

Dolar, Mladen. A Voice and Nothing More. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

Key Passages, assembled by Clayton Walker 10/30/07 - (all bulletins are quotations)

Chapter One: The Linguistics of the Voice

- We constantly inhabit the universe of voices, we are continuously bombarded by voices, we have to make our daily way through a jungle of voices, and we have to use all kinds of machetes and compasses so as not to get lost. There are the voices of other people, the voices of music, the voices of media, our own voice intermingled with the lot. All those voices are shouting, whispering, crying, caressing, threatening, imploring, seducing, commanding, pleading, praying, hypnotizing, confessing, terrorizing, declaring ...-we can immediately see a difficulty into which any treatment of the voice runs: namely, that the vocabulary is inadequate. The vocabulary may well distinguish nuances of meaning, but words fail us when we are faced with the infinite shades of the voice, which infinitely exceed meaning. It is not that our vocabulary is scanty and its deficiency should be remedied: faced with the voice, words structurally fail. [13].
- The voice is endowed with profundity: by not meaning anything, it appears to mean more than mere words, it becomes the bearer of some unfathomable originary meaning which, supposedly, got lost with language. It seems still to maintain the link with nature, on the one hand - the nature of a paradise lost - and on the other hand to transcend language, the cultural and symbolic barriers, in the opposite direction, as it were: it promises an ascent to divinity, an elevation above the empirical, the mediated, the limited, worldly human concerns. This illusion of transcendence accompanied the long history of the voice as the agent of the sacred, and the highly acclaimed role of music was based on its ambiguous link with both nature and divinity. [31].

Chapter Two: The Metaphysics of the Voice

- ...music, and in particular the voice, should not stray away from words which endow it with sense; as soon as it departs from its textual anchorage, the voice becomes senseless and threatening - all the more so because of its seductive and intoxicating powers. Furthermore, the voice beyond sense is self-evidently equated with femininity, whereas the text, the instance of signification, is in this simple paradigmatic opposition on the side of masculinity ... The voice beyond words is a senseless play of sensuality, it possesses a dangerous attractive force, although in itself it is empty and frivolous. The dichotomy of voice and *logos* is already in place. [43]
- [Lacan's *jouissance*, the reverse of the law of the father] is the part [of the voice] which can never be simply present, but is not simply absent either: the object voice is the pivotal point precisely at the intersection of presence and absence. It discloses the presence and gives ground to its imaginary recognition - recognizing

oneself as the addressee of the voice of the Other - but at the same time it is what inherently lacks and disrupts any option of a full presence, it makes it a truncated presence built around a lack - the lack epitomized by the surplus of the voice. [...] For what endows the Law with authority is also what irretrievably bars it, and attempts to banish the other voice, the voice beyond *logos*, are ultimately based on the impossibility of coming to terms with the Law's inherent alterity, placed at the point of its inherent lack which voice comes to cover. [55-6].

Chapter Three: The 'Physics' of the Voice

- The voice is the flesh of the soul, its ineradicable materiality, by which the soul can never be rid of the body; it depends on this inner object which is but the ineffaceable trace of externality and heterogeneity, but by the virtue of which the body can also never quite simply be the body, it is a truncated body, a body cloven by the impossible rift between an interior and an exterior. The voice embodies the very impossibility of this division, and acts as its operator ... It is as if, in one and the same place, we had two mechanisms: one which strives toward meaning and understanding, and on the way obfuscates the voice (that which is not the matter of understanding), and on the other hand a mechanism which has nothing to do with meaning but, rather, with enjoyment. Meaning versus enjoyment. It is an enjoyment normally streamlined by meaning, steered by meaning, framed by meaning, and only when it becomes divorced from meaning can it appear as the pivotal object of drive. [71].
- *What language and the body have in common is the voice, but the voice is part neither of language nor of the body.* The voice stems from the body, but is not its part, and it upholds language without belonging to it, yet, in this paradoxical topology, this is the only point they share - and this is the topology of *objet petit a*. [73].
- The voice cuts both ways: as an authority over the Other and as an exposure to the Other, an appeal, a plea, an attempt to bend the Other. It cuts directly into the interior, so much so that the very status of the exterior becomes uncertain, and it directly discloses the interior, so much so that the very supposition of an interior depends on the voice. So both hearing and emitting a voice present an excess, a surplus of authority on the one hand and a surplus of exposure on the other. There is a too-much of the voice in the exterior because of the direct transition into the interior, without defenses; and there is a too-much of the voice stemming from the inside - it brings out more, and other things, than one would intend. *One is too exposed to the voice and the voice exposes too much*, one incorporates and one expels too much. [81].

Chapter Four: The Ethics of the Voice

- What all this tradition [of ethics, including Socrates, Rousseau, Kant, and Heidegger] has in common is that the voice comes from the Other, but this is the Other within. The ethical voice is not the subject's own, it is not for the subject to master or control it, although the subject's autonomy is entirely dependent on it.

But it does not pertain simply to the Other either, although it stems from it: it would belong to the Other if it were reducible to positive commands, if it were not merely an opening and an enunciation ... The voice comes from the Other without being part of it; rather, it indicates and evokes a void in the other, circumscribing it, but not giving it a positive consistence. It has no properties, yet it cannot be circumvented ... The voice is the element which ties the subject and the Other together, without belonging to either, just as it formed the tie between body and language without being part of them. We can say that the subject and the Other coincide in their common lack embodied by the voice, and that 'pure enunciation' can be taken as the red thread which connects the linguistic and ethical aspects of the voice. [102-3]

Chapter Five: The Politics of the Voice

- ...the written word has no power if it is not preceded by, and based in, the living voice. The authority of writing depends on its being the faithful copy of the voice. [109].
- ...there is another kind of voice, a very different use and function of voice which has the effect not of enacting, but of putting into question the letter itself and its authority. It is precisely the (appropriately called) authoritarian voice, voice as authoritarian, the voice as the source of authority against the letter, or the voice not supplementing but supplanting the letter. Most tellingly, all phenomena of totalitarianism tend to hinge overbearingly on the voice, which in a *quid pro quo* tends to replace the authority of the letter, or put its validity into question. The voice which appears limitless and unbound, that is, not bound by the letter, the voice as the source and immediate lever of violence. [113-4].
- The voice is precisely at the unlocatable spot in the interior and exterior of the law at the same time, and hence a permanent threat of a state of emergency. [120]
- Psychoanalysis ... can be carried out only *viva voce*, in the living voice, in the living presence of the analysand and the analyst. Their tie is the tie of the voice (analysis by writing, or even by telephone, will never do). But whose voice? The patient, the analysand, is the one who has to present his or her associations, anything that comes to his or her mind, in the presence of the analyst ... it is the analyst, with his or her silence, who becomes the embodiment of the voice as the object. She or he is the personification, the embodiment, of the voice, the voice incarnate, the aphonic silent voice. This is not His Master's Voice, not the voice of a command or of superego, but, rather, the impossible voice to which one has to respond. It is the voice which does not say anything, and the voice which cannot be said. It is the silent voice of an appeal, a call, an appeal to respond, to assume one's stance as the subject. One is called upon to speak, and one would say anything that happens to come into one's mind to interrupt the silence, to silence this voice, to silence the silence; but perhaps the whole process of analysis is a way to learn how to assume this voice. It is the voice in which the linguistic, the ethical, and the political voices join forces, coinciding in what was the dimension of pure enunciation in them. They are knotted together around that pivotal kernel of the object voice, of its void,

and in response to it our fate as linguistic, ethical, political subjects has to be pulled to pieces and reassembled, traversed, and assumed. [123-4].

Chapter Six: Freud's Voices

- [After Freud's "A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic theory of the Disease" (1915)] The prospect of lovemaking was interrupted by a mysterious sound, a noise, a click, a knock, a beat, a tick. Its origin unknown, and her lover, when asked, dismisses it as trivial - the old clock ticked, perhaps. The strange noise then acquired a huge importance in retrospect, it was suddenly encircled by a retroactive interpretation, a paranoiac construction, a fantasy which provided it with a meaning and a framework ... and perhaps there is no *ça parle* without a *ça cliquète*. Desire ticks ... the strange loop, the tie between inner and outer, the short circuit between the external contingency and the intimate, the curious match of the click and the inner sexual arousal ... It is the moment of derailment of desire, a structural moment when something which upsets and interrupts the course of desire toward its fulfillment actually defines and drives the desire itself. The click, the tiny tick, the stumbling block of desire, makes the object appear, and quite independently of particular notions of physiology and male projections it produces a paradigmatic situation: the short cut between the inner and outer ticking provides the clue to "what makes desire tick." [131-2].
- The essential feature is the double nature of this sound [the click] - it is on the one hand what one hears, which manifests the enigmatic activity of the Other by which one is spellbound, awestruck, mesmerized; and at the same time the sound that one might produce oneself and which could betray us in front of the other, disclose our existence to the Other, reveal our hideaway, where we are the guilty witness of something we shouldn't witness: a 'too-much' has been manifested, revealed by the voice, and we fear disclosing 'too much' of ourself by our own noise. The subject is petrified in anguish and becomes one with the sound, the sound heard and the sound emitted, he or she is caught between two sounds which can ultimately be seen as one and the same object. [133].
- The primal fantasy is built around the voice, while the stuff that dreams are made of are images, even though the clue to them is retained by words - this poses the tricky problem of voice and language in dreams, which we must leave aside ... The time of fantasy is situated in the time for understanding, between the initial and the final moment: it is the defense against the excessive nature of the initial moment, it frames the voice and underpins it with fiction, it emerges in the place of understanding, instead of understanding, as a stand-in for understanding before the concluding moment when the true sense will finally be revealed, and there will no longer be any need for fantasy. [136-7].
- There is a temporal vector between the voice (the incomprehensible, the traumatic) and the signifier (the articulation, the rationalization), and what links the two, in this precipitating and retroactive temporality, is fantasy as the juncture of the two... [138].

- [Lalangue - the slip of the tongue]
 - Words, quite contingently, sound alike, to a greater or lesser degree, which makes them liable to contamination; their mutual sound contacts can transform them, distort them, be it by retention, the inertia of certain sounds, their momentum by which they influence what follows, or by anticipation of certain sounds which influence what precedes them, or by various modes of substitution. In this contamination a new formation is born - a slip, which may sound like nonsense but produces the emergence of another sense. [140] ... The floating and wandering words are drifting and fluttering around the present chain, waiting for their moment, the opportunity suddenly to come to light. These floating signifiers, in a minimalist sense, are there at all times, lurking in ambush in vast quantities. [140-1] ... The nonsense emerges from contingent sound encounters, and with it another sense, which can manifest itself only for a moment because of that co-sonance, through the momentary resounding, then it is gone. It is gone despite the interpretation which tries to provide it with a framework of sense, the horizon of understanding; or rather, it evaporates through the interpretation which consists of pinning it down to a particular sense, naming its meaning, reducing its nonsense, but loses it precisely by endowing it with a positive content - as if it existed properly only in that instant, if indeed this can be called existence at all. [141]
 - It is obvious that the link between language and desire is far more delicate and intimate; their intertwining cannot be disentangled. Desire emerges through and is maintained by contingent encounters, this part of the voice in the signifier, and there is no way of extricating it from that web as an independent agency, of placing it somewhere outside language from where it could regulate the particular instances of slips as their cause. A strange loop in causality takes place here, where desire is as much the effect of the slip as its cause. It emerges only through the slip as its effect and, in a circular loop, retroactively becomes its cause; it creates its anteriority, it is readable only in retrospect, it does not preexist somewhere else from where it could manipulate the language and use it as a means for its particular purposes. Ultimately it coincides with the erratic nature of language itself, with its sound echoes and reverberations, its co-sonances. It does not spring from some profundity of unconscious urges; rather, all those urges have to be interpreted as the retroactive effects of something utterly superficial, the contingent resounding of voices in the signifier, as the fold, the wrinkle, the fold of language (to use the excellent Deleuzian word), its excrescence. [150-1].
- [Silence]
 - Silence requires great effort; it implies an ethics whose first principle is: "We must not interrupt the silence unless we have something to say which is better than silence" (ibid., p.39[Dinourat 2002]). Silence would thus be the measure of sense, but can any word be measured against this yardstick?

Can we speak at all? Anything we could say weighs too little against the backdrop of silence.

- The silence of the drives has to be read against this background [Pascal's silence of science/the universe]: it is not a silence which contributes to sense, and this is its most disturbing feature; it presents something we can call silence in the register of the real. It does not tell us anything, but it persists - this is another feature of the drives: they insist as a constant pressure, they keep coming insistently and stupidly back to the same place, the locus of their silent satisfaction. [156].
- The void produces something out of nothing, albeit in the form of an inaudible echo. We expect a response from the Other, we address it in the hope of a response, but all we get is the voice. The voice is what is said turned into its alterity, but the responsibility is the subject's own, not the Other's which means that the subject is responsible not only for what he or she said, but must at the same time respond for, and respond to, the alterity of his or her own speech. He or she said something more than he or she intended, and this surplus is the voice which is merely produced by being passed through the loop of the Other. This, I suppose, is at the bottom of this rather striking dispossession of one's voice in the presence of the silence of the analyst: whatever one says is immediately countered by its own alterity, by the voice resounding in the resonance of the void of the Other, which comes back to the subject as the answer the moment one spoke. this resonance expropriates one's own voice; the resonance of the Other thwarts it, scoops it out, although it is but an echo of subject's own words. the speech is the subject's own, but the voice pertains to the Other, it is created in the loop of its void. This is what one has to learn to respond for, and respond to. And this is how the Other of the symbolic order, to which the analyst lends his support, is transformed into the agent of the voice: the silence makes that in the Other the voice emerges. [160-1].
- To respond to the voice and respond for it is the starting point of analytic discourse, and its point is to keep the space open for this break in the continuity of "bodies and languages." [162].

Chapter Seven: Kafka's Voices

- The law can remain the law only insofar as it is written, that is, given a form which is universally at the disposal of everyone, always accessible and unchangeable - but with Kafka one can never get to the place where it is written to check what it says; access is always denied; the place of the letter is infinitely elusive. the voice is precisely what cannot be checked, it is ever-changing and fleeting, it is the non-universal *par excellence*, it is what cannot be universalized ... The letter of the law is hidden in some inaccessible place and may not exist at all, it is a matter of presumption, and we have only voices in its place. [170].

- We cannot resist silence, for the very good reason that there is nothing to resist. this is the mechanism of the law at its minimal: it expects nothing of us, it does not command, we can always oppose commands and injunctions, but not silence. Silence here is the very form of the validity of the law beyond its meaning, the zero-point of voice, its pure embodiment. [172].
- lack of a lack, the absence of a gap ... the strategy of art, of art as the nonexceptional exception, which can arise anywhere, at any moment, and is made of anything - of ready-made objects - as long as it can provide them with a gap, make them make a break. It is the art of the minimal difference. Yet the moment it makes its appearance, this difference is bungled by the very gesture which brought it about, the moment this gesture and this difference become instituted, the moment art turns into an institution to which a certain place is allotted and certain limits are drawn. Its power is at the same time its powerlessness, the very status of art veils what is at stake ... Her [Kafka's Josephine, the mouse], which opens a crack in the seamless continuity of the law, is betrayed and destroyed by the very status of art, which reinserts it and closes the gap. [178-9] ... So the second strategy fails, it is ruined by its own success, and the transcendence that art promised turned out to be of such a nature that it could easily fit in as one part of the division of labor; the disruptive power of the gap turned out to accommodate the continuity all too well. [180].
- Food and voice - both pass through the mouth. Deleuze keeps coming back to that over and over again. There is an alternative: either you eat or you speak, use your voice, you cannot do both at the same time. they share the same location, but in mutual exclusion: either incorporation or emission ... By speech mouth is denaturalized, diverted from its natural function, seized by the signifier (and, for our purposes, by the voice which is but the alterity of the signifier). The Freudian name for this deterritorialization is the drive ... Eating can never be the same once the mouth has been deterritorialized - it is seized by the drive, it turns around a new object which emerged in this operation, it keeps circumventing, circling around this eternally elusive object. Speech, in this denaturalizing function, is then subjected to a secondary territorialization, as it were: it acquires a second nature with its anchorage in meaning. Meaning is a reterritorialization of language, its acquisition of a new territoriality, a naturalized substance ... But this secondary nature can ever quite succeed, and the bit that eludes it can be pinned down as the element of the voice, this pure alterity of what is said. This is the common ground it shares with food, that in food which precisely escapes eating, the bone that gets stuck in the gullet. [[186-7