for the effectiveness of word-magic. But one would have to extend this beyond the mere activation of memory images suggesting sexual excitement. The activation would probably include a distinct mode of perception (as suggested by Ferenczi's use of the word *hallucinatory*) in order to account for the degree of intrusion into current reality testing. Whether this activation is due to a quality pertaining to the word itself, disregarding the context of the utterance, remains highly questionable. In fact, ritualistic use of evocations (or invectives) has always been marked by characteristic nonverbal signs, such as chants, masks, dances, etc. This brings us back to the vocal yet nonverbal utterance, the shout, as an instrument of magic, even when it lacks any connotative significance.

Robert Graves' story "The Shout"³⁸ is a most powerful illustration of this phenomenon. The narrative is set during a cricket game on the grounds of an asylum for the mentally ill. A patient by the name of Crossley, "the most intelligent man in the asylum," joins the narrator in the scoring box at the game and the two are quickly engaged in conversation. Crossley tells the story of a strange man named Charles who was listening to a sermon when children, who had crept up behind a cromlech, suddenly shouted in his ears and then burst into laughter over their prank. Mr. Charles "was startled into anger; he opened his mouth as if he were about to curse them, and bared his teeth to the gums." Later Mr. Charles expresses his relief for not having shouted back. When questioned about that, he says: "If I had shouted, my shout would have either killed them outright or sent them mad." His statement naturally arouses interest, but when asked to display his talent, he retorts: "It is not only children who would be hurt by my shout. Men can be sent raving mad by it; the strongest, even, would be flung to the ground. It is a magic shout that I learned from the chief devil in the Northern Territory." Upon being urged to give a taste of this magic, he adds: "My shout is not a matter of tone or

vibration but something not to be explained. It is a shout of pure evil, and there is no fixed place for it on the scale. It may take any note. It is pure terror, . . .” And indeed, as his “face . . . hardened to a rough stone mask, dead white at first, and then flushing outwards from the cheek bones red and redder, and at last as black, as if he were about to choke,” he uttered a shout that devastated everything around.

Epilogue

Once the written page was a hide, a skin spread out to dry under the sun, to cover hollow barks for drumming, a dead piece of parchment for painless tattoos. The animal hide, a flattened, translucent shell of life, remains as elastic as ever. The space behind the page might still be most effectively imagined as a perpetual source of pulsation, of jabbing and kicking, of shoving and tugging, even when such demonstrations of life are seemingly swallowed by the crevices of the book. The patient would have to be sought and pictured in such a space if he is indeed to be enveloped by the page and not merely grazed by it. There she would yell and shout obscenities, be heard, be known, impact and impale. Each scream would come bulging through the paper, fistlike, poking, though always dulled. An insult would quiver on the page, would smell faintly of live cinders, though not enough to wrinkle the nose. A scream would never cut through, nor would an insult ever burn its way through the page to its targets. They would stay muzzled, choked by their own efforts, lacking witness to their pain and rage.

Those who purport to bear witness, the clinicians who cannot bear the loneliness of their tasks, seek to remove themselves from the presence of uttered pain. Ostensibly they insert the page to objectify their experiences, but actually they use it as a shield, to fend off the blinding intensity of the patient's utterance and to include it among those methodical tricks that assure separateness and foster transference. In their claim to aid future generations of patients by spreading the word from their clinics, they beg the fact that their writings serve more to anchor themselves in a world of truth than do anything for their patients. These remain forever enshrouded by their analysts' texts, mystified by the words and mythological figures to the masses of unanalyzed. Dora and Little Hans are the inverse epigones of psychoanalysis. By lending their texts to their analyst, they were stripped of their hides and became nameless, contorted bodies, bound by the neuroses of desire. With Dora and Little Hans, Freud established the *patient* as the singular locus for the production of the Unconscious, an explosive site limned by the setting and

ultimately defused by the clinical text.

Is there then no memory of what is covered by the page? Is the space circumscribed by the text contained thereby and marked as irretrievable, therefore eternal? After being in the presence of screaming or insulting, the attempt to craft a text for it is both a way of betraying its memory and a method of cherishing it by creating its very own mausoleum etched on the page. No trick, not even sneaking a microphone behind this white curtain, will change its nature, will make of it a weeping, bleeding veronica, an authentic image of pathos. Instead, the text continues to limp along in its incompleteness, the most appropriate monument to the memory of presence, the abstraction of voice from its speaker.

Notes

- 1 Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924–34), 5:163–64. The translation is from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), 8:7–8.
- 2 Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5:164. Translation, *Standard Edition*, 8:8.
- 3 Heinz Kohut, title of lecture given at the meeting of the German Psychoanalytic Association in Berlin on 10 October 1970, cited from *The Search for the Self*, vol. 2 in *Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut* (New York: International University Presses, 1978).
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 556.
- 5 Wilhelm Reich, *Character-analysis*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1949).
- 6 Richard Müller-Freienfels, *Philosophie der Individualität* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1923), p. 81.
- 7 My translation.
- 8 Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965), pp. 27ff.
- 9 *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), Book II, p. 31.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 11 Virgil, *The Aeneid*, book 2, verse 774, quoted by Arthur Schopenhauer in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 3 of *Samtliche Werke*, ed. Arthur Hubscher (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1966), p. 320.
- 12 Schopenhauer, *Die Welt*, pp. 319ff.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 321.
- 14 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 4–5.
- 15 Stanislaw Przybyszewski, cited in Henning Bock, “Farbe als Ausdruck: Zur Deutung von Bildern Edvard Munchs,” in *Edvard Munch—Forschungen—Thesen*, ed. Henning Bock and G. Busch (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1973).
- 16 The inscription is cited in Arne Eggum, *Edvard Munch—Painting, Sketches, and Studies* (New York: Clarkson and Potter, 1984).
- 17 *The Babylonian Talmud*, trans. I. Epstein and Seder Nashim, (London: The Soucius

- Press, 1936), vol. 2, Tractate Ketubboth, 11a.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 72a.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 72b.
- 20 A., “Dialogue psychoanalytique,” *Les Temps Modernes* 24 (1969), pp. 1812ff.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 M. Alpert, L. J. Hekimian, and W. A. Frosch, “Evaluation of Treatment with Recorded Interviews” *Psychiatry* 122 (1966), pp. 1258–64.
- 23 A., “Dialogue psychoanalytique,” p. 1825.
- 24 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les sequestrés d’Altona* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 222ff.
- 25 Peter Handke, *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), pp. 11ff. The translation is mine.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 27 Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 135.
- 28 Handke, *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, p. 21.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 30 M. F. Ashley Montagu, “On the Physiology and Psychology of Swearing” *Psychiatry* 5 (1942), pp. 189–202. This citation is from p. 195.
- 31 Raymond Hollander, “Compulsive Cursing: An Approach to Factors in its Genesis, Development, and Pathology,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 34 (1960), pp. 599–622.
- 32 C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1946), pp. 24–47.
- 33 Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages,” in Ogden and Richards, *Meaning*, pp. 296–336.
- 34 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Language and Magic* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Philological Studies, 1956).
- 35 H. Grapow, “Bedrohungen” [Threats], *Agyptologische Zeitschrift* (1911), cited in Izutsu, *Language and Magic*, p. 17.
- 36 Sigmund Freud, “Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious” (1905), in *Standard Edition*, 8:98ff.
- 37 Sandor Ferenczi, “On Obscene Words,” in *Sex in Psychoanalysis* (1916), paraphrased by Edmund Bergler in “Obscene Words,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 5 (1936), pp. 226ff., my italics.
- 38 Robert Graves, “The Shout,” in *Occupation: Writer* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1950), pp. 71–91.