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Gibberish, Gobbledygook

At times, speech runs over itself. Words twist and tense under pressure, tripped up by inertia, or with urgency, perverted by nervous shaking or under the spell of secret pleasures, to produce slippages, ruptures, and even nonsensical outpourings. These trouble the trajectories of proper speech, to unsettle or complicate their meanings.

Voice is mostly constrained to the arena of communication, relegating the nonsensical to a periphery. At the same time, speech is to be appreciated as a movement that oscillates between sense and nonsense, between semantic voicing and its gibberish counterpart, each supplying the force of expression with material and drive. It is my view that gibberish, in being peripheral to voice proper, occupies a rather central position within the oral imaginary. Might we hear in the nonsensical a manifestation of an oral poetics underlying speech in general? Is not the "noise" surrounding verbal articulations a sort of raw matter supporting rather than undermining our faculty of speech? As Jean-Jacques Lecercle posits in his work on nonsense, or *délire*, "the abstraction of language is based on the material expression of oral drives," suggesting that language functions according to an inherent "corporeality" that is always prone to heightened expressivity, and madness.[1]

Uniqueness

The work of Adriana Cavarero provides a productive view onto the relations between sense and nonsense, speech and vocality, and what she refers to as "the saying and the said." This is supported by a critique of the philosophical legacies, stemming from the Greek concept of logos, that have withdrawn "the voice" from rational thought—a "logos" wherein only "the semantic counts."[2] Such legacies for Cavarero have ultimately relegated the primary phonation of voice to the periphery.

> By capturing the phone in the system of signification, philosophy not only makes a primacy of the voice with respect to speech all but inconceivable; it also refuses to concede to the vocal any value that would be independent of the semantic. Reduced to an acoustic signifier, the voice depends on the signified.[3]

The challenge posed to such philosophical thinking aims to ultimately return us to an appreciation of voice beyond the strictly semantic, encouraging a deeper vocalic listening and discursive view. Accordingly, voice is mapped as an extremely rich and essential materiality whose sounding nature may support the semantic, yet importantly by remaining a force of corporeal presence, one leading out to a resonance of relation "to which singular voices are called."[4] Voice, in other words, is the very "uniqueness of being" that affords, in its recognition, the promise of joining together. "The voice, indeed, does not mask . . . It communicates the uniqueness of the one who emits it, and can be recognized by those to whom one speaks."[5] Voice is thus inextricably tied to identity, as the uniqueness that supports one in *having* subjectivity.

Cavarero's argument, while supplying a rich opportunity for recuperating "voice" as a primary sounding, as a process that need not arrive at the semantic, seems to also suggest voice as a "natural" property of the individual obfuscated by the directives of the rational and the reasoned. I would question whether her embrace of the "truthfulness" of voice, as that which gives way to our unique presence, also strips away the more playful and performative dimensions voice comes to wield. It is my argument that voice is neither fundamentally rational and reasoned *nor* primarily sounded and unique. The enactments of speech rather draw upon *and* debate with the semantic, finding support from the possibilities revealed when we open our mouths. In short, I'm interested in how the uniqueness of voice is often revealed when we play with words, impersonate others, parade the heterogeneity of our identity—that is, by enjoying the oral imaginary, which teaches us how to elaborate the spoken by way of all sorts of nonsense.

The relation of sense and nonsense, of the semantic and the sounded, is to be appreciated as the very fabric of voice, and it is the mouth's ability to flex and turn, resonate and stumble, appropriate and sample, which continually reminds us of the potentiality promulgated in being an oral body.

Poetry

The legacy and practice of sound poetry gives us extremely dramatic demonstrations of this potentiality. Intentionally aimed at overwhelming the supposed gap between language and body, words and their breath, sound

poetry can be heard as a vital catalog of the choreographies of the mouth, and all the micro-modalities I'm tracing here. Its project, from text composition to *poésie sonore*, evidences how sound and sense intermesh, conflict, and ignite their operative dynamics, giving way to a voice in tension. As Velimir Khlebnikov wrote in 1920:

> What about spells and incantations, what we call magic words, the sacred language of paganism, words like "shagadam, magadam, vigadam, pitz, patz, patzu"—they are rows of mere syllables that the intellect can make no sense of, and they form a kind of beyonsense language in folk speech. Nevertheless an enormous power over mankind is attributed to these incomprehensible words and magic spells, and direct influence upon the fate of man. They contain powerful magic.

Khlebnikov's ideas of the "beyonsense" of language seek to recapture a primary voice, a "folk speech" from which words are no longer purely rational, but rather may perform as magical entities. As he further elaborates:

> Its strange wisdom may be broken down into the truths contained in separate sounds: *sh*, *m*, *v*, etc. We do not yet understand these sounds. We confess that honestly. But there is no doubt that these sound sequences constitute a series of universal truths passing before the predawn of our soul. If we think of the soul as split between the government of intellect and a stormy population of feelings, then incantations and beyonsense language are appeals over the head of the government straight to the population of feelings, a direct cry to the predawn of the soul or a supreme example of the rule of the masses in the life of language and intellect, a lawful device reserved for rare occasions.[6]

Khlebnikov's theories of language and the spoken parallel much of Cavarero's understanding of voice as a primary sounding, and the instantiation of individual uniqueness. Khlebnikov, in turn, sees in the dominance of Western logic an eclipse of the sounded, and what we might refer to as "the poetical." Much of sound poetry throughout the twentieth century adopts this conceptual position, seeking out a "lost voice" of the raw and the lyrical, a voice caught in the rather imperial directive of reasonable speech.

I'm interested to follow these appeals to the "predawn of the soul" and how voice figures on this horizon of recuperated words specifically through a reshaping of linguistic matter. Such work brings us closer to the mouth, and deeper into the performativities of the oral. It also evidences the voice as precisely a tussle between sense and nonsense, revealing the uniqueness of the individual as a figure shaped by the pressures of proper speech, as well as the opportunities found in *not knowing*—in the gobbledygook of experimental orality.

Ur

Cavarero's thinking finds expression in much of the work of sound poetry, whose critical relation to language is most often aimed at overcoming the explicitly narrow confines to which vocality is held. As in Khlebnikov's work, the "reign of the semantic" is understood to delimit the full potentiality at the center of voicing.

With Kurt Schwitters' *Sonate in Urlauten* ("Sonata in primeval sounds") or *Ursonate* (a poem written in response to Raoul Hausmann's phonetic poem from 1918, which starts with the line "fmsbwtözäu"), such articulations find particular form, whereby each vocable trespasses the scene of signification.

Structured as a traditional sonata with four movements, *Ursonate*, which between 1921 and 1932 saw countless revisions and additions, takes the listener through eccentric twists and turns of speech formed around a repetition of consonant and vowel sounds as seen in these first lines:

> dll rrrrrr beeeee bö,
> dll rrrrrr beeeee bö fümms bö,
> rrrrrr beeeee bö fümms bö wö,
> beeeee bö fümms bö wö tää,
> bö fümms bö wö tää zää,
> fümms bö wö tää zää Uu:[7]

In parts of the work, a series of articulations unfold that with each utterance adds and subtracts from the previous line, operating according to what Renato Barilli terms "electrolysis" where "the material of expression freed of semantic adhesives (lexemes and morphemes), is pronounced letter by letter, each of its various minimal components exploding in the acoustical space."[8] Thus we hear a slow deterioration of language whose pronunciation aims to formulate a new type of signification akin to that of glossolalia. Theorized by Michel de Certeau as "the beginnings of speech"—that primary voicing that punctures the mechanics of meaning making and the "institution of speech"—glossolalia is figured as a composite of the pre- and the postlinguistic: "Every glossolalia combines something prelinguistic, related to a silent origin or to the 'attack' of the spoken word, and something postlinguistic, made from the excesses, the overflows, and the wastes of language."[9]

A *speaking in tongues*, glossolalia suggests many aspects sound poetry comes to embody. From notions of the "holiest refuge" (Hugo Ball) to primitive voicing, or what Raoul Hausmann calls "mega-mneme" (great memory) at the deep center of voice, sound poetry mimics and mines glossolalia as an oral reservoir specifically bridging the pre- and postlinguistic—that is, the central origin *and* enveloping edge of language.[10] *Ursonate* attempts

to return us to such a primordial form of speech, unearthing an imagined enunciation and unsettling what passes as language.

Gibberish may be heard as the instantiation of the particular pleasures of having words in the mouth, and all the excitations of self-sounding: to feel the passing of breath as it rises up from within to fill the throat and mouth, conditioned and contoured by the larynx, the muscular force of the tongue moving back and forth, to the final drop onto the lips, as sudden energy flows over to reverberate behind the ears, along the skin, and within the environment around. All such movements underscore the voice as an assemblage of signification *and* the corporeal, reminding of the material poetics of language.

Semiotic

Importantly, Certeau attempts to salvage glossolalia from "interpretations" that locate this speech back into the folds of meaning, and that ultimately hear within the broken syllables secret meanings. "Whereas glossolalia postulates that somewhere there is speech, interpretation supposes that *somewhere there must be meaning*."[11] Rather than recover meaning in glossolalia to circumscribe the sounding body, Certeau seeks, as with Cavarero, to underscore the tension such utterances pose to language—as pleasures of prelinguistic mouth movements that unsettle the contours of meaning to suggest a project for a postlinguistic future. *Ursonate*, and sound poetics in general, can be appreciated to draw upon glossolalia as an imaginary center—a linguistic unconscious—to refigure speech according to primary utterance.[12]

Such views find support in Julia Kristeva's work on the semiotic. Kristeva's theoretical construct of the semiotic, outlined in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, aims to capture "the drive" behind language and "the symbolic."[13] Poetic language is understood as the force of such drive, a transgression onto the territory of the symbolic; it enacts a certain unsettling of linguistic structures, and the inscriptions of the symbolic, to give way to what I might call "the wild." Importantly as Kristeva suggests, poetic language (*and the wild imagination*) performs by "imitating" the positing of meaning. In other words, by working within and alongside the operations of the symbolic, poetic language "mimes" the functionalities of meaning production; it necessarily *parades* as language while overflowing, through heterogeneous practices, the borders of signification.

Following Kristeva's view, it is clear that sound poetry, as gibberish stretching the mouth, aims for the operations of language, of the symbolic, by explicitly tracing over it, breathing into it, spitting on it, and pulling it apart. In doing so, it pries open a gap on the terrain of signification; it speaks through the oral imaginary, to rescue a disappeared voice.

Brute

The strategies of Schwitters, and others such as Hugo Ball, find elaboration in the developments of Lettrism (Isidore Isou) and Ultra-Lettrism (François Dufrêne, Gil J. Wolman), as well as in Henri Chopin's *poésie sonore*. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, sound poetry would continue to create works that occupy the peripheries of language, speaking over and under the word and extending the oral as an extreme dimension, a highly elastic existential void. For example, François Dufrêne's Ultra-Lettrist works eliminate the remaining particles of language in favor of a corporeal, spasmodic performance, where noise is drawn out of the mouth through an exaggerated communicational thrust. His *Triptycrirythme* from 1966, for example, consists of guttural retching, recorded and layered to draw forward a body of phlegmatic intensity. The work is a voyage into the throat, an oral cacophony captured on the way in and out of the body. It wheezes, it spits, it moans and pants, it chokes, forcing out the movements of the vocalic mechanism into a reverberant noisescape.

In this regard, sound poetry must be emphasized as a cultural project that radically highlights the paralinguistic and paragrammatic arena I'm examining throughout this study. Its extensive dedication to unlocking the central vitality of the spoken, of all oral phenomena, provides a catalog for surveying the tensions of the mouth: sound poetry's conscious attempt to reinvent the operations of speaking, echoing the profound poetics of the glossolalic, evidences the intensity of the sounded body.

Paralleling Dufrêne's phlegmatic approach, the works of Gil J. Wolman equally leave behind the word and the letter in favor of hyperexpressions focusing on breath. His *La Mémoire* (under his general concept of Mégapneumes) from 1967 captures the artist exhaling and inhaling into a microphone to a point of tactile abrasiveness. The single drawn breath comes to reveal the individual body moving in and out of itself—a wheezing vessel full of animating energies that also exalts a primary poetical matter, that of the breath behind every utterance. As Dufrêne would state of Wolman in 1965: "the BREATH alone founds the poem—rhythm and outcry, that cry, content contained, until now, of the poem: of joy, of love, of anguish, of horror, of hate, but a cry."[14] This essential, anguishing matter exemplifies sound poetry's return to primary origins, breaking down language through an elaboration of oral actions. As Bachelard states, "In its simple, natural, primitive form, far from any aesthetic ambition or any metaphysics, poetry is an exhalation of joy, the outward expression of the joy of breathing."[15]

Sound poetry's brute vocalizations bring forward an unsteady and evocative weave between language and music, the poetic and the sonic, to open up a dynamic audibility lodged within the physicality of voicing. Twaddle, balderdash, hogwash, bunkum, and other acts of general gibberish

thus find their point of optimal cultural reference in sound poetry. Out of the mouth comes an assemblage of paralinguistic expressions, forcing sense and sound into tense confrontation. The realignment of voice and its signifying energies, as an elemental force of giving presence and of sharing in worldly vibrancy, renders the mouth a dramatic organ: a mouth tensed by multiple drives, imaginaries, memories, and linguistic structures. The force of gibberish, as I'm following here, can be heard as the base of all utterance: a ground upon which speech is constructed, wielded, or exercised, as well as exploded.

Noise

Gibberish delivers a break onto coherence, and the communicative act. It necessarily ruptures the message, but it does so by letting in what I might call the *messy base of wording*: the noise *underneath* speech. Gibberish captures that foundational static out of which wording arises. As Michel Serres suggests, the background noise of the world may subsume human speech in its volume while also supporting the emergence of form—out of the noise, that primary babel, new language may appear.[16] Accordingly, it is my view that gibberish is an education onto the relation of sound to speech, sense to nonsense; it reminds of the primary phonetic noise by which we learn to articulate, and from which we might draw from again, in acts of parody, poetry, romance, or storytelling, as well as through the simple pleasures of a disordered semantic.

Here I'd like to bring into consideration Charlie Chaplin's use of gibberish in the film *The Great Dictator*. Produced in 1940 as a critical parody of Hitler, and the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, Chaplin uses the voice as a primary vehicle for staging the brutal absurdity of the dictator's ideological views. This appears immediately in the opening scene, where the first lines spoken by the dictator (as well as by Chaplin, as this was his first talking film) wields an unforgettable force of effusive gibberish:

> Democrazie schtunk! Liberty schtunk! Freisprechen schtunk![17]

Chaplin's nonsensical enactments throughout the film highlight language as a material susceptible to mutation, appropriation, and poetical transfiguration that no less delivers potent meaning. Such oral moves on the part of Chaplin reveal to what degree gibberish may perform to supply the thrust of speech with the power of critique.

Under the pull of gibberish, language appears as raw material, shaped and reshaped by the movements of the oral cavity, the guttural push of the diaphragm, and all the wet viscosity of tongue and fleshy cheeks. Words

reveal their inherent breath and muscularity, and especially their sonority within the dynamism of gibberish. The spoken, as that vital channel by which self and other meet, and from which social structures gain form, if not intensity—the very coming into being of a subject—must be understood to be significantly fueled by its own periphery, by that which is excluded.

As Adriana Cavarero reminds, the primary sounding behind each word is a vibrant and elemental event that both supports language, and the profound delivery of speech, while also being relegated to an exterior of language. Yet it seems important to also hear in this "uniqueness" a fundamental ambiguity: while Cavarero hears this primary vocalizing as the opportunity for coming together, as democratic initiative, as shared resonance, such a voicing is also driven by the force of noise, and its uncertain trajectories; by hybridity, collage, excitation, and rupture.

Returning to Michel Serres, gibberish is precisely the noise of speech that drives the mouth and yet in return is repressed by its lingual functions. In other words, the voice is always in tension with the corporeal conditions essential to its sounding. The social and linguistic structures of language come to tune the mouth, locating it within a grammar of expressions intricately connected to the operations of speech. We might appreciate and understand "vocal noise" as that lost object—the *petit objet a* theorized by Lacan from which desire gains its motivating drive; through its relegation to the outside of language, noise operates behind the scenes, to supply the production of words, and related fantasies of voicing, with hidden momentum.[18]

Gibberish, and all such nonsensical vocality, is to be appreciated as the primary body of linguistic signification. Rather than hear noise then as outside any system of communication, we can understand it more as a central mechanism that must nonetheless remain invisible, or at least, unspoken. By drawing it back onto stage, Chaplin's canny speech, for example, proposes a complex theory: that gibberish is in fact aligned with the monstrous and the potentiality for violence. A noise whose destination is never certain, yet one tuned to the force of transgression, violation, and play.

By putting nonsense into the mouth of the great dictator, we come to hear in gibberish not only a critical vocabulary, a parody of fascism, but also how the return of the repressed (noise) may also lead to terrible actions. For what is so remarkable about Chaplin's emulation is how closely it aligns with the original.

> Hitler speaks without notes, initially in drawn-out fashion for emphasis. Later on, words come tumbling out, and in overly dramatic passages, his voice is strained and barely understandable. He waves his hands and arms around, jumps back and forth excitably, and always seems to be trying to captivate his attentive, thousand-strong audience. When he's interrupted by applause, he theatrically stretches out his hands.[19]

Chaplin's nonsensical speech must be heard as a parody that also directs our attention to the terror of the spoken in general. I would emphasize that noise is always operating on this line, this difficult thread, between the barbarous and the poetical; between arrest and the emergence of form; between a return to primary origins—the "uniqueness of being"—at the center of the spoken and the awful ways in which "original" versions of the body can also unleash violence.

Although the "beyonsense" of language may give way to new figurations of the spoken, as a needed poetical slippage for the oral imaginary, it may also unearth the terrible force of abuse.[20] It strikes me as necessary then to hear in the rich primary sounding of the voice a medium also for disagreement, debate, and dispute. The uniqueness of being, and its energetic vocalic sources—the rich reservoir of the poetical—can form the basis for joining together, but also for breaking apart; for explicitly posing arguments, and establishing counter-publics, which more than ever may demand a thorough tussle, and deeper creativity, in finding the words.

Clown

I want to identify a potentiality at work in sound poetry and supported, in turn, by what Judith Butler terms "performativity." As Butler outlines, "performativity" is precisely a "reproduction of norms"; it is that mechanism by which power maintains itself, preceding the subject and reproducing through him or her its particular logic. Yet, importantly for Butler, in such reproduction exists the potentiality of things "going awry," to ultimately "produce new and even subversive effects."[21] Power is then always negotiating an inherent tension that pulls at its peripheries, agitating its limits, which in the case of sound poetry, and the force of gibberish, realigns the mechanics of vocalization toward that feverish territory of noise, "beyonsense" and *not knowing*—all signposts for the discursive limit of certain bodies.

Within this performative space of *not knowing* appears the possibility of a certain movement, not only of vulnerability and violation, but also of escape, parody, and clowning—that of things going awry. As Chaplin readily knew, buffoonery functions as an expanded platform—of bodily gesturing, as well as that of mouth movements, which can radically condition and contour a diversity of relational exchanges, and especially, ways of dealing with power: to push and pull within the dictates of the normative. His antics promulgate a steady catalog of maneuvering in and around the social structure, often slipping in and out of the law. The apparent "stupidity" of Chaplin's persona uncovers a potentiality in *not knowing*: by carving out a space to the side of the orders of language, bodily integrity, and social

acceptability, one may gain certain elasticity, a means for bending and flexing within the strictures of ideology.[22]

In pursuing gibberish we can identify this as a question of the mouth. Returning to sound poetry, I would suggest that much of its creative work appears through a *clowning of the mouth*, a *not knowing* the words; if the mouth can be understood as that architecture by which words are literally shaped—where syllables take up residence—breath given form and language expelled, then to search for another linguistic order is to pull at that architectural container; it is tool and retool the cavity of the oral. In short, it is to turn the mouth into a clownish form—to *misbehave*. Such maneuvers also appear as the making of a potential—of new wording, which is equally new narrative, of the subject within the space of the social. It is to insert an X onto the line of the contract of language and power, knowing full well that we might be duped, but which might also give way to a new possibility for negotiation: to prolong that space between sense and nonsense (wherein identification resides) and in support of "who can be a subject."[23]

To return to Butler, and her outline of masquerade, of "gender performativity" and of queering the lexicon of bodily presence, I want to apply such views so as to underscore clownery as a mode of the performative. The clownish specifically gains definition by operating *alongside* a functional and stable body, adjacent to its productive actions and social participation. As Chaplin shows, clowning gains its power through its ability to turn the human form into something mechanical, something out of place and often at odds with "proper" performance. By standing in contrast, it carves out a space for more spontaneous and dissenting behavior.

As I map in the chapter on laughter, Henri Bergson's analysis of the comic gravitates around a number of points; one in particular focuses on the notion of the mechanical and the inelastic. The comic is driven forward at times by that moment of the body appearing disjointed, tripped up, or out of sync. Is not Chaplin's—and other's, such as Buster Keaton's—humor articulated through such instances of mishap, error, and failed articulation, of the stupid? In short, clowning is a gestural vocabulary based on *becoming other than (properly) human*, an other that is most often at odds with productive mechanics—of labor and capitalism, of normative behavior and gender identity. Clownery, in others words, articulates a vulnerable body. In doing so, it animates and reanimates the body *in parts*, a body coming undone: Chaplin's elongated shoes and shuffling gait, his twittering mustache, his blower hat and cane—these are not only props, rather they function as parts of his body that when animated come to life, to trip up others, to aid in foolery, and to provide sudden opportunities for escape, romance, and charm. Fragmenting the body into pieces, the clown, as the one who does not know, and who is vulnerable to language and power, is often unwittingly able to slip through.

Is not sound poetry, as that arena for extending the operations of the voice, calling forth a "right to speech" often undermined by the powers of language? A right to the verbalization of the "beyonsense" according to strategies of the stupid, the clownish, foolery, and mishap? And in doing so, expanding the public sphere toward that of the outcast or the underspoken?

Impersonation

Shifting to another figure of gibberish, and another cultural territory, I'd like to extend this study by focusing briefly on the topic of animation, and the character of Gerald McBoing-Boing. An animated character from the 1950s, Gerald's special talent for speaking only "sound effects" literally draws out the relations between voice and sound. In the first short film from 1950, we find Gerald, a small boy of 2 years, whose entrance into language is disrupted by his uncanny speech—in the place of words comes various sounds, such as train whistles, lions, bangs, and bonks. In response, Gerald's father attempts to correct the boy's problem by sending him to school, which lasts all of 1 day before Gerald is sent home for making "noise." Ostracized, Gerald finally runs away from home, to be rescued by a radio producer who hires Gerald to provide all the sound effects for his productions. From riding horses to gunfire, dog barks to bells ringing, Gerald soon turns into a radio star. His ability to voice an entire orchestra in a later film secures Gerald's fame as a genuine celebrity of the radiophonic.

While Gerald was becoming a radio star in the 1950s, Isidore Isou and Henri Chopin were recording their own paralinguistic experiments, aiming for the full breadth of oral capability, a sounded poetry. In some ways, Gerald McBoing-Boing may serve as the ultimate sound poet, a sort of mascot for sound poetry's project, where the voice is finally freed from the constraints of language to adopt a plethora of potential identities: to become pure effect. That is, to arrive at a state of pure animism—to become a *sonic body*.

As Henri Chopin's work demonstrates, sound poetry may focus on the mouth, as that oral dimension of possible utterance, but its productions unfold equally as extended bodily performances. With Chopin, the entire body shivers, quakes, and is doubled on itself through the use of microphones and the tape recorder. His works throughout post–World War II avant-garde culture are marked by this performative use of technology, fusing it with body sounds and gestures. The "body is a factory of sounds," Chopin proclaimed,[24] and it is precisely by amplifying, cutting, and splicing together that such a body is reshaped into a "postlinguistic corporeality"[25]—resulting

"in a thickly woven fabric of sounds and supersonic rhythms . . . timbre, phonic thickness, body."[26]

What then might we discover in this expanded field of poetic sound, where the mouth cultivates new configurations? And that redraw the signifying lines between voice and language? While sound poetry searches for a zero degree of speech, to that primal breath and grain of voicing, the sphere of animation opens up another perspective on the topic of gibberish, that of impersonation, voice acting, and by extension, masquerade. It's my feeling that each cultural practice offers us a vital lesson in how to debate the very nature of voice, giving us the lead to reforming the mouth into alternative movements, soundings, and performances: sound poetry in the field of the existential—of primary myths, tensions, and in search of the first breath—and with animation, through a proliferation of fantastical characters and their vocal identities.

To expose this horizon instantiated by animation, I'd like to consider the amazing voice work of Mel Blanc. Working in the animation studios of Warner Brothers in the 1940s and 1950s, Blanc was extremely important in crafting the work of cartoons and their popularity. He was the main voice actor at this time, supplying the voices of such animation characters as Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Tweety Bird, Sylvester the Cat, Yosemite Sam, the Tasmanian Devil, and Speedy Gonzalez, among others. Having started his work in radio in the 1930s in Hollywood, Blanc soon became known for his vocal abilities of impersonation, leading to an array of comedy skits as well as characters. With his move in 1937 to cartoons, Blanc astounded audiences with his characterizations.

Interestingly, the diversity of voices Blanc was able to perform has as its backdrop the immigrant communities around which he grew up. As Blanc reveals in the first lines of his autobiography: "Even as a child, I heard voices. Now, I don't mean to imply that I was daffy, as in duck. I was simply fascinated by the way people spoke, particularly immigrants from other countries. And in the flourishing industrial center of Portland, Oregon, circa 1918, a medley of foreign accents caught my ear."[27] It was precisely these foreign accents encircling the young Blanc that captured his imagination and found their way onto his tongue, and eventually, into the mouths of numerous animation figures. Such oral circulations remarkably underscore the dynamics of impersonation, as a *speaking other*, to ultimately reshape the particular contours of speech and the self. Referring back to the works of sound poetry, might we hear in these poetical vocables an impersonation of an imaginary voice, that of the primary sound? A ghost in the mouth that drives the speaking self toward the fantastical, the brute, the existential, and the glossolalic?

I'm interested to introduce the figure of Mel Blanc as a further expression of what may happen to the voice when we speak differently. While for Cavarero such a voice may find its way toward relational resonance, in a

song tuning self and others upon a horizon of conjoining, it might equally give life to a range of animated and funny figures. Acts of impersonation open the mouth up to adopt multiple personas, to collect together in the speaking body a chorus whose vocalic expressions are certainly more than one; a gibberish from which new voices may take shape, whether in the form of a daffy duck, a deranged leader, or a sound poet.[28]

Delirium

Gibberish performs as an extremely vital mouth production, allowing the full force of the body, as that vessel of absolute resonance, of animistic exuberance, of alien imagination, and of that "uniqueness" Cavarero outlines, to rise up and capture itself in various types of speech, and in the process, to contort not only the lips and tongue, but also the power passing between mouth and word.

Returning to Jean-Jacques Lecercle, his work evocatively renders the inherent "delirium" (*délire*) central to language—a delirium not of absolute madness, but one driven by the profound recognition of language's vital link to the body. "Instead of using language as a transparent and docile instrument, and looking through it at the world outside, they [delirious authors] focus their attention on its workings, on its dark, frightening origin in the human body."[29] The delirious work thus identifies the often-repressed origin of language, to revel in words as so much raw matter and whose potentiality resides specifically in its ability to generate correspondences across things, bodies, meanings, origins, cosmologies, graphisms, etc. Madness, yes, yet one that is compelled by the interactions of sense and nonsense, and the oral drives that may turn language into a base for radical poetics, as well as a vibrant social life.