THE MATERIAL POETICS OF DIGITAL VOICE:
A CREATIVE-CRITICAL INQUIRY

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2014

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences

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This dissertation theorizes the aesthetic and ethical potential of *digital voice* as a material for composing and (re)inventing texts in multimedia platforms. Traditionally, the field of composition and rhetoric has imagined voice as either a silent textual metaphor or an embodied instrument of live oratory. However, as we turn to embrace digital writing, voice reemerges in a new form, no longer reducible to language nor tied to the time and place of the live speaking body. Building on recent discussions of orality and aurality, I argue that we must also attend to a related but distinct concept of *vocality*—as a newly accessible compositional material, which raises complex questions about the relationship between language, bodies, and technologies in digital composing contexts.

Providing a survey of the ways that voice has been employed in composition and rhetoric over the past half-century, I argue that the inventive potential of voice is constrained by linguistic and representational values that we continue to ascribe to recorded voices in the age of digital reproducibility. Next, I draw on interdisciplinary theories of voice from philosophy, physiology, film, and digital aesthetics in order to rearticulate voice's relationship to language, bodies, and technologies, and to propose a more flexible, material theory of *digital vocality*. Finally, I put

this theory to work through a pair of critically informed media projects, which experiment with voice's affective, performative, malleable potential across media platforms.

In a video series, *Coerced Confessions*, I employ a technique of reverse remix to digitally "coerce" reenactments of real-life confessions from the bodies of unwitting actors, reflecting on the materiality of language and the boundaries of performance and agency in digital editing. In an experiment in posthumous poetics, I take up recorded voices of deceased individuals from oral history archives and reimagine them as "actors" or "performers" in a fictional audio drama, considering possibilities for collaboration with archival voices of the dead. Ultimately, by taking seriously the possibility that we might write not only with words, but with voices, my dissertation contributes a more expansive sense of the methods, materials, and ethics available to contemporary composition practice.

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PREFACE

To my committee, Steve Carr, Neepa Majumdar, Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, and, in particular, my infallibly generous chair, Don Bialostosky: Thank you for believing in the potential of this experiment, for giving me the creative latitude to pursue it, and for encouraging me along the way. Thank you also to Jamie "Skye" Bianco for pushing me to make media, to Jess Enoch for helping me develop as a writer, and to Aaron Henderson for teaching me everything I know about the art of video—and for lending me the equipment to make the work! I am also deeply grateful to all of those individuals who have lent their time, talents, and voices to the media projects that are so central to this dissertation and so close to my heart. To actors Jamie "Skye" Bianco, Ken Bolden, and Harry J. Hawkins IV: Thank you for taking a chance on the *Coerced Confessions* project and for bringing so much life to the unlikeliest of characters. And to the memory of Juanita Bowman and my grandfather, Josiah Patton: I wish you knew how much I've treasured the time I spent with your voices. I'll never forget the incredible warmth, stubbornness, and sense of humor you've brought to my life and my work. To my brilliant friends and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh, especially Trisha Campbell, Kerry Banazek, Steph Ceraso, and Pamela VanHaitsma: Your companionship on this journey has made all the difference. Finally, thank you to my favorite artist and confidant, Lenka Clayton, for always reminding me what matters, and to Michael DuPuis for keeping me going in the final months. I'd like to dedicate this project to the memory of my grandmother, Olive, whose voice started it all.

1.0   WRITING VOICE AND ETHICS: AN INTRODUCTION IN STORIES

> The voice is elusive. Once you've eliminated everything that is not the voice itself—the body that houses it, the words it carries, the notes it sings, the traits by which it defines a speaking person, and the timbres that color it, what's left? What a strange object, what grist for poetic outpourings.
>
> — Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*

This dissertation is a story about voice, materiality, and ethics in contemporary writing practice. It is a story of how I came to tell stories *about* voice by telling stories *through* voice—or, perhaps more aptly, *with* and *alongside* the recorded voices of others. And, if you keep reading, you will encounter some of these stories—stories told in voices that are not my own, that will never be my own, that perhaps were never *anyone's* "own" to begin with, at least not in the sense that I once imagined them to be. But before we get to that, I would like to begin with another story altogether: a story about mermaids.

This story grew out of a conversation I had a few years ago with a studio arts undergrad named Ashley, in which she politely informed me that my work is (and I quote) "very Little Mermaid." At first, I'll admit, I was more than a little put off by the comparison, finding it hard to move past the image of those perky purple seashells or to imagine how I could possibly make

this a selling point on the job market. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized: she was right. And the more intrigued I became by the implications.

While I don't remember the exact details of my conversation with Ashley, I'm pretty sure the trigger point for the mermaid revelation was when I boiled down my research to something like this: "Basically," I told her, "I'm interested in what happens when we extract the voice from the body, and in what we can *do* with it once we do." Looking back, it is hard not to cringe at everything that's wrong with this statement, ontologically speaking, as if the voice weren't always already beyond the body from the moment it is heard *as* voice, as if the voice were free to do something *other than* to leave the body behind.[1] (Or, as voice scholar Steven Connor so cleverly puts it, "What I Say Goes.") At the same time, though, it is also easy to see how Ashley's mind would have gone straight to that classic scene in Ursula's lair.[2]

So bring yourself back to that fateful moment when Ariel gives her voice over to the sea witch. (Or, better yet, search for it on YouTube).[3] As Ariel sings—that inane melody I loved so much as a child—and Ursula cheers her on, an enormous pair of green hands floats across the salty ether, penetrates Ariel's convulsing body, and extracts from it the glowing orb that is her voice. We watch in horror as Ariel clutches her throat and the golden voice-orb floats away, carrying with it the sound of a song now beyond her control, to be locked away in a seashell for safe keeping. And future redeployment.[4]

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[1] See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion of the relationship between voice and the body.

[2] As it will become clear, I am referring to Disney's 1989 film adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale and, specifically, to the character of the sea witch, who, in the original story, remains nameless.

[3] Ironically, perhaps, copyright restrictions do not permit me to embed a clip of the scene directly in the text, but, at least at the time of this writing, it is widely available for streaming on YouTube. The widespread availability of this particular clip, presumably posted on YouTube by avid fans, speaks to the scene's iconic role in Disney's adaptation. And, even if you have already seen it, it is worth returning to.

[4] In Disney's film adaptation, Ursula, the sea witch, transforms herself into human form, as a beautiful woman named Vanessa and uses Ariel's voice (which she keeps in a seashell around her neck) to seduce

This probably won't come as a surprise, but this is not how the scene unfolds in the Hans Christian Andersen original, where the sea witch simply cuts to the chase and slices out the poor mermaid's tongue. Of course, it's easy to see why this wasn't a viable plot-point for Disney screenwriters. All I have to do is picture myself in a darkened theater at age six, sipping a Capri Sun and watching the carnage ensue. But, if you think about it, there is actually much more going on here than a cheap trick for a G-rating. Because, in the roughly 150-year time span between Andersen's fairytale and Disney's summer blockbuster, a pretty massive historical event took place that would change the way we relate to and imagine the human voice forever: the invention of sound reproduction technology.

Naturally, back in 1837, the logical way to "steal" a person's voice would have been to go straight for the tongue. But with the invention of the phonograph, it became suddenly possible to imagine a voice beyond the time and place of its initial utterance; to abstract its vibrations from the living, breathing body that produced it; and to capture and re-present them in material form as media. And if we watch this scene carefully—the glowing orb, the sound waves, the seashell—it doesn't take much to map onto it a technological narrative of sound transmission, reproduction, and capture. On its own, I find this parallel fascinating, but I am ultimately less interested in the analogy itself than in the possibilities and problematics it opens up.

Of course, for Andersen's "Little Mermaid," there is very little that can happen with the voice plotline after the sea witch has done her deed. The mermaid's voice is gone, or at least rendered inarticulate, but, in the end, it has not been stolen; it simply no longer works. In this story, the mermaid's voice does nothing for the sea witch beyond its lack. In the end, all the witch is left with is her sadistic pleasure and a slimy organ in a jar, and the narrative has no

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the prince into proposing marriage in an attempt to coerce Ariel's father, King Triton, into abdicating his throne to Ursula in order to save his daughter.

choice but to sow its conflict elsewhere. But this is *not* the case in the Disney adaptation. For Ariel, her voice is not simply a capacity, it is a commodity—something she owns and is therefore at risk of losing. Crucially, when her voice is stolen, it is not destroyed; it *continues to exist* with the terrifying potential to speak beyond her intention and sound beyond her control. And it is precisely this resonant potential—the erotic charge of the stolen voice object—that the sea witch arms herself with as she sets out to woo the prince and destroy the world. Or whatever it is she sets out to do. For our purposes, it doesn't really matter. All that matters is that it is *evil*.

So why have I told you this story? What can we do with it? And what does it tell us about the role of voice in contemporary digital writing? For me, this story is, first of all, a striking example of the kinds of stories we tell ourselves, as a culture, *about* the human voice. It is a reflection of the power that we ascribe to the voice—as one of our most precious possessions, even as a piece of ourselves that we cannot fully be ourselves without. It is also a powerful reminder that, while our voices might be produced by our bodies, they are not self-identical with our bodies; that, in fact, our voices have the capacity to circulate as vibrational bodies in themselves, the potential to act and affect beyond the life we breathe into them. But, more than anything, I think this story serves as a provocative commentary on the polarizing ethics of voice in the age of digital reproducibility.

On the surface, it is easy to take this story as a neat moralistic allegory for the dangers of technological deception, as an argument for why we must fortify our guard against those who wish to use our voices to do us harm. But, in this dissertation, I suggest we imagine it otherwise: As an opportunity to reflect on some of our deepest values and assumptions—about identity, about ownership, and about the boundaries between word and voice, meaning and material, representation and performance. Indeed, at its heart, I like to imagine this story as a call to

consider what it might mean, and how it might *sound*, for writers to embrace voice not only as a silent, textual metaphor, but as a core material of our practice; to explore the possibilities for writing not only with words, but with voices—even with the voices of others. Because, whether we like it or not, this possibility is no longer the stuff of fairytales. It is a very real affordance of our present technological culture, made *imaginable* with the invention of sound reproduction, which first decoupled voice and body in the late nineteenth century; made *achievable* with the novelty of magnetic tape, which rendered the voice spliceable and rewritable in the middle of the twentieth; and made radically *accessible,* today, with the rise of digital audio, which so readily transforms the voice into an object of mass circulation, manipulation, and play.[5] But while these technological developments may have opened up new possibilities for writers to engage with the voices of others, to what extent do our present ethical frameworks account for these emergent compositional practices?

Taking this question as a point of departure, my dissertation explores the compositional possibilities and ethical complexities of *digital voice* as a material for (re)inventing texts in multimedia writing platforms. Traditionally, voice has been taken up in the field of composition and rhetoric as either a silent, textual metaphor—for style, agency, or writerly presence[6]—or an embodied instrument of live oratory. However, as the field moves to embrace digital media technologies and to reimagine writing as a multimodal pursuit, voice reemerges in a new form, no longer reducible to language nor tied to the time and place of the live speaking body. Crucially, with the rise of digital audio, it becomes possible for writers to compose texts not only in their own voices, but also in the recorded voices of others. In this context, vast archives of

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[5] I will return to this question of voice and technology in detail in Chapter Three.
[6] I will address the spectrum and variation of 'voice's' metaphorical usage at the opening of Chapter Two.

voices open themselves as malleable materials that may be cut up, recombined, and made to speak in ways that rearticulate and even resist the intentions of the original speaker. While recent scholarship in the field has begun to account for the affordances of *orality* and *aurality*,[7] missing from this conversation is any attention to a distinct but related concept of *vocality*[8]—and, more specifically, the mediated, *digital* vocality—as a newly accessible compositional material, which raises complex ethical questions about the relationship between language, bodies and technologies in digital composing contexts. Ultimately, by theorizing this paradoxical materiality across inter- and extra-disciplinary contexts—and by experimenting with its compositional possibilities through creative-critical media practice—my dissertation seeks to contribute to a more expansive sense of the methods, materials, and ethics available to digital composition, broadly defined.

1.1   PROJECT ORIGINS

I first became interested in the question of digital voice through my longstanding work with the voices of oral history, and, in particular, through close compositional work with my grandmother's recorded voice in a multimedia webtext called "The Olive Project: An Oral History Composition in Multiple Modes" (Anderson). Beginning as a personal experiment in

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[7] Prominent examples include Cynthia L. Selfe's 2009 *College Composition and Communication* article, "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing" and Jeff Rice's 2006 *Computers and Composition* article, "Making of Ka-Knowledge: Digital Aurality."

[8] While "vocality" has become a common term throughout interdisciplinary voice studies over the past decade, it has yet to enter into the disciplinary lexicon in the field of composition and rhetoric. The first instance of its usage that I have encountered in my research is in Paul Zumthor's 1990 book *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*, where he makes a point of distinguishing between orality, as speech, and vocality as voice. This distinction between speech and voice—which continues to be mobilized by philosophers like Mladen Dolar and Adriana Cavarero—is central to my theoretical framework in this dissertation.

composing family history, "The Olive Project" brings together fragments of audio from my grandmother's oral history recording, alongside photographs from family albums, and assembles them into an interactive, audio-visual archive of her material memories. As an experiment in narrative disruption, the main section of the webtext takes the form of a horizontally-scrolling webpage with no scroll bars, inviting the user to navigate through the materials by listening to a brief audio anecdote and then clicking on one of several textual hyperlinks to activate an animated scroll and bring a new audio anecdote—and a new set of links—into reach. In this space, the audience encounters a story with no clear beginning or ending, only seemingly endless (and often arbitrary) associations, juxtapositions, and repetitions, which enlist the user's participation while at the same time resisting her control. Drawing, most immediately, upon public historian Michael Frisch's call for a "post-documentary" approach to oral history, this project attempts to mobilize the interactive affordances of web-based media to enable a "fluid, flexible, multi-pathed, non-linear access" ("Digital Revolution" 112) to audio-visual archives, seeking to engage its audience in a "shareable" experience of creating connections between the materials contained within them.[9] In this sense, you might say that "The Olive Project" stands as an elaborate (if flawed) effort to *avoid* telling my grandmother's life story—or at least to share the ethical burden of attempting to do so.

While my grandmother, Olive, was still alive during the production of "The Olive Project," it was an undertaking I entered into with the knowledge that, soon, she would not be. When we sat down to record her oral history in the summer of 2009, she was six months in to a

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[9] Frisch's work on digital oral history in this essay is the latest incarnation of his longstanding commitment to the project of engaging audience in the analysis of oral history. Notably, in his 1990 book-length work, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History,* Frisch argues that, "in the same sense that both interviewer and interviewee are the 'authors' of an oral historical document, public-historical presentation has the challenge of finding ways of sharing the 'author-ity' of interpretation with the public" (226).

battle with pancreatic cancer. I came to her with my request for an interview not as a scholar or an artist, but as a granddaughter, anticipating the loss that was coming and seeking to hold on to whatever I could. At the time, I had no intention of doing anything with the stories we recorded, beyond distributing them to my family as a record of my grandmother's life. And, schooled in the classical tradition of alphabetic transcription, I certainly had no intention of using the voice recording itself—a fact that is reflected in the quality of the audio. However, when, months later, I moved across the county to begin my PhD and left my grandmother behind, it was, without question, the sound of her recorded voice that I cherished most. And while it was my deep emotional attachment to that voice—and to the person who *felt as if* she were behind it—which inspired me to set out to compose my grandmother's story in the first place, I have since come to realize that it was also that same attachment that frightened me away from properly doing so.

Coming from a background in feminist and community-based oral history, I brought to my work on this project a deep concern with the ethics of representation—with the extent to which the act of "giving voice to the voiceless"[10] is always just as much an act of *taking*. But it wasn't until I began to cut and paste, overlap and rearrange my grandma's voice recording in digital audio software that I began to really *feel* the power I had over the meanings and performances these materials conveyed. In contrast to my previous work with the silent, textual "voices" of oral history transcripts, I felt my ethical responsibility to this audible, vibratory voice—and to the person who *felt as if* she were behind it—in a profoundly visceral way. And, and least at first, I found it profoundly unsettling. While I had asked my grandmother for permission to use her voice recordings for the project before she died—and while I knew that we

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[10] As I will discuss in Chapter Five, oral history is perhaps the only field outside of composition and rhetoric (and writing more broadly) with a stronger attachment to the 'voice' metaphor, which stands as a symbol of agency and representation in the field's struggle to democratize history.

both knew that I had the best intentions at heart—in the end, I think I was paralyzed by the fear of not getting it "right," and, as such, I set out to find another way around. Uncomfortable with the "author-ity" (Frisch *Shared Authority* 226) that I had over my grandmother's story, as the self-appointed custodian of my grandmother's voice, my approach to this dilemma was to devise a way to distribute that authority more broadly: namely, by creating a system within which my audience might share in the activity—and the responsibility—of putting the pieces together to construct the narrative.

Looking back, I now recognize my work on "The Olive Project" as my first attempt to confront the ethical challenges of composing with the voices of others. But, looking back, I also recognize the extent to which, at the time, I was so concerned with my grandmother's *story*, with the words she spoke and the meanings they conveyed, that I all but ignored the question of her voice itself. And, to the extent that I did consider my grandmother's voice as an audible, vibrational, performative material, I have since begun to comprehend the great difficulty I had in separating the *sound* of that voice from the *person* who produced it. Indeed, the more I began to consider the role of voice in this project, the more fascinated I became by the contradictions it presented, and the more I began to wonder: What if we were to ask of voice not only whose it is, what it says, or what it means, but also *what* it is, what it *can do*, and what we can (and should) do *with it*?

As a way in to these questions, in this dissertation, I embark upon an exploratory investigation of the human voice, drawing from diverse theoretical 'voices'[11] on voice in order to

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[11] I invoke metaphorical 'voice' here, partly as a provocation, in anticipation of a larger theoretical conversation that I will broach in Chapter Two around the implications of the voice metaphor on our contemporary notions of audible, material voice in composition and rhetoric. At the same time, it is worth noting the extent to which the more naturalized alternatives ("perspectives," "viewpoints," etc.) appear inappropriate in their visualist bias.

understand, and ultimately unsettle, some of the most deeply-rooted values and assumptions that govern our relationship to our own voices and to the recorded voices of others, both within and beyond the purview of composition and rhetoric. Over the course of this research, I began to comprehend, firstly, the extent to which we, as a culture, tend to conflate voice with *language*, forgetting that, as Mladen Dolar puts it: "if we speak in order to say something, then the voice is precisely that which cannot be said" (15). Secondly, I began to recognize the extent to which we confuse voice with *identity*—for example, letting our metaphorical attachments to notions of "the writer's voice" spill over into the very forms of *metaphysical* thinking that Jacques Derrida and the poststructuralists have so famously critiqued. And finally, and most importantly, I began to question the extent to which these lingering attachments to voice as *speech* and voice as *self* might ultimately serve to limit our compositional engagement with the digital voices of others to strictly semantic and representational forms of meaning-making. Taking these limitations as a point of departure, in this dissertation, I set out to reimagine the possibilities of digital voice as something quite different, exploring opportunities for alternative forms of compositional practice that far outstretch our field's current representational methods and ethics.

1.2   ON CREATIVE-CRITICAL METHODS

Drawing on my creative practice as a digital storyteller and media maker, I approach the question of digital voice in this dissertation through a hybrid, practice-based methodology, which integrates rigorous theoretical analysis with practice-based experiments in digital media production. My decision to engage this "creative-critical" approach responds, first and foremost, to the distinct requirements and possibilities of the topic at hand. In the course of my research on

digital voice and composition practice, I have come to realize that there are limits to what I can achieve—intellectually and politically—by exploring this topic solely through traditional methods of scholarly analysis and alphabetic text production. In the end, it *matters*, both literally and figuratively, that the model of digital vocality I have proposed in this dissertation is one that seeks to move beyond the boundaries of language and alphabetic text to explore its sensory and affective possibilities. In order to take up media artist and theorist Norie Neumark's call for attention to the performativity of digital voice—to the questions of "what voice does" and how voice contributes to "an aesthetics of intimacy and intensity" in digital arts and media (95)—it is crucial that we approach digital voice not as a theoretical abstraction, but rather as an experimental material, ripe for creative and ethical intervention. Thus, in this dissertation, I explore how the form of my work might enact or perform rather than simply represent or reflect upon the questions at the heart of my research. By drawing upon creative methodologies—from art, theater, music, film and poetics—I aim to bring them into conversation with a longstanding tradition of critical analysis, both in English Studies and the Humanities writ large.

Of course, this turn toward creative methods and forms is not without precedent in the field of composition and rhetoric. Among contemporary scholars, Anne Frances Wysocki's work at the intersections of aesthetics, politics, and embodiment is perhaps the most prominent example of this trend, as evidenced by not only her writing on digital art, but also her provocative presentations of her own experiments with poetic, interactive, and kinesthetic compositions at major conferences in the field. Suggesting that "[a]ny text we compose engages us aesthetically" and that "bodily perceptions" go hand-in-hand with ethics ("Unfitting Beauties" 110), Wysocki pushes us not only to consider artistic practices and forms as serious objects of

scholarly inquiry, but also to compose these texts and forms ourselves.[12] This potential for fruitful crossover with creative disciplines has also been proposed more broadly, at a pedagogical level, by other composition scholars in response to the rise of digital and multimodal writing pedagogy. For example, in his book *Remixing Composition*, Jason Palmeri uncovers a longstanding, if largely hidden, tradition of connections between composition pedagogy and the so-called "allied arts"—visual arts, drama, film, etc.—and calls for further attention to these potential connections. By employing practice-based inquiry and creative media production as a heuristic, I hope to imagine further opportunities for these forms of mutual exchange.

Looking beyond the field of composition, my work here is also invested in helping to bridge the longstanding gap between creative and critical pursuits within English Studies more broadly. In their article "Converging the ASS[umptions] between U and ME," Cheryl E. Ball and Ryan M. Moeller argue that digital media technologies provide us with a particularly productive inroad into this project. Because "[n]ew media texts make meaning with both form and content," Ball and Moeller argue that they might help to heal the cleft between disparate areas of English Studies, which have become increasingly oppositional: namely, between scholarly vs. creative writing and literature vs. rhetoric. While "there are multiple possibilities of what can count as knowledge in our field," these possibilities tend to be compartmentalized (literary criticism vs. creative writing vs. rhetoric) and placed into hierarchies (literary criticism over creative writing and rhetoric). As all of the subfields of English Studies increasingly take up digital media technologies and forms as a core part of their practice, we might well see increasing possibilities for productive conversation across their boundaries and perhaps even a dissolution of those

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[12] Over the past few years, at the margins of the field, we have seen increasing interest in and support for such experimentation with aesthetics and form in scholarly publishing. In addition to longstanding multimedia journals, such as *Kairos* and *Enculturation,* we have seen the rise of new multimedia publishing platforms—for example, *Itineration*, which launched in 2012.

boundaries altogether. By locating my methodology at this point of intersection between form and content, I hope to help chart out what this creative-critical "convergence" might accomplish.

At stake in this opening to questions of form is necessarily an opening to questions of *audience*—to questions of how scholarship circulates and for whom scholarship is produced. While the recent movement for Open Access publishing[13] has made great strides in broadening the potential networks of distribution for the products of scholarly inquiry, it seems safe to suggest that the question of "access" is much more than a purely economic or practical concern. Indeed, if our goal is to engage broader audiences and publics in conversations around twenty-first-century humanistic inquiry (and some might say that the very survival of humanistic inquiry depends on our ability to do so), then perhaps we should consider how the forms and genres of our scholarship might more readily invite this engagement; perhaps we might consider new ways of engaging not only the minds of the public, but also their bodies and senses—after all, as Anne Wysocki reminds us, "our senses are persuadable" ("Unfitting Beauties" 110)—or even engaging different audiences at different levels in the texts and knowledges we produce.

With this in mind, the two practice-based media projects that I have developed for this dissertation have been designed for multiple audiences and contexts. In addition to their immediate function as components of my doctoral research, I have created these projects with the intention that they might also have lives in the world beyond the academy—as installation pieces, as radio broadcasts, and as web-based exhibitions. While the critical reflection I offer in Chapters Four and Five is a vital element of my scholarly engagement with digital voice, I would like to emphasize this: That the projects I have produced here in no way depend on this text for

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[13] Notably, this conversation around access—once at the margins of our field—is beginning to gain traction and generate attention within the mainstream of composition discourse, as evidenced by the 2014 CCCC theme, proposed by Adam Banks: "Open | Source(s), Access, Futures."

their purpose or meaning. Rather, it is my intention that they stand on their own as works of creative production, which provoke curiosity and questions and confusion and pleasure in their own right and among diverse audiences. In this sense, the media projects that you will encounter in this dissertation should not be taken as merely instrumental catalysts for traditional academic theory-making, nor as demonstrations of a theory-already-formed. Instead, I offer them as an attempt to imagine the possibilities for theory-in-the-making, for theory-made-by-making, for theory that emerges from the material itself.

This integrated, creative-critical methodology also responds to a broader intellectual and political endeavor to rethink the forms and modes of knowledge production in the twenty-first-century humanities. Working to reimagine critique as only one form of knowledge production among many, prominent scholars such as Brian Massumi have called for a "productivist" or "inventionist" approach to the humanities (12)—a shift toward "affirmative methods: techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagerly) to reality" (13). Crucially, for Massumi, in order to take seriously this move toward affirmation, we must reorient our activities toward invention—and, as he reminds us, "[i]nvention requires experimentation" (17). In a similar vein, science studies scholar and philosopher Bruno Latour has famously argued that the utility of critique might have run its course, that the practice of "poking holes in delusions" is ultimately fruitless "if nothing more true is revealed beneath" ("An Attempt" 475). Calling for an alternative model of "compositionism,"[14] Latour suggests that we might instead take up the many "ruins" left in the wake of critique and work to "reassemble" them "piece by piece" to create something new (475).

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[14] While Latour's "compositionism" admittedly makes no explicit reference to composition as a field, a number of compositionists (in the narrow disciplinary sense) have recently begun to take interest in his thinking as a possibility for rethinking rhetorical theory and method, as evidenced by well-attended panels on Latour's work at both the CCCC and RSA conferences in 2012.

What these scholars are proposing, then, is an approach to knowledge-making that is fundamentally generative, that seeks out and builds upon potentialities, and that works to "*invent or reinvent* concepts" rather than simply "apply[ing] them" (Massumi 17, emphasis added). Missing from this framework, however, is any concrete methodological proposal for how this alternative approach to knowledge production might play out in practice. Thus, I see my dissertation as a valuable opportunity to begin imagining what such a "productivist," "compositionist" approach might actually look like—or, better yet, how it might sound.

1.3   PROJECT OVERVIEW

As an exploratory opening to this project, in the chapters that follow, I offer a multifaceted, creative-critical investigation of digital voice, which engages the *field* of composition as a disciplinary point of entry, while also engaging the *practice* of composition (broadly defined) as a methodological launch pad for a fundamentally material inquiry. In the first half of this dissertation, I employ traditional modes of text-based analysis, drawing together a rich body of disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship to lay the groundwork for a reconceptualization of voice—and more specifically *digitally mediated* voice—in contemporary composition theory and practice. Then, in the second half, I take up some of the theoretical openings—to questions of embodiment, agency, and performativity—which have emerged out of my analysis and experiment with their compositional possibilities in a pair of creative media projects, using the projects themselves as a platform for theoretical elaboration. Finally, I conclude with a critical reflection on the broader ethical implications of my research, working to propose—or, perhaps

more aptly, *to compose*—the beginnings of a *new* ethics of digital voice: an ethics-in-the-making, which begins from the material itself.

In **Chapter Two, "From Metaphor to Material (and Back Again?),"** I trace the history of voice across the contemporary disciplinary landscape of composition and rhetoric, investigating the ways in which our longstanding metaphorical traditions of 'voice'[15] have impinged upon and ultimately limited our subsequent approaches to audible, material voice in composition pedagogy and practice. I begin this chapter by describing how the 'voice' metaphor has been shaped by various mobilizations of and assumptions about the human voice itself, as an audible, vibrational, value-laden phenomenon. Then, I move to consider a range of pedagogical approaches to voice-as-*sound*, which have emerged at the margins of the field over the past half-century, from early cognitive behaviorist "talk-write" pedagogies[16] to recent efforts to reclaim voice through the canon of delivery in digital rhetoric. Ultimately, I illustrate how these approaches to voice have been limited, in various ways, by our lingering metaphorical attachments to language and identity and propose the need for a more flexible, nuanced approach to voice for contemporary composition practice. By highlighting the distinction between metaphorical and material voice, which has been too often obscured in the mainstream disciplinary discourse, this chapter positions my project in relation to historical and contemporary conversations in the field and establishes the exigency of my intervention in the chapters that follow.

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[15] Hereafter, I will refer to voice in its metaphorical sense as 'voice,' while references to the sounding, speaking voice will not include these single quotation marks.

[16] As I will discuss, Robert Zoellner was the first to propose this methodological approach in the late 1960s, coining the term "talk-write," which would later be taken up and reimagined by other scholars in the decades that followed.

In **Chapter Three, "A Resonant Material Vocality for Digital Composition,"** I offer an interdisciplinary intervention into the field's vocal imagination, proposing the value of a more robust, material theory of digital vocality. Taking the limitations in our field's current frameworks of *orality* and *aurality* as a point of departure, in this chapter, I pose the question: What would happen if we were to start not from the linguistic, metaphorical, and oratorical tradition of voice in composition, but rather from the material complexities of the voice itself? And, how might a more nuanced approach to voice force us to recompose composition as we know it? I begin this chapter by drawing together an interdisciplinary body of voice scholarship from fields such as philosophy, physiology, film studies, and digital aesthetics, in order to interrogate and ultimately rearticulate our commonplace understandings of voice as it relates to, and is often subsumed by, notions of speech and of self. In the process, I suggest that we might address voice, instead, as an *event* or an *effect*—one with paradoxical relationships to language, bodies, and technologies—and argue that, in doing so, we might productively open voice to new forms of compositional intervention. I close this chapter by bringing these interdisciplinary theories of voice back into conversation with contemporary disciplinary concerns in the field, proposing ways in which digital voice might enable us to reimagine the embodied, performative, and collaborative possibilities of digital composing practice.

Chapter Four, "*Coerced Confessions*: Performance, Editing, and Manipulation," represents the first of two hybrid, practice-based chapters, which use methods of creative-critical media production as a springboard for theoretical reflection. In this chapter, I discuss an experimental video series called *Coerced Confessions*, in which I employ a technique I call reverse remix in order to digitally "coerce" performative reenactments of real-life public confessions from the bodies of unwitting actors. Exploring the contradiction between the

perceived "fidelity" and practical "flexibility" of digital voice (Neumark 95), I illustrate how, in a digitally "coerced" performance, voice might exert material force and produce performative effects that outstretch the boundaries of live, intentional speech. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's sociological theories of language—in particular, his discussion of "expressive intonation" ("Speech Genres" 90)—I use this project as a platform for enacting the materiality of language and reflecting on the implications of "revoicing" recorded speech through digital audio editing. Drawing on the work of prominent film scholars like Rick Altman and Michel Chion, I also consider the relationship between the visible body and the audible voice in audio-visual media. Ultimately, by situating my practice in relation to theories and practices of vocal remix from across literary, artistic, and popular contexts, I aim to suggest ways in which the manipulable materiality of digital voice might compel us to expand our understanding of performance and agency in digital composing environments.

In **Chapter Five, "*Our Time is Up*: Archives, Co-labor, and Imagination,"** I discuss my work on a second practice-based media project: an experimental audio drama titled *Our Time is Up*. Speaking back to the dominant preservational and representational values surrounding archival voice recordings, in this project, I mobilize the recorded voices of deceased individuals from oral history archives and reimagine them as "actors" or "performers" in a collaborative work of fictional storytelling. I begin this chapter by laying out the landscape of voice (and, inevitably, 'voice'), as it has evolved across the history of oral history, from a silent metaphor of the alphabetic transcript to an analytical tool for uncovering hidden meanings of performative oral narratives. Situating my posthumous audio drama in relation to like-minded artistic interventions into conventional archives and documentary forms, I pose the questions: How might we mobilize the performative potential of archival voices beyond their representational

functions? And what are the ethical implications of doing so? I address these questions, first, by drawing on theories of "posthumous duets" by musicologists Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut—in particular, their proposal for the possibility of co-agential participation and "intermundane collaboration" (17) between living and nonliving voices. Then, I apply this concept to my own experience composing audio drama with posthumous voices, bringing Bakhtin's theories of "heteroglossia" and "polyphony" into the conversation in order to extend the possibilities for such collaboration toward speech-based narrative genres. At the close of the chapter, I turn to the unlikely practice of ventriloquism for ethical inspiration, proposing a model for ethical composing practice, which encourages us to reimagine our relationships to one another and to the materials we engage in our work.

In my conclusion, **Chapter Six, "Making. Voice. Matter. A Reflection on Material Ethics,"** I briefly revisit the trajectory I have taken in the preceding chapters before stepping back to consider in more detail the ethical potential that digital voice represents. Aiming to move beyond simple correctives to our negative ethical proscriptions against interfering with the voices of others, in this chapter, I propose possibilities for positive, generative ethical alternatives. Drawing from work by philosophers Mladen Dolar and Adriana Cavarero, I begin by briefly examining the historical role of the human voice in the development of Western ethics and political philosophy. Next, I consider the complexities posed by a move away from idealized notions of the unmediated, singularly embodied human voice of Western political philosophy toward the fractured, disruptive multiplicity of (non)human voices in the digital age, taking up Anne Frances Wysocki's work on ethics and digital aesthetics as a point of entry. Finally, I reflect back on my personal experience of composing with voices—and with the digital voices of others—in the experimental media projects that form the basis of my practice-based inquiry,

considering the role of relationality, performance, and sensory experience in my composing process. Ultimately, in this concluding chapter, I suggest the value of such practices in helping us to reimagine our relationships with one another and with the broader material world and argue for further experimentation and invention across creative fields and disciplines.

1.4   CONVERSATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Before proceeding to this analysis, I would like to briefly gesture to some of the principal disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts in which my research is situated, as well to as the various theoretical and artistic conversations to which I hope my work here will contribute. Stemming from my present institutional grounding in an English department with a well-established commitment to critical and cultural approaches to writing, in this dissertation, I take the field of composition and rhetoric—and writing practice more broadly—as my most immediate point of entry into the question of digital voice and, indeed, as the primary impetus for the project's emergence and exigency. However, this project is also informed by my broadly interdisciplinary background[17]—bringing together studies in philosophy, media studies, oral history, and geography—as well as my many *extra*discinplinary investments in the work of storytelling, performance, and the visual arts. In this sense, while my dissertation certainly speaks to the theory and practice of composition, in its most narrow, disciplinary sense, I also see it as speaking more widely to a rich array of academic, professional, and creative communities, which share a common interest in the act of *composing*, broadly defined.

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[17] I came to my PhD in Critical & Cultural Studies (English) with undergraduate degrees in Comparative History of Ideas and Communication and a Masters degree in Community Development and Planning.

As I have noted, I imagine this dissertation, firstly, as an intervention into a longstanding metaphorical tradition in the field of composition and rhetoric, which has overwhelmingly imagined 'voice' as a silent, textual metaphor. While the 'voice' metaphor has largely fallen out of favor with the decline of expressivist writing pedagogy, in this dissertation, I will suggest that metaphorical voice has, in fact, had a lasting effect on the ways we imagine voice-as-*sound* in the field of composition today. At a basic level, I argue that the field has become so accustomed to debating the politics of silent, textual 'voice' that we risk forgetting that such a thing as the audible human voice exists in the first place. And, going one step further, I propose that this easy slippage between voice and 'voice' suggests a deeper dilemma, in which the linguistic and metaphysical values that we associate with metaphorical 'voice' might risk being mapped back on to our understanding of its material predecessor. In this sense, while my dissertation is not concerned with the 'voice' metaphor for its own sake, I find it useful to consider metaphorical 'voice' in composition literature to the extent that it impinges upon or otherwise obscures our approach to voice as a sounding, vibrational material in digital composition contexts. This effort to "re-vocalize voice"—or to remind the field that voice is *sound*, as opposed to text or identity—is one of the principal interventions I aim to make.

As an intervention in the theory and practice of digital rhetoric, my exploration of vocality also suggests ways that we as a field might reimagine our relationship with the materials of our practice more generally. For the most part, digital and multimodal approaches to composition and rhetoric have tended to take up new media technologies as mere "tools," setting up binary oppositions between subject and object, human and nonhuman, agent and instrument. And as the field has recently moved to recover the classical canon delivery for digital rhetoric, we have seen an explicit disavowal of embodied performance in favor of technologized models

of media or design (McCorkle 13). While this theoretical shift has opened the field to a range of emerging compositional technologies and practices, it also risks reducing the body to a function of *reception*—a receiver of the multiple sensory modalities that digital media open up, rather than a core participant in the process of their *production*. In this context, my work with digital voice offers two crucial points of intervention: Firstly, because voice is, as Jonathan Rée has noted, the only "active organ"[18] of the human sensory apparatus—that is to say, "You can use your voice to populate your auditory world at will, and nothing remotely comparable applies to the other senses" (55)—it is uniquely well suited to serve as a fundamentally *compositional*, as opposed to merely perceptual, bodily mode. And, secondly, because *digital* voice is not *either* embodied performance *or* mediated material, but rather *both/and*, it stands as a provocative and paradoxical case for reconsidering the relationship between human bodies and technologies in digital composing practice.

Using my practice-based experiments with digital voice as a point of entry, my dissertation also contributes to longstanding debates around the materiality of language in English and literary studies more broadly. Certainly, prominent language theorists like J. L. Austin and Mikhail Bakhtin have drawn much-needed attention to the vital role of speech in both literary and everyday language contexts. However, while such approaches to the study of language certainly *imply* a notable regard for the actual, embodied act of vocalization, as some scholars have argued,[19] they frequently end up instrumentalizing or obscuring the rich materiality of voice beneath a privileged focus on words, text, and meaning. Furthermore, because these

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[18] Rée attributes this observation, originally, to Rousseau, in his work *Émile, or On Education.*

[19] For example, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four, scholars like Annette Schlichter (41) and Norie Neumark (96) have pointed to a striking oversight in J. L. Austin's speech act theory, which frames the "performative" as a purely linguistic question of "doing things with words," with no attention to the material role of voice in that act.

scholarly works themselves are produced in traditional alphabetic modes, even the most ardent

attempts to get at the "expressive intonation" of human speech (Bakhtin "Speech Genres" 85)

have understandable difficulty escaping the material constraints of their form, as primarily visual

(as opposed to aural) modes of inquiry. Addressing these limitations in the literature, in my

dissertation, I work to extend these conversations to more explicitly—and more *audibly*—

consider the vibrational materiality of the human voice. And, importantly, I do so not simply by

representing the relationship between voice and language, but rather by *enacting* that

relationship through experimental media practice[20]—practice which "perform[s] the voice"

(LaBelle "Background Noise" 134) through acts of recombination, reinvention, and disruption.

Beyond the boundaries of English Studies, my dissertation also speaks to the

interdisciplinary field of Sound Studies—and Voice Studies more specifically—offering a

nuanced exploration of the relationship between voice and technics, through both analytical and

practice-based inquiry. As media scholar Frances Dyson has argued, sound theorists have too

often "substituted aurality for what is in fact audio," approaching mediated sound as "ephemeral"

or "immaterial" in such a way as to obscure the role of technology involved in audio production

and reproduction (6).[21] And according to Annette Schlichter, this avoidance of technology is also

characteristic of the work of many prominent voice scholars,[22] who "do not account for sound

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[20] Here, I am implicitly mobilizing Neumark's distinction between performance and representation:
"performative works enact and make evident, rather than represent or express" (96).
[21] Notably, Dyson attributes this tendency to our essentialist attitudes toward the human voice. In other
words, it is because we have such a difficult time imagining the voice as something separate from its
source and the identity of the person who produced it that we tend to forget the fact that the transduced
voice is not in fact the same as the "original" (which is arguably not "original" at all) but rather something
produced through an interaction with technologies and with dramatically different material conditions.
[22] Mladen Dolar's work on the "object voice" in *A Voice and Nothing More* (the title speaks for itself)
and Adriana Cavarero's work on a "vocal phenomenology of uniqueness" in *For More Than One Voice:
Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* are two prominent examples of this erasure of sound
technology from theories of voice.

technologies but prefer to present the voice as a medium of an unmediated body" (46). While recent scholarship in the area of voice and digital aesthetics[23] has begun to close this gap, more work needs to be done in the area. By challenging its associations with metaphysical presence, taking seriously its interaction with audio technologies, and at the same time refusing to reduce it to a question of pure "audio,"[24] the theory of *digital vocality* that I propose in this dissertation offers a productive inroad into theorizing voice at the boundary of humanness.

Speaking more broadly, my dissertation also participates in conversations across aesthetic, production-based fields—such as film, poetics, oral history, music, and art—which work closely with voice as a core material of their practice. Conventional approaches to vocal performativity in the arts and humanities have tended to situate the voice as something to be *used in* performance, as a vehicle for delivering semantic meanings that lie somewhere beyond it. Under this framework, not only is the material *intensity* of voice[25] too easily obscured by its service to speech, but our ability to take up that intensity *as* a material for compositional invention is also constrained by the proscriptions of representational ethics. As many scholars have noted,[26] music is one notable exception to this trend, as a practice which, as Mladen Dolar puts it, "brings the voice energetically to the forefront, on purpose, at the expense of meaning"

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[23] For example, work by scholars such as Norie Neumark, Philip Brophy, and Brandon LaBelle in *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*.

[24] While Douglas Kahn argues that the phonograph served to "equalize [voice] with all other sounds amid exchange and inscription" (9), I would argue that there is simply too much excess in voice—our expectations that it is "destined toward [speech]" (Cavarero 127) and its special place in the so-called "hierarchy of perception" (Chion 5)—to collapse it entirely into the notion of audio. I will discuss these boundaries and definitions in greater detail in Chapter Three.

[25] I'm using the term "intensity" here in the spirit of Brian Massumi's definition of affect in *Parables for the Virtual*, as a set of "autonomic reactions" that occur "at the surface of the body, at its interface with things" (85), which precede language and cognition and happen outside of the boundaries of conscious experience.

[26] Among them, Roland Barthes in "The Grain of the Voice," Christoph Cox in "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism," and Mladen Dolar in *A Voice and Nothing More*.

(30) and thus offers an inroad into voice's nonrepresentational potential. Building on this foundation, scholarship in performance studies and digital aesthetics[27] has begun to take seriously the capacity of recorded voice to act and affect in its own right as a performative material, in ways that foreground *sound* and privilege *effect* over meaning. By drawing inspiration from these experimental approaches to voice—and by putting them to work through my own creative experiments in digital media production—I aim to challenge the accepted boundaries around conventional uses of voice in the creative arts writ large and propose new methods and conceptual approaches.

At the same time, by approaching this question of digital voice through the lens of *writing*, and from the disciplinary perspective of English Studies, more broadly, my dissertation also speaks back to those more radical approaches to vocal aesthetics, which have sought to define voice *in opposition to* language and meaning.[28] Indeed, across the spectrum of avant-garde art and poetics—for example, in the history of twentieth-century sound poetry[29]— we find a striking desire to reclaim voice's material potential precisely by stripping it of its connection to linguistic and representational practice, a tendency that only ends up reinforcing the primacy of language and essentializing the body.[30] In order to complicate this reductive, either/or posture, in this dissertation, I approach voice, instead, as philosopher Mladen Dolar does: as a radical *excess*, as that which language and the body have in common, but which neither can rightly

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[27] See Norie Neumark's "Doing Things With Voices: Performativity and Voice," which argues for the innate performativity of digital voice as an "authenticity effect" with the capacity to enact and disrupt identity as much as it represents or expresses it (95).

[28] According to Amanda J. Weidman, "The idea that aurality and orality are closer to lived, embodied experience but are nonrational or pre-analytical faculties is pervasive in the ideas and methodology of many academic disciplines" (287).

[29] As I discuss further in Chapter Three, scholars like Steve McCaffery and Brandon LaBelle have characterized the development of avant-garde sound poetry as a progressive move *away* from language and toward an idealized, primal embodiment, which defines voice in opposition language and meaning.

[30] As LaBelle puts it, "sound poetry yearns for language by rupturing the very coherence of it" (150).

claim as its own (73). By bringing theories of writing and language to bear on discussions of vocal materiality and performance, and by experimenting with voice as a compositional material in literary and narrative genres, my dissertation works to contribute critical nuance to the ways that voice is understood and mobilized as a compositional material across broad spheres of creative practice. Ultimately, it is this paradox—the fundamental tension between voice's relationship with and resistance to language, bodies, and meaning—which drives my ethical inquiry in the chapters that follow, with relevance to creative and compositional practice across disciplines, contexts, and genres.

2.0   FROM METAPHOR TO MATERIAL (AND BACK AGAIN?)

> Metaphor is a bilateral-bidirectional turning, 'inter-revolution,' revolving
> transformation, intervolving transmutation, between the familiar and the
> strange.
>
> — Kuang-Ming Wu, *On Metaphoring*

It goes without saying that the question of 'voice' in rhetoric and composition has been most widely understood as a question of *metaphor*. Making its debut as a benign grammatical descriptor ("active" vs. "passive" verb form) at the height of current-traditional rhetoric in the late 1930s (Bowden 175), 'voice'-as-metaphor came to assert a more formidable presence—as *a question of* presence—alongside the expressivist push for the personal in the late 1960s (179). After years as the uncontested golden child of "authentic" writing pedagogy, with the rise of social construction in the 1980s, 'voice' found its politics under scrutiny by a wave of scholars leery of stable identity and personal discourse (Yancey "Introduction" xv). And alongside increasing interest in dialogical approaches to composition, came a reworking of 'voice' as a fundamentally social practice of appropriation.

That's one version of the story, anyway—a compelling if mildly abridged account of 'voice's' historical trajectory, which composition scholar Darsie Bowden traces in her essay

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"The Rise of a Metaphor: 'Voice' in Composition Pedagogy." For Bowden, "one could argue that these three uses represent the move from current-traditional rhetoric with its emphasis on form and product through subjective rhetoric and its emphasis on author to transactional rhetoric and its emphasis on audience" (175). While she ultimately offers a more nuanced historical account, taking into consideration the formative influences of classical rhetorical education and early American writing instruction, Bowden also argues that this admittedly "oversimplif[ied]" narrative does in fact capture the essence of the 'voice' metaphor: its radically shifting allegiances and its location "at the nexus" of the most pressing debates in the field—contestations between "oral and written language, social and individual perspectives, and creative and expository writing" (174).

This dual notion of the essential *indeterminacy* and simultaneous *centrality* of metaphorical 'voice' is intrinsic to Kathleen Blake Yancey's argument in her introduction to the edited collection, *Voices on Voice: Perspectives, Definitions, Inquiry.* As the spatial equivalent to Bowden's chronological tracing, Yancey's text works to map "The Landscape of Voice" in composition. In the process, she finds 'voice' to be variously figured as:

> infusing the process of writing; as a reference for truth, for self; as a reference for human presence in text; as a reference for multiple, often conflicting selves; as a source of resonance, for the writer, for the reader; as a way of explaining the interaction of writer, reader, and text; as the appropriations of others: writers, texts; as the approximations of others; as a synecdoche for discourse; as points of critique; as myth (xviii).

Like Bowden, Yancey sees these contradictory mobilizations of 'voice' as intricately tied up in many of the larger trends and movements that have come to define the field, arguing that the 'voice' metaphor is, in fact, "paradigmatic of composition studies itself, of its recent history and

its current concerns" (xviii).

In the two decades that have followed the publication of these accounts (published in 1995 and 1994, respectively), the "current concerns" facing the field of composition have come to look—and *sound*—quite a bit different than either Bowden or Yancey might have imagined. Over the past decade, amidst the increasing accessibility and cultural pervasiveness of digital technologies, *media* and *multimodality* have staked their claim on the disciplinary terrain as what is arguably a new "paradigm" for twenty-first-century composition. Coincidentally, it was Yancey, in her 2003 Chair's Address to the CCCC, who would ultimately set the tone for this shift, heralding an alternative future of "Composition in a New Key."[31] Admonishing the field for its mounting "anachronis[m]" (302), Yancey calls here for an embrace the many diverse forms and platforms in which people are actively participating in composing practices, broadly defined, *outside* of formal writing instruction, *beyond* the traditional academic essay, and i*n conversation with* these emerging technologies. The new composing environment that Yancey describes is one in which texts are "Made" rather than only written and, crucially, "Made Not Only in Words"[32] but in *all* of the available modes, media, and materials of communication.

If multimodality and digital media do indeed constitute the *current* "current concerns" for the field as we know it (which, if it is not already obvious, is what I would like to argue here), then the question arises: Given our present "paradigm," to what extent does 'voice' remain a

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[31] Despite the musical metaphor that Yancey uses for the title and structure of her CCCC Address—calling for an approach to "Composition in a New Key" and dividing her talk into four "Quartets"—it is notable that she in fact never explicitly discusses sound (and certainly not voice) as an emerging compositional modality. Instead, the majority of the examples upon which she draws in her effort to rethink the composition curriculum have a decidedly visual bias (posters, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) I believe that this oversight is indicative of a larger tendency to silence sound as a valued composing modality in the early discourse on multimodal composition.

[32] I'm referring here explicitly to the title of Yancey's speech and its republication in the *CCC* journal as "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key."

formative figure on the contemporary compositional landscape? Or, put more bluntly: In the wake of the alphabetic empire, how much does 'voice' really matter? On one hand, the easy answer is that 'voice,' technically speaking, doesn't "matter" at all—at least not as we've been addressing it thus far. To the extent that it remains a fundamentally silent, textual metaphor, 'voice' appears to have little to say to a paradigm shift that is premised upon a radical de-privileging (though clearly not a dismissal)[33] of alphabetic, print-based writing as the *only* valued form of expression. On the other hand, if we reimagine what we mean by 'voice,' the situation changes entirely; if we shift our attention from voice as silent metaphor to voice as sounding materiality, then it becomes anything but expendable. In fact, I would like to argue that, in this context, *voice matters to composition* as it has never mattered before; that voice-*as*-matter—as the material vibration of an embodied utterance—is, in fact, among the most pressing "*matters of concern*" (Latour "An Attempt" 478) at the heart of contemporary compositional practice. In other words, as the field begins to open itself to the affordances of orality, aurality, and audio technologies, voice resurfaces *not* as a tangential metaphorical concern, but rather as one of the core materials with which we make meaning, express feeling, and compose a common world.

But to what extent has the field recognized, embraced, and theorized voice as a material potentiality? To what extent have we approached voice *as* voice in light of composition's digital futures? In this chapter, I will address these questions by working to recompose the "landscape" of voice for contemporary composition and by reintegrating voice-as-*sound* into the disciplinary narrative. In the first section, I will revisit voice's roots in the field as a silent, textual metaphor,

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[33] This is not to suggest that alphabetic text is somehow absent from our present concerns in composition, or that metaphorical approaches to 'voice' might not have some potential relevance to other compositional modes. I am merely arguing that these concerns are not at the crux of the core questions in the field in the same way that they were, for example, in the struggle between expressivism and social construction in the Bartholomae/Elbow debates.

asking how various traditions of metaphorical 'voice' draw upon and propel forward particular assumptions about voice, which might influence our ability to engage it as a sounding material. In the next section, I will turn to examine a range of approaches to sounding voice itself that have emerged at the margins of the field, identifying three prominent strands of practice—voice as *method*, voice as *mode*, and voice as *material*—and exploring moments of limitation and potential in each. Finally, I will turn to discuss how these past configurations of voice in the field speak to the realities and potentialities of voice's technological future, arguing for the need to construct a more robust, interdisciplinary theory of digital voice as a compositional material.

2.1   ON 'VOICE' AS METAPHOR(ING)

When approaching 'voice' as a metaphor, it is important to understand that 'voice' is definitively not *a* metaphor, in the sense of a stable, singular substitution. Instead, we might better consider 'voice' as multiply and adjectivally *metaphorical*. As Kathleen Blake Yancey has suggested, "[W]e use the metaphor of voice to talk generally around issues in writing: about both the act of writing and its agent, the writer, and even about the reader, and occasionally about the presence in the text of the writer" ("Introduction" vii). Indeed, in her "landscape of voice," Yancey identifies no less than five distinct approaches to metaphorical voice—ranging from expressivism (x), to Bakhtinian dialogics (xii), to non-Western views of voice (xvii)—all of which represent radically different (and often contradictory) pedagogical and political projects. Noting the vast proliferation of texts exploring 'voice' in the field's major journals—for purposes as diverse as "feminist theory," "the writing process," "political dissent," "advertisements," and "evangelical discourse"—Cynthia Selfe argues that perhaps the only thing

these works have in common is metaphor itself, or, in other words, the use of voice as "*a characteristic of written prose*" (630).

On one hand, this multiplicity might be read positively as a sign of 'voice's' enormous elasticity—its enabling potential to be something for everyone. However, for scholars like Darsie Bowden, 'voice's' lack of clear definition—Is it "style," "persona," "stance," or "ethos"?—is actually a liability. "[A]s a consequence," Bowden argues, "there has never been a consistent methodology for how to use it in the teaching of writing" (173). Even Peter Elbow—perhaps 'voice's' most enthusiastic and longstanding supporter—admits that, over time, the term has become "warm [and] fuzzy" and "has been used in such a loose and celebratory way as to mean almost anything" ("What Do We Mean" 2). In the midst of this great multiplicity, and indeed great *ambiguity*, it is perhaps not surprising that the debates around 'voice' in composition have been all but dominated by a single, deceptively simple question: "What Do We Mean When We Talk About Voice in Texts?"[34] (Elbow).

Let me begin by saying that this is not the question I will take up in this chapter. Not only does any attempt to answer this question risk coming off as grossly reductive, but, more importantly, this question holds little potential to yield substantive insight on the primary matter at hand—that is, the *matter of sounding voice*. Because, when all is said and done, this question is not about *voice* at all; it is about 'voice,' long ago abstracted and co-opted and, as I will argue, on the verge of forgetting where it came from—even forgetting that it is a metaphor at all. In other words, I am not interested here in entering into familiar debates on the empirical validity, pedagogical utility, or political integrity of metaphorical voice. 'Voice'-as-metaphor interests me only to the extent that it impinges upon voice-as-*material*, only from the perspective of its

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[34] This is the title of Peter Elbow's essay in Yancey's collection *Voices on Voice: Perspectives, Definitions, Inquiry.*

effects. For my purposes, then, rather than continuing to ask "What is voice?"[35] (Leggo 145) in its many shifting metaphorical guises, I would like to shift the direction of the conversation entirely, asking instead: *What happens to voice-as-sound when we metaphorize voice in the first place?*

As a way into this question, I find it useful to begin by examining the ways in which metaphorical 'voice,' by its very nature as metaphor, has drawn upon particular understandings of sounding voice—both what it is and how it works as a fundamentally "embodied, physical [and] human" phenomenon (Selfe 630). In this section, then, I will talk through a range of approaches to metaphorical 'voice' that have surfaced in the dominant disciplinary conversations on the topic in recent decades, starting from the key assumptions about the human voice underlying each. I will aim to connect these assumptions to a set of broader theoretical discourses and scholarly traditions that appear to have informed the field's approach to voice thus far. And, finally, I will discuss how these mobilizations of metaphorical 'voice'—and the assumptions upon which they are based—may be continuing to reverberate in contemporary approaches to voice-as-sound in the field of composition.

2.1.1 Identity

Without a doubt, the single most alluring—and single most maligned—principle underlying the 'voice' metaphor (at least in its strongest form) is the image of voice as a profoundly

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[35] It is telling, I believe, that this question appears at the very top of a list of 100 "Questions I Need to Ask Before I Advise My Students to Write in Their Own Voices" in Carl Leggo's 1991 essay in *Rhetoric Review*. Furthermore, of the 99 additional questions on his list, the vast majority function largely as extensions of the first, in that they take metaphorical 'voice' as a starting point and inquire less into what 'voice' *does* than what it *means* or *is*. And #33—"Can voice be defined with definiteness?" (147)—even hints at the possible futility of the question in the first place.

"individual," "personal," and "authentic" expression of a unique and unrepeatable human subjectivity. Indeed, this presumed connection between *voice* and *identity* lies at the foundation of the expressivist movement in composition. Under this framework, 'voice' is an ineffable, almost magical quality in the text that gives it "life" and makes it "human," drawing on the resources of both natural language (i.e. rhythm, cadence, intonation) and individual identity (i.e. lived experience, embodiment, the unconscious) to express "the sound of more of a person behind the words" (Elbow "What Do We Mean" 18)—or even to produce "the individual human being composed of words in the text" (Yancey "Introduction" ix). Here, 'voice' is figured as a function of authentic authorship and, indeed, as a direct point of access to the humanity of an absent writer behind the text (Elbow 17). Despite the fact that it has no universally identifiable features, this notion of 'voice' exists as a special quality that readers, on one hand, may sense in the text of another author, and writers, on the other hand, can "listen" for in their own writing, in order to identify and develop "a voice that feels like one's own" (Elbow 27). In practice, the so-called "voicist pedagogies" (Bowden 181) associated with expressivism tend to "posit a writer developing 'naturally,' somewhat as do toddlers in an oral context" (Yancey x), engaging students in exercises such as freewriting, in order to block out the distracting static of audience and listen for the ring of this originary voice.

This strong instantiation of 'voice'—which Peter Elbow distinguishes as "resonant voice" (16)—is rooted in a longstanding metaphysical tradition, which has figured voice as a form of "presence." We find an influential example of this perspective in the scholarship of Walter Ong, particularly in his aptly titled text *The Presence of the Word*. For Ong, because spoken language both preceded written language in its historical development and developed "naturally" in contrast with the "artificiality" of writing technologies (the alphabet, the printing press, etc.),

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voice stands as the "native habitat" of human language (22). Furthermore, because voice "moves from interior to interior" of conversing bodies (125), it is seen to express a profound, even *divine* sense of "interiority" itself, and thus serves as language's most immediate point of access to human consciousness or the soul. In many ways, then, Ong's scholarship represents one of the most emphatic contemporary celebrations of vocal authenticity—framed through a return to "primary orality" and the "natural" roots of language in speech—upon which the 'voice' metaphor in composition has drawn.

It is well known that these notions of "authentic" or "resonant" 'voice' in writing have been widely attacked as essentializing and arhetorical, not least by poststructuralist approaches to writing instruction. For example, in his iconic "debate" with Peter Elbow, David Bartholomae figures the 'voice' metaphor as a "sentimental" fiction of personal ownership and expression, which depends on a presumption of stable and individualized identity ("Writing With Teachers" 67). For Bartholomae, the idea of a writer's "'own' presence" in a text obscures the extent to which all discourse has "already [been] written by a culture" prior to the writer's arrival on the scene ("Responses" 85). On the surface, then, we might say that 'voice' is taken up by social construction as the symbol of all that is wrong with personal and expressive approaches to writing in ways that apparently have little to do with material, sounding voice. On second glance, however, we see at the root of this critique a much larger body of contemporary theory, which has rallied not only against the notion of metaphysical "presence," but also against the voice itself.

I am referring here, most explicitly, to poststructuralist scholar Jacques Derrida, and his crusade against "phonocentrism" in *Of Grammatology*. Here, Derrida protests against a supposed valorization of speech over writing, which he sees as implicit in the logocentric tradition of

Western philosophy, which links the signified with an originary, divine connection to breath and voice.[36] In arguing for a *re*valuation of language as pure trace, with no connection to a stable, human presence, Derrida effectively banishes the voice—as an embodied phenomenon—from critical consideration. Thus, because of their genealogical connection to these influential poststructuralist theories, perhaps we might consider social constructionist perspectives on 'voice' in composition to be directed not only at the metaphor, but also at the materiality—and in ways that have had enormous repercussions on voice's reputation throughout the field.

2.1.2 Embodiment

But if social construction has implicitly done away with the body in favor of discourse, other discourses on 'voice' have taken up the body as a key site through which voice—and thus 'voice'—might be figured. This express interest in the body has manifested itself most commonly as a widespread fascination with the concept of the "voiceprint"—the so-called "speaking analogue to fingerprints," which is fundamentally "individualized" and by which we recognize an individual speaker (Yancey viii). While not literally present as audible "voice quality" in written texts,[37] the "voiceprint" provides a useful correlate to metaphorical 'voice' imagined as *style*, or what Elbow classifies as "*Recognizable or Distinctive Voice*" ("What Do

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[36] It is important to note that recent philosophical and phenomenological studies of voice (see Mladen Dolar's *The Voice and Nothing More* and Adriana Cavarero's *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* for two prominent examples) have begun to question Derrida's claim of "phonocentrism," arguing, to the contrary, that voice has been largely feared (Dolar) or devalued (Cavarero) rather than privileged within the Western framework of *logos*. These texts will serve as fruitful points of departure in my larger attempt to return voice-as-sound to the center of composition theory and practice.

[37] For a detailed discussion of "voice quality" as a factor in identification, see Jody Kreiman and Diana Van Lancker Sidtis's introduction in *Foundations of Voice Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Voice Production and Perception*.

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We Mean" 13). The assumption here is that a writer's 'voice' is the means by which reader will come to recognize him or her as distinct—presumably in the same way that we recognize an individual speaker by his or her unique voice.

Given that the "voiceprint" is based in empirical evidence gleaned from vocal physiology and forensics, it stands as a decidedly less controversial approach to the 'voice' metaphor—one that is still highly individual, but without treading into the dangerous territory of metaphysics. As Elbow insists, "If I have a 'distinctive and recognizable voice,' that voice doesn't necessarily resemble me or feel to me like 'mine' or imply that there is a 'real me'" (14). Instead, Elbow underplays the "genetic" determination of the voiceprint analogy (3) and emphasizes instead the role of repeated behavior—figuring writing as a habitual practice through which a recognizable 'voice' eventually emerges (13). However, despite this deliberate move away from authenticity, as Bowden suggests, there is often a fine line between "identifiability" and "identity"—a line which many proponents of metaphorical 'voice' have been quick to disregard (185). Indeed, because the other side of voice's "identifiability" is its identifiability *over time*—as Elbow argues, "[s]omething constant persists despite the change" (3)—there is a clear temptation to return the fact of vocal uniqueness to something essential, even something *owned*. Thus, while the body here certainly offers a more material or "empirical" grounding for the 'voice' metaphor, there also seems to persist a prevailing notion that "[t]he voice comes from the body; the body is utterly personal and this personalness somehow […] is [what is] powerful" (Bowden 182).

2.1.3 Emotion

This highly personalized approach to voice is also evident in parallel discussions about the relationship between voice and *emotion*: namely, the idea that 'voice' in writing has the potential

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to express something "authentic" about what we might call *the life of the mind*. Here, rather than

focusing on changes in the voice that might have occurred "after a number of years" (Elbow

"What Do We Mean" 3), this strand of scholarship is concerned with the way the voice shifts

continuously to express the internal feelings and attitudes of the speaker. Elbow describes this

process as a kind of "naked" or "candid" exposure, in which "our voice quavers with fear or

unhappiness or lilts with elation or goes flat with depression" (3). The body here shifts from

being a closed container for an essentialized soul, to being a permeable membrane across which

a person's interior, mental state can be transmitted. And it is ultimately the voice—by virtue of

its flexibility—that has the power to reveal this interior to the outside world. In this sense, while

still deeply personal, 'voice' is afforded the capacity to function semi-autonomously, beyond

conscious authorial intention.

This appreciation for voice's innate expressive capacities is a key principle of the

elocutionary movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[38] For British actor-

turned-elocutionist Thomas Sheridan, the most effective approach to vocal delivery requires that

speakers "unlearn" the so-called "artificial and constrained" methods of expression typically

associated with reading aloud in favor of tapping into the "natural" tones and gestures of

everyday speech (140). These tones can only be produced properly if speakers immerse

themselves entirely in the emotions and passions they seek to express, seeking to feel them in

their own minds and bodies.[39] Crucially, however, these passion-driven, even "animalistic" tones

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[38] The extent to which this idiosyncratic and vastly underappreciated educational movement directly influenced our own field's approach to metaphorical 'voice' is difficult to say. However, I find in its distinctive approach to vocal delivery a number of resonances that are worth considering.

[39] John Walker explains this process as a kind of feedback loop, in which "each passion produces an agitation of the body, which is accompanied by a correspondent agitation of the mind" and further argues that, in fact, "certain sounds naturally produce certain bodily agitations, familiar to those produced by the passions" (325).

have the capacity to "of themselves excite analogous emotions, without the intervention of any thing else" (Sheridan 119). Thus, there is a way in which voice's expressive capacities have an almost autonomous power not only to "expose" the inner passions of the speaker (and, conversely, to expose his or her lack of passions if they are not in fact genuinely present), but also to transmit these passions to an audience—an audience that must ideally be not only "instruct[ed]" and "please[d]" but also "moved" (Sheridan 143). After all, the voice, in elocution, is imagined to appeal not to the head, but to the heart. As Sheridan puts it, it is "understood by being felt" (119).

Of course, it's important to note that Sheridan's "natural" approach to vocal delivery is the exception, not the rule, in the mainstream elocutionary movement. Indeed, for many elocutionists, voice's innate capacity to express human emotion is only valuable to the extent that it is harnessed and finessed through a practice of rigid, imitative performance. As elocutionist John Walker explains, while it is true that "the expression of every passion ought to commence within" (331), in fact, these expressions often "stand in need of the regulation and embellishments of art" (324). As he understands it, it is the task of the "eloquent" orator "to acquire such tones and gestures as nature gives to the passions; that he may be able to produce the semblance of them when he is not actually impassioned" (324). Thus, the primary method by which elocution is taught is through the study of painstaking taxonomies that describe—and indeed *pres*cribe—the "natural" and "appropriate" vocal and gestural expression of "the principal *passions*, *humours*, *sentiments*, and *intentions*" (Burgh 18)[40] for scripted reanimation. For rhetoric scholar Ben McCorkle, it is through this process—"one that values the mechanical

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[40] Burgh's list of categories range everywhere from "desire" (26) to "anger" (28) to "death" (32), each described in dictionary-like specificity and sometimes cross-referenced for convenience—i.e. "*Dependence*. See *Modesty*" (25).

regularity of print and reinscribes the attributes back upon oral processes of oral delivery" (107)—that elocution works to elide the differences between speech and writing, ultimately privileging the values of "a print-centered communication environment" over instrumentalized vocal delivery.

2.1.4   Performance

This shift in attention toward *audience* and *performance* is also characteristic of another strand of metaphorical discourse in composition pedagogy—one that figures voice as fundamentally *rhetorical*. In these discourses, the voice is not only capable of "revealing" the inner truth of a person's emotional state of being, it can also be deliberately mobilized and manipulated by the speaker for particular rhetorical effect. One of the key ways in which this performativity has been figured is through a sharp distinction between two "dimensions" of voice: its basic "sound" and the "manner or style" in which it is used. Elbow frames these distinctions using a musical metaphor, which figures voice as a "physical 'instrument'" ("What Do We Mean" 3). As he explains, on one hand, the instrument itself constrains and determines the range of possible sounds that can be produced, and, on the other hand, the musician can use that instrument to play a range of "tunes, rhythms, and styles" of her own invention (3). This distinction—between what we might think of as *voice quality* and *vocal delivery*—has enabled the field to figure 'voice' in writing as *flexible* and *rhetorical*. Based on audience and circumstance, the writer—imagined as a player of her own voice-as-instrument—may chose to modulate and deploy her voice in a variety of ways to create a diversity of intended effects.

This musical metaphor represents a longstanding tradition that goes back to early discussions of delivery in classical rhetoric. In his reflection "On the Character of the Orator,"

Cicero celebrates the enormous flexibility of the human voice by comparing it to the "strings in a musical instrument," which are able, when "moved by the affections of the mind," to express every imaginable human emotion (256). For Cicero, the expressive capacity of the voice appears to be innate to its instrumental character, such that "the tones of the voice, like musical chords, are so wound up as to be responsive to every touch, sharp, flat, quick, slow, loud, gentle" (256). From this perspective, as a person is "touched" by emotional stimuli from the outside, his or her voice-as-instrument responds with a pre-given tonality that corresponds to the given emotion. However, as we see in Quintilian's approach to voice-as-instrument, it is also possible and even essential that this variety and flexibility be made "obedient to the will of the speaker" through careful management and modulation (353).[41] Under this framework, voice is imagined as something outside of and distanced from the speaker herself, but something that is at the same time capable of delivering what is inside—raw "affections," certainly, but more ideally performed rhetorical intention. As an "instrument" of rhetorical delivery, the voice is figured as a singular, closed, natural object, possessed of its own capacities to resonate and affect, as well as its own internally determined limitations to this flexibility. Ultimately, it is up to the speaker-as-musician—the owner of a singular voice-instrument—to activate the capacities of her voice, as well as to keep their dangerous excesses at bay.

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[41] In *The Philosophy of the Human Voice*, American elocutionist James Rush takes up the comparison between the human voice and the musical instrument as an ultimately incongruent one, identifying the "radical and vanishing movement" (63) of the human speaking voice through a tone and contrasting this with the "discrete" movement from pitch to pitch made by an instrument (33). At the same time, he also seeks to develop a notational system that makes voice's excesses accessible to the same kind of recording and performative reanimation as music, thus setting up a fascinating tension between the desire to harness and tame voice and the inability to actually do so.

2.1.5   Dialogue

Carrying forward this notion of rhetorical performativity, I would like to turn now to address one final approach to 'voice' in writing—one that is equally invested in voice's intonational flexibility, but that figures this flexibility very differently. I'm referring here to "dialogical" approaches to composition, which draw upon the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin. In contrast to the closed, singular, personal voice-instrument proposed by traditional approaches to rhetorical delivery, Bakhtinian approaches to composition have worked to reconfigure 'voice' as fundamentally *multiple*, *dialogical*, and *social*. As composition scholar Frank Farmer explains it, in this context, "voice is always *voices*. A voice in isolation has no reason to speak, no motive to be heard, and thus is meaningless" (62). Such pedagogies encourage students to "become self-conscious about and attentive to the language they use" as writers (Halasek 6). Rather than imagining themselves as owning their voice—or 'voice(s)'—as solitary authors, students are pushed to consider how language functions instead as "a continuing heterogeneity and diversity of or tension among voices" (18) and to imagine themselves as participating in a social process of "revoic[ing]" (Farmer 69), which is always already imitating, responding to, and anticipating the responses of existing conversations and genres. Thus, in place of a speaker who adapts and modulates her own personal voice to meet a variety of rhetorical situations, this approach to voice imagines a speaker who is constantly borrowing from the intonations and accents of others and adapting them to her own purposes. In this sense, dialogical approaches to 'voice' in composition pedagogy represent a radical disavowal of voice-as-*authorship* in favor of an alternative model of voice-as-*appropriation*.

The theories of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin—which provide the impetus for this "revoicing" of 'voice' in writing—represent a radical effort to reimagine the nature of

language itself, not as a neutral linguistic system but as a living practice of situated social "utterance." Central to this theory is the idea that speakers do not, in fact, draw their words from the dictionary, but rather encounter them "in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" and then appropriate them for their own purposes ("Discourse" 294). As such, one's own speech is always first and foremost invested with "echoes and reverberations" of the speech of another ("Speech Genres" 91), often in the form of audible "accents" and "expressive intonations" that are constitutive of meaning (85).[42] On one hand, given that Bakhtin's theory of language draws its inspiration directly from the social contexts of everyday utterance, voice-as-*sound* plays an essential and formative role. On the other hand, while audible voice provides the impetus for Bakhtin's thinking, its sounding potential is ultimately silenced when the theory is collapsed into alphabetic discourse. 'Voice' in this context is *not*, to be sure, a sounding vibration. Instead, it is perhaps something closer to the notion of *perspective* as it is inflected by questions of style, intention, and context.[43] However, with few exceptions,[44] Bakhtin tends to mobilize terms like "voice," "accent," and "intonation" in alphabetic contexts *as if they were actually audible.* Crucially, such a move risks erasing the

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[42] In his essay "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," Bakhtin's collaborator, Valentin Volosinov, describes the place of intonation in language, arguing: "*Intonation always lies on the border of the verbal and the nonverbal, the said and the unsaid*. In intonation, discourse comes directly into contact with life. And it is in intonation above all that the speaker comes into contact with the listener or listeners— intonation is social par excellence. It is especially sensitive to all the vibrations in the social atmosphere surrounding the speaker" (102). This interest in "vibration" is notable as precisely that which 'voice,' when transformed into textual metaphor, does not possess.

[43] In this sense, we might see Bakhtinian approaches to 'voice' in composition as most closely allied with the social construction movement, which seeks to shift the focus from "voice" to "citation" (Bartholomae 67). However, if the social constructionists have all but banned the use of the 'voice' metaphor as a result of their iconic clash with expressivism, Bakhtin has allowed for a reworking of 'voice' that is more palatable to poststructuralist politics.

[44] For example, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Bakhtin explicitly draws attention to the fundamental incongruence between the "material of music" versus that of the novel and explains that ultimately, "the term 'polyphonic novel,'" is thus necessarily "a graphic analogy, a simple metaphor" standing in for lack of a "more appropriate label" (22). I will return to this notion of polyphony in Chapter Four.

distinctions between metaphor and materiality, ultimately working to silence sounding voice in favor of its textual manifestations.

2.2   MATERIAL RELATIONS

Stepping back for a moment from this discussion, I would like to pose the question: So what, then, does this silent, textual 'voice' have to do with the project at hand, with voice as a sounding material? On the surface, it would seem, the answer is very little. After all, despite what we may have been led to believe, the range of generic conventions, stylistic features, and linguistic philosophies that apparently give 'voice' to textual discourse ultimately bear little resemblance to the audible vibrations we emit from our speaking, breathing, bellowing bodies in an act of vocal utterance. While it is clear, as I have argued here, that the 'voice' metaphor indeed draws from ideas about the human voice as "its most immediate reference" (Yancey "Introduction" viii), it is also just as clear that the 'voice' metaphor is *not* equivalent to the human voice itself. Certainly, theories of subvocalization have suggested the possibility that our own bodies might approach the act of reading text with the same basic nerve and muscular activity we use in speaking it (Elbow "What Do We Mean" 7). But in the end, it is fair to say that we cannot actually "hear" alphabetic text (unless, of course, we read it aloud); that no matter how we figure it, metaphorical 'voice' in all its forms is fundamentally devoid of voice's essential quality of vibrational resonance.

If this is the case, then the question becomes: Why attend to metaphorical 'voice' in the first place? Wouldn't it be easier to simply declare a break with voice's silent, textual past and push voice forward into its sounding material future? Admittedly, when I first approached this

dissertation, that is precisely how I imagined my intervention—and, indeed, it was tempting to simply dismiss metaphorical 'voice' as an anachronistic relic with little bearing on the task at hand. However, as I have progressed in my research, I have come to realize that, in fact, to approach voice as a binary of metaphor vs. material, silence vs. sound, past vs. future would be both to blatantly ignore the extent to which 'voice'-as-metaphor has inflected—and continues to inflect—the diverse approaches to voice-as-sound that have emerged in its wake, and to grossly misunderstand the nature of metaphor itself.

In my previous discussion of Bakhtin, I alluded to the possibility that his work—precisely by attending to sounding voice only to collapse it into alphabetic text—might inadvertently be serving to erase the distinction between the metaphor and the materiality, ultimately to the privilege of the former. However, it is important to point out that Bakhtin is *in no way* alone in this tendency—and neither are the compositionists who have drawn on his work in order to reimagine the internal dialogics of writing. Rather, this slippage between material voice and textual 'voice' seems to be endemic to the disciplinary discourse around 'voice' *in general* and indicative of a larger trend in which *voice*, in the field of composition, is imagined first-and-foremost as a textual phenomenon. Undoubtedly, this fact speaks to the power and popularity that the 'voice' metaphor has garnered over time, and in spite of the enormous controversy it has generated. In fact, I would argue that we might even consider 'voice' to be among what composition theorist Robert Zoellner calls the primary "instrumental metaphors" of writing pedagogy—that is, not the metaphors we *teach*, but the metaphors we *use to teach* (268). As Zoellner suggests, such metaphors often become "so fundamental and pervasive that we tend to forget that they *are* metaphors and act as if they were 'fact'" (269). While, certainly, there have

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been notable exceptions to this rule[45]—moments in the disciplinary discourse in which explicit effort is made to acknowledge the existence of "the literal thing itself, the human voice"—more often than not, such efforts are framed explicitly as "remind[ers]" of 'voice's' status as metaphor, suggesting that there is a felt need for such reminders in the first place (Elbow "What Do We Mean" 2).

But if it is indeed the case that we, as a field, have often forgotten that 'voice' *is* a metaphor, then I am not suggesting that this fact on its own is somehow inherently problematic. I am not a literalist, and neither am I against the 'voice' metaphor purely on principle. (Admittedly, in my own teaching, I have often found 'voice' to be a useful point of entry into questions of style and representation.) However, I would argue that the widespread metaphorical amnesia surrounding the question of 'voice' in our field *does* become troubling when it serves to close down the possibilities for substantive discussion around the voice itself. Because, when we forget that there *exists* a physical, material reality behind the metaphor, it is all too easy to exclude this reality from consideration—crucially, even in conversations that call for explicit critical attention to the materiality of sounding voice.

Janet C. Eldred's 1997 *CCC* article—promisingly titled "The Technology of Voice"—stands as a prominent example of the implicit silencing, which characterizes the very disciplinary conversations that appear ready to take up voice as a sounding phenomenon. In this personal-critical essay, Eldred discusses her relationship to her mother's 'voice' over time, from her early childhood experiences of exchanging handwritten letters, through her mother's struggle to communicate as her body deteriorated due to terminal A.L.S. Implicit in Eldred's narrative is an

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[45] Peter Elbow's essay "What Do We Mean When We Talk About Voice in Texts?" is a notable example of this, stating: "When there is so much metaphorical talk about voice, I find it intellectually cleansing to remind myself that it is a metaphor and to acquaint myself better with the literal term—and even try to immerse myself better in the experience of the literal thing itself, the human voice" (2).

underlying sense of congruency between the "written voice" that her mother used in letters and emails and the audible speaking voice that she ultimately lost to the disease—and, furthermore, a familiar assumption that "written voice" is, in fact, just as audible (334). Describing the strangeness of the technologies that helped to mediate her mother's "voice" when she could no longer speak—the "technological voice" of the hand-held "Crespeaker" (340) and the "stranger's voice" of the T.D.D. telephone (345)—Eldred ultimately expresses a preference for "the old [voice], the written [voice]" of her mother's letters and even the "online voice" of her email communication (346). Beginning the essay by suggesting (rightly, I think), that "in any discussion of voice, we necessarily hear technology's inflections" (334), Eldred ultimately skirts around any substantive consideration of these sounding technologies by framing them only as poor substitutes for the textual metaphor.

In many ways, it is hard to argue with the sincerity of the feelings and experiences behind Eldred's heartfelt reflection. And, indeed, her essay does raise some provocative questions—about the uncanny disruption of the wrong voice, about the ways in which mediated and synthetic speech infuses our day-to-day lives, and about the affective experience of listening vs. reading. Unfortunately, however, because of the ease with which we seem to be able to collapse the distance between textual 'voice' and its sounding equivalent—and to the privilege of the former—these questions are largely left unaddressed. At the essay's end, we are left with an unresolved conflict between Eldred's mother's desire to hear her daughter's voice on the T.D.D. telephone and Eldred's own stubborn preference for the more 'authentic' voice of her mother's writing—followed by an awkwardly placed argument against grading personal writing in the composition classroom. What concerns me about this essay, then, is not the argument itself, which is profoundly sympathetic, but rather the missed opportunity that this argument represents:

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the extent to which pressing questions about the future of the material voice are obscured by the residue of 'voice's' metaphorical legacy.

As we will see in the section that follows, this muddying effect represents a much larger pattern in the dominant discourse on voice, wherein many of the core principles that undergird the field's attachment to 'voice'-as-text continue to inform its efforts to imagine the possibilities for voice-as-sound. Thus, just as the 'voice' metaphor has precluded discussions of sounding voice from happening in the first place, it may also have the potential to infuse these discussions *when they do happen* with its own assumptions and values. In this context, perhaps it is not enough that we simply shift our understanding of 'voice' from a singular metaphor to a multiplicity. Instead, it seems to me that we might best understand 'voice' as participating in a dynamic process of "metaphoring" (Wu 37)—a reciprocal process through which 'voice' *borrows from* particular ideas about the human voice itself, *reaccentuates* those ideas to meet its own purposes, and then maps those ideas *back onto* the original term in ways that have lasting implications—both promising and limiting—on our relationship to it.[46]

2.3   SOUNDING VOICE IN COMPOSITION

Looking back at the previous discussion, we have seen how different ideas about the sounding human voice make possible different approaches to and mobilizations of the 'voice' metaphor.

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[46] As Kuang-Ming Wu explains it, "This is the two-way metastasis of metaphor from the familiar to the novel and back. Seeing the novel in terms of the familiar digests the novel to turn it intelligible—as 'novel familiar' and no more alien. As we do so, we cannot help but perceive the familiar in terms of the novel, 'digesting' the familiar to turn it sparkling new." (49-50).

Whether we imagine voice as individual or social, embodied or linguistic, agential or instrumental ultimately has enormous consequences for what we can do with voice in composition pedagogy and practice. I have also suggested how these various assumptions about voice are not only drawn from common sense understandings of our own voices—or what Peter Elbow calls "everyday empiricism" ("What Do We Mean" 11)—but, in many cases, are also connected to larger scholarly traditions—from metaphysics, to classical rhetoric, to literary criticism—already circulating at the margins of the discipline. Building upon this foundation, in the analysis that follows, I will turn my attention toward a range of pedagogical and practical mobilizations of voice-as-*sound* emerging out of the disciplinary literature.

Just as it would be a fallacy to approach 'voice' as *a* metaphor, in any unified sense, I have found that it is just as problematic to assume a singular approach to vocal sound. Thus, as a parallel to the multiplicity of metaphoring 'voice,' which I have just laid out, I will work my way through a symphony of sounding voice in three movements: voice-as-*method*, voice-as-*mode*, and voice-as-*material*, posing the questions: How do approaches to voice-as-sound in composition figure the voice and its relationship to language, bodies, and technologies? How do they figure voice in ways that resonate with or depart from the metaphorical tradition? And to what extent do these approaches account for the complexities and potentialities of *digital* voice at the present moment of compositional practice?

2.3.1　Voice as Method

Emerging around the same time as the 'voice' metaphor itself, we find one of the earliest contemporary approaches[47] to the compositional potential of sounding voice in Robert Zoellner's 1969 proposal for "talk-write pedagogy." Emerging out of a cognitive-behavioral strand of composition theory, Zoellner's "talk-write" approach proposes to mobilize speech behavior as an instrument for inventing and refining ideas in the early stages of writing. He situates his method as a deliberate corrective to the dominant "think-write" model of writing instruction, which, as Zoellner explains, "equates *the act of thought with the act of writing*" (269), "glosses over certain central elements of the *act* of writing" (270), and thus "become[s] entirely dissociated from both reality itself, and from whatever verbal-vocal 'voice' the student may have developed in coping with that reality" (306). In contrast, his "talk-write" method encourages students to draw on their natural abilities to produce thought in the oral modality of spoken language and then to utilize this language as a generative inroad to the writing process.

Drawing on the experimental methods of behavioral psychology—and even going so far as to compare students to the rodents of behaviorist experiments (197)—Zoellner reimagines the writing process as a highly structured and fundamentally recursive practice of "vocal-to-scribal dialogue between teacher and student" (297). The process unfolds as follows: first, the student "*says the thing he was unable to write*"; then he receives verbal reinforcement from the teacher, who records the student's speech as alphabetic text for his examination; and finally, the student

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[47] When I say "early," I am referring here to the period following composition's iconic split from speech communication in the early part of the twentieth century, which Ben McCorkle outlines in his historical study *Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse* (134). Certainly, before that point, the interest in spoken language, and thus sounding voice, would have had a strong presence in the disciplinary discourse.

continues to move back and forth between voice and writing until he has ultimately refined his "protoscribal" but "rhetorically viable" speech into a finalized piece of writing (296). As Zoellner imagines it, this repetitive practice would not only condition a student into more productive, inventive modes of writing behavior (as opposed to abstract cognition) through embodied habituation,[48] it would also help to invest the student's "written 'voice'" with some of the features that make his "speaking 'voice'" lively and distinctive (301), improving the quality of his writing overall.[49] In this sense, we could say that Zoellner's approach mobilizes *both* metaphorical 'voice'-as-*style* and material voice-as-*sound* simultaneously, with the latter serving as a practical method for achieving the former.[50] And, indeed, when sounding voice becomes merely a means to an end of alphabetic writing, it can only "sound" metaphorically as a stylistic residue of spoken language.

Interestingly, this instrumental approach to the spoken voice as a means toward "good writing" has reemerged in a strikingly similar form—if decidedly less "rodential" (Zoellner 320)—over forty years later, in Peter Elbow's book, *Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing*. Here, Elbow argues that "unplanned speech"—a concept more or less on par with what Zoellner calls "cortical utterances" or "visceral blurts" (273)—has the potential to

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[48] As an explicitly embodied mode of pedagogical practice, Zoellner's "behaviorial" approach to writing is in some ways reminiscent of what Debra Hawhee calls the "three Rs of sophistic pedagogy—rhythm, repetition, and response" (135). While Zoellner explicitly addresses the functions of repetition and response, as they fit within the framework of behaviorialist conditioning, I wonder to what extent *rhythm,* as it functioned through the experience of speaking and hearing oneself speak, might also have played an important role in the learning process Zoellner proposes. However, because he limits voice's embodiment to its neurological function, this level of sensory experience is conspicuously absent from his discussion.

[49] I use the gendered "his" to refer to the student here in keeping with the usage in Zoellner's article.

[50] Perhaps because he is writing at a moment prior to metaphorical 'voice's' full naturalization in the discipline, Zoellner does appear to appreciate the difference (indicated with quotation marks) between 'voice'-as-*metaphor* and voice-as-*sound*. At the same time, the fact that he doesn't feel the need to discuss this fact further suggests perhaps there was already certain degree of slippage between the two concepts.

serve as a resource both in the early stages of writing through "talking onto the page" and in the later stages of revision, through reading aloud (5). As Elbow explains, "These two uses of the tongue can help people write better and with more enjoyment" (5). Like Zoellner, then, Elbow's method is working to reimagine voice precisely *as* a method—a practical "resource" (5) for achieving the dual objectives of *invention* and *style* in alphabetic writing.[51]

In many ways, Elbow's project in *Vernacular Eloquence* appears as an extension of a much larger, even career-long project to "rethink the very nature of speech and writing and how they relate to each other" (5).[52] Working against a longstanding prejudice that spoken language and written language are fundamentally disparate in style and purpose,[53] Elbow's work seeks, first, to put speech and writing into productive conversation by minimizing the distance between them and, second, to reclaim the value of spoken language itself as an avenue toward better writing. Crucially, while he acknowledges that there are important differences between speech and writing "*as physical processes*" and "*as physical media or sensory modalities*," Elbow argues that, ultimately, "when we look at speech and writing as language or products, the distinction is not so simple ("Vernacular" 19). In other words, *language* is precisely the thing that speech and writing have in common. Thus, as a method for writing improvement, voice becomes necessarily reduced to a function of language itself—inseparable from and subordinate to the values of "grammatical, syntactical, semantic, and connotational meaning" (106).

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[51] While Elbow is perhaps best known as an advocate for the "authentic" voice of expressivist pedagogy, his approach to the 'voice' metaphor has always included a keen interest in the speaking voice itself, and, indeed, this book brings together both in a single, unified model.

[52] It was as early as 1985, in his *CCC* article, "The Shifting Relationships between Speech and Writing," that Elbow first took on this challenge.

[53] See Robert J. Connors's "The Differences Between Speech and Writing: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos" and Gary Sloan's "The Subversive Effects of an Oral Culture on Student Writing," both published in 1979 issues of *CCC*, for prominent examples of such critiques.

It is in this sense, and perhaps *only* this sense, that we can logically approach Elbow's suggestion that "writing can *conserve* speech—speech that time wipes out" ("Vernacular" 41). For if speech is nothing more than *language* (however rhythmic or stylized), then, certainly, writing is as good a tool as any for conserving it. Following this assumption, there is ultimately little reason to attend to the many *other* technologies for conserving the spoken voice, imagined fundamentally as *sound*. And, indeed, beyond a fleeting nod to the existence of "recording device[s]"[54]—followed by a quick assertion of writing's superiority "for anything longer than voicemail messages" (41)—the only form of technology that Elbow engages is alphabetic writing itself. In this context, the extent to which voice-as-*sound* actually matters to Elbow's method is questionable. 'Voice'-as-metaphor remains a privileged term here, but voice's sounding material seems almost incidental—as the "rich" but superfluous expression of linguistic intonation.

That being said, it is important to note that Elbow's disavowal of emerging technologies is not representative of the larger approach to voice-as-method, at least as I am imagining it here. Indeed, despite the fact that Zoellner's "Talk-Write" approach is over four decades old, and despite the fact that he does not actually employ audio technologies as a core component of his practice, he does explicitly situate his method as a response to the dawning "electronic age" heralded by scholars like Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong (319). Zoellner takes this shift in the technological landscape as grounds to question the continued relevance of some of the core values at the heart of writing pedagogy. In the context of these changes, Zoellner suggests:

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[54] For example, in his discussion of the "ephemeral" nature of speech, Elbow argues that, in fact "spoken words decay the moment they are heard […and] are gone forever *unless a recorder has been on*" ("Vernacular" 14, emphasis added).

one might begin to suspect that an entirely intellective, rational, representational, linear, serial, and essentially asocial pedagogy, stressing private thinking and private writing with little or no attention to voice, may be becoming less and less relevant to the cultural configurations within which our students will have to lead their lives (319).

Thus, it seems that—even in the analog age—voice and technology are beginning to be seen as fundamentally intertwined, and their combined effects on writing practice are already palpable.

Following from this prospect, it is notable that many of the variations of "Talk-Write" pedagogy, which emerged just a few years after Zoellner's in the early 1970s, do in fact explicitly incorporate analog recording devices—"tapes, cassettes, dictabelts" (Snipes 203)—as essential components of the method. For some of these scholars, the tape recorder serves merely as "a means of storing the subject's speech communication behavior and […] a means of transferring his speech communication to paper" (Radcliffe 194). Here, sound reproduction is imagined as little more than *an instrument to the instrument*—a novel memory aid ensuring the accurate transfer of language*, via voice*, to its final destination in written form. However, in a noteworthy departure from this shallow instrumentality, Wilson Currin Snipes proposes a "talk-retalk-write-rewrite" (200) method of "oral composing,"[55] which takes up sound reproduction as a fundamental aspect of both invention and self-reflection. Under Snipes's method, the initial "Talking Stage," which is performed in conjunction with a recording device, is first and foremost "an opportunity to play with [one's] thoughts, to say absurd things, to take ridiculous and silly stands, and to hear [oneself] in such stances" (203). Thus, rather than a mere conduit for storage

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[55] This shift from "writing" to "composing" constitutes a significant move toward asserting the value of everyday spoken language not merely as an instrumentalized step toward alphabetic writing, but, in fact, as an important composing practice in and of itself. Indeed, for Snipes, "A discussion between two people is a composition; a classroom discussion is a composition" (203). Thus, the student comes to the composition classroom *already* possessing important capacities as an everyday "composer."

and transfer, technology here serves as a fundamentally experiential and experimental platform—one suited both for *playing with* new possibilities for "self-expression" and for *playing back* a sonic record of these utterances as a means to auditory "self-discovery" (200).

Of course, for Snipes, writing in 1973, the material limitations of analog audio serve to restrict this potential for "play" to the living utterance itself—and largely to the practice of recording and playback. By drawing on the technological capacities of vocal capture, this approach to sounding voice in composition begins to demonstrate an appreciation of voice's potential as an instrument of playful delivery, but one that must always, in the end, be submitted to an iterative process in which it is rearticulated as alphabetic text. Thus, as is the case for all of these approaches to voice-as-method, it is ultimately *language*—and definitively *not* voice—that remains the primary material of compositional practice.[56] Certainly, these approaches make valuable strides toward reclaiming the relevance of speech to composition pedagogy and practice. At the same time, precisely by approaching voice under the framework of *speech*, these pedagogies tend to lose sight (or sound) of voice's sonic materiality as a valuable potentiality in and of itself. Indeed, as a means to an end of alphabetic textuality, voice becomes a utilitarian method, operating in the service of linguistic style, linear argument, and semantic meaning.

2.3.2   Voice as Mode

What I see as the second key approach to sounding voice in composition is one that hearkens back to a much earlier moment in the field's pre-history: the classical rhetorical canon of

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[56] As Zoellner argues, "[W]ords are in many ways as plastic and artistic a medium as paint or clay, and the talk-write classroom should reflect this fact" (299).

delivery. This approach—which essentially takes up voice as a *mode of* delivery—is part and parcel of a larger effort in the field to recover this long-disparaged canon for contemporary compositional practice. In "Writing Technologies, and the Fifth Canon," her keynote address at the 2006 Computers and Writing conference, Andrea Lunsford situates this turn toward delivery within the broader context of what Walter Ong has called "secondary orality," wherein developments in electronic media have fundamentally changed the means and modes of communication in our day-to-day lives. In an effort to keep up with the affordances (and, indeed, the *requirements*) of the current technological landscape, Lunsford proposes a parallel framework of "secondary literacy." As she explains it, secondary literacy is "both highly inflected by oral forms, structures, and rhythms and highly aware of itself as writing, understood as variously organized and mediated systems of signification" (170), thus bringing together orality and writing into a new, mutually constitutive configuration of compositional modalities.

Certainly, there is a sense in which, under this framework, "writing," "literacy," and "signification" continue to hold privileged ground as *the* key terms of composing practice, suggesting a certain degree of consistency with the method-based approaches to voice that I have just outlined. Lunsford is clearly not interested here in unseating alphabetic writing as the primary means through which we make and communicate meaning—nor, for that matter, in moving beyond persuasion as the traditional function of writing practice.[57] But neither is she interested in simply using orality as a methodological stepping stone toward rhetorical invention and stylistic refinement, only to slough it off once the objective of "good (alphabetic) writing" has been achieved. Instead, and in line with the broader discourses of multimodal composition,

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[57] Indeed, in discussing her experience creating a new model for digital, multimodal, delivery-based curriculum in undergraduate composition, Lunsford expresses anxiety around the possibility of moving too far from "persuasion" toward "production" in ways that privilege the media over the message (176).

Lunsford calls for "the inclusion of aural and visual elements" (176) *alongside* and *in conversation with* alphabetic writing practice—elements with the potential to infuse writing with their own sensory logics and effects. By drawing upon these additional modalities, and by attending to "the material conditions of production" out of which texts emerge (176), Lunsford argues that we might productively *reimagine* writing itself: "as epistemic, performative, multivocal, multimodal, and multimediated" (171).

While many scholars working in this area have tended to take up voice only indirectly and by implication, often within a broader framework of "orality" (speech) and "aurality" (sound),[58] Lunsford's work is notable for its explicit acknowledgement of voice as a distinctive modality in and of itself. In fact, for Lunsford, voice stands as one of the three primary modalities involved in the writing process, which she nicknames the "three v's: vocal, visual, [and] verbal" (176). On one hand, it seems significant that the "vocal" is separated off from the "verbal" here, suggesting the possibility that voice-as-*sound* might be taken seriously apart from its traditionally perceived connection—and, indeed, *conflation*—with language. On the other hand, it is striking to note that (1) this is the *only* time that Lunsford makes mention of voice itself (aside from a fleeting reference to the "multivocal") and (2) there is no room in this trio for the many *other* forms of sound, which do not coincide with the peculiar subcategory of human voice. With this in mind, one has to wonder if voice is being mobilized here either for the novelty of alliteration alone, when "aural" might in fact be a more fitting term, or precisely for its instrumental function as a carrier of language—or, as Lunsford calls it, a mode of "perform[ing] knowledge" (176)—with no sense of sound's value beyond this purpose.

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[58] See Cynthia L. Selfe's "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing" and Cheryl Ball and Byron Hawk's 2006 Special Issue of Computers and Composition, "Sound in/as Compositional Space: A Next Step In Multiliteracies" for two prominent examples.

What is at stake here, I believe, is our understanding of "delivery" itself. At the root of Lunsford's argument is a celebration of "the return of orality, performance, and delivery to the classroom" (170)—a notion that explicitly conjures the classical rhetorical context of live, embodied speech. However, as Lunsford attempts to map this context onto the realities of the present digital landscape, her express interest in embodiment shifts—subtly but significantly— from a *productive* framework of vocal and gestural performance to a *receptive* framework of the "visual and aural components" of textual design (170). This transformation of delivery—from embodied performance to multimodal design—is, according to Ben McCorkle, *the* central feature of the contemporary move to recover delivery for digital rhetoric. As McCorkle explains, amidst the "explosion" of digital writing technologies, "delivery no longer means simply the physical and vocal characteristics of embodied speaking but also the formal, aesthetic, and logical elements of a given medium of communication" (32).[59] In this context, viewed from the perspective of *reception*, the "vocal" might in fact fit neatly into the category of the "aural," on one hand, as a sound-among-sounds, which is taken up by the audience through the ear, *or* the "verbal," on the other, as a sound whose primary function it is to transmit semantic meaning.

We see this same struggle—to reconcile the history of live delivery with its technological futures—in another of the key texts that positions voice as a *mode*: Heidi McKee's "Sound Matters: Notes Toward the Analysis and Design of Sound in Multimodal Webtexts." As the title indicates, this article is essentially interested in the question of *design*—the production and analysis of digital compositions. In this context, as it does for Lunsford, voice becomes one of a

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[59] In his recent book, *Rhetoric Delivery as Technological Discourse: A Cross-Historical Study,* Ben McCorkle situates his project as an extension of this recovery effort, which reimagines delivery as *media* or *design*. By setting out to demonstrate the fact that "this interaction between delivery and various technologies of communication occurs *throughout* the disciplinary history of rhetoric" (36), McCorkle fails to address the erasure of the body's role in performing digital delivery in this context—a project that I believe is crucial to understanding digital voice as a compositional material.

series of discrete "elements" in the design of a multimodal text, which McKee frames as "vocal delivery" (337). The explicit use of the term "delivery" here is clearly evocative of the familiar notion of a singular, embodied, live speaker drawn from the tradition of classical oratory. And, indeed, McKee argues that "[a]s with any spoken performance, the qualities of vocal delivery in a web composition create tone and convey mood" (341). We hear in this statement an effort to both collapse the distance between spoken performance and web-based composition as two sides of the same coin, and to mobilize the familiar terms of metaphorical 'voice' in its attachment to contemporary writerly notions of "tone" and "mood." By drawing on these idealized histories of voice—which privilege an authorial speaking (or writing) subject and their aural effects— McKee successfully asserts the value of voice on its own terms, but, in doing so, also glosses over all that separates the digitally mediated voice from both the live speaking body and its metaphorical counterpart.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that, in her discussion of multimodal voice, McKee draws most directly on the eighteenth century elocutionists—a movement that practiced and preached methods for the artful, embodied performance of printed texts. On one hand, the elocutionary tradition no doubt provides a valuable inroad into considering "the nonverbal aspects of vocal delivery," demonstrating the fact that "meaning is carried not solely by the verbal content but, as oral performers and oral readers continually show, also by the vocal qualities" (340). At the same time, the strange marriage of body and text that characterizes the elocutionary performance is one that imagines the body first and foremost as a *vehicle for transmitting* a pre-given textual composition, *not* a material for compositional invention itself. As Ben McCorkle has suggested, elocution was not only a reaction against print technology— which was supposedly "incapable of dealing with the canon of delivery, at least as it was

classically defined" (92)—but also an active agent in the promulgation of print culture and print-based values, which it then "reinscribe[d] […] back upon oral processes of oral delivery" (108). Thus, voice here is necessarily confined to the role of a "representational mode" (McKee 337), valuable for what lies behind it, for the meanings it delivers—but meanings which ultimately inhere in the text itself.

Perhaps for obvious reasons, then, McKee's approach to "vocal delivery" tends to assume what we might call an *eloquent* model of "clarity and seamlessness," in which "the digital reproduction of the person speaking needs to be understood" (343). The idea that it is actually "the person speaking"—as opposed to the sound of a person's *voice*—which is being reproduced in the process of digital audio recording is telling, and, I believe, is an inevitable consequence of any approach to voice that subscribes to either the classical ideal of the singularly embodied orator performing herself to a live audience or the metaphorical ideal of the singularly subjective writer revealing herself to a reader on the page. Whether understood as rhetorically constructed "*ethos*" or metaphysically intrinsic "presence," the voice here becomes inextricably anchored to the values of both linguistic transmission and ethical personhood in ways that limit its potential to act and affect beyond print-based or oratorical conventions. While McKee does briefly, and productively, make a nod to the importance of "postmodern, disruptive approaches" (343) to voice—those made possible precisely through the interactive web-based interface—the model of "vocal delivery" on which she draws ultimately seems unable to account for the complexities of this disruptive potential.

Of course, one of the key complexities of mediated voice—and perhaps that which distances it most profoundly from the embodied performance of oratorical delivery—is its potential to sound beyond the time and space of its original utterance by a living, breathing,

speaking body. As Brenda Jo Brueggeman argues, the field of rhetoric has always approached the voice within a framework of intentionality, taking it as self-evident that "those who hoped to control the will of an audience had first to *control their own voice* and body" (19 emphasis added). Indeed, Demosthenes—as the poster boy for rhetorical delivery in the ancient world— was celebrated precisely for his ability to assert control over his incorrigible voice, which, in the act of stuttering, operated beyond his conscious intention and in excess of the semantic meaning he sought to deliver. In taking up the question of *broken* voices, *disruptive* utterances, and *disobedient* bodies, which operate beyond the control and intentionality of disabled orators, Brueggeman suggests that there might in fact be a certain power intrinsic to such a "voice that transgresses the boundaries of rhetorical propriety" (21)—or, as she puts it bluntly, "a voice we are drawn to but don't much want to hear" (24). In a sense, then, what Brueggeman is proposing is that voice might have value not only for its ability to give "mood" or "tone" to the semantic meaning it seeks to "deliver," but also precisely in its *inability* to transmit the sense and meaning that we have come to expect. In this context, at least some aspect of voice's capacity for "nonverbal" performance emerges here as independent from both language and selfhood, suggesting alternative possibilities for voice to act and affect.

If it is true that "the Western rhetorical tradition that has insisted on interpreting selfhood in terms of speaking ability" (25), then the question arises: What happens when voice escapes or exceeds the conscious intention of the speaking subject? In Brueggeman's case, this excess is a factor of human embodiment itself—namely, the potential of the disabled body to act beyond the mind's control. However, I wonder if we might not also fruitfully apply this question to the context of vocal mediation. In her discussion of sign-language interpretation, Brueggeman effectively shifts her attention from the singular speaking body to a fundamentally *mediated*

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form of communication, one that complicates the neat distribution of speaker-audience-topic in the classical rhetorical triangle (26). Here, the interpreter serves as "informational conduit," on one hand, and "interactive participant," on the other—"both one who affects the discourse as a full participant, and one who delivers it, impartially, like the U.S. Mail" (26). In response to this provocation, Brueggeman raises the question of "rhetorical complicity," asking: "[W]ho is really 'the speaker' here?" (27). By shifting the question of embodiment from a framework of *reception* to a framework of *production* in this manner, Brueggeman is working to challenge the agency of the speaking subject. Thus, it is in this final approach to vocal delivery—ironically, the least "technological" and the most distant from traditional compositional practice—where we begin to approach the complexity of voice as a mediated material.

2.3.3   Voice as Material

This final category of approaches to voice-as-sound—that which attends most explicitly to voice's materiality—is only recently beginning to emerge at the margins of scholarly and pedagogical discourses on multimodal composing. We find a fascinating example of this trend at work in the pedagogical experiments of Tara Rosenberger Shankar, as outlined in her article "Speaking on the Record: A Theory of Composition." Here, Shankar sets forth a framework for an oral/aural composing practice she calls "spriting"—an amalgam of "speech" and "writing"— which mobilizes our technological capacities to capture and edit the sound of spoken language as digital audio to produce a structured "talkument" (375). Following in the footsteps of scholars like Peter Elbow, Shankar's approach is motivated by a desire to reclaim the value of speech (and, by extension, voice) in the face of a "graphocentric bias" in the Western intellectual tradition, which privileges practices of reading and writing over speaking and listening (375).

However, unlike Elbow, she does not shy away from the realities of audio technologies, but rather takes them up as a core element of her practice. Because, with sound reproduction, "speech can be made permanent" (379), Shankar suggests that we might submit speech and voice to forms of knowledge-making that have until recently only been accessible to alphabetic text production. With her "spriting" pedagogy, Shankar aims to bring together the "unrecuperable, untranslatable characteristics of speech material" (379) with the structure and permanence of alphabetic composing practices, ultimately aiming to "elevat[e] the status of speech itself to a writerly media" (380).

One of the unique aspects of Shankar's approach is her work in developing a customized software platform, which she calls the "SpriterWriter," to enable spriting practice among school-aged children. This software allows students to record their speech, parse it into visually demarcated units, and rearrange those units into a linear, essayistic composition with indented paragraphs and automated line-breaks. By using "Western text conventions as a metaphor for the visual representation of spriting," the SpriterWriter reimagines the audio editing process as a means to support essayistic, textual literacies (384). In a sense, then, rather than reasserting the value of speech—as sound and voice—on its own terms, Shankar ultimately opts to reshape speech (quite literally) in the image of writing, using the technological affordances of digital media to adapt spoken language to the conventional practices of alphabetic inscription. And because it starts from the familiar forms and conventions of alphabetic composing (i.e. linearity and singular authorship), we might argue that the SpriterWriter ultimately does little to mobilize the *particular* affordances of vocal material, with its potential for layering and multivocality.

Indeed, Shankar admits that, at the outset, "I had the conservative (and erroneous) idea that spriting would function as a part of a writing process: It would enable composers to focus on

higher-level aims in a mode with fewer mechanical requirements" (383). Under her initial model, she imagined children approaching spriting as a two-part process: "first, shaping ideas in speech and, second, translating those ideas to text" (383). By imagining spriting in this way—as a linear, teleological progression from speech to writing—Shankar proposes a model, which, in many ways, looks like an updated, software-enabled approach to Zoellner's "Talk-Write Pedagogy"—a classic example of the traditional method-based approach to voice in composition, which, as we have seen, tends to instrumentalize the speech as a practical tool for achieving the ultimate end of alphabetic textual production.

What is interesting, though, at least for our purposes, is not necessarily what Shankar sets out to do with her "spriting" experiment *in theory*, but rather what she discovers as she puts it into *practice*. Crucially, and despite her expectations to the contrary, Shankar finds that the students she worked with indeed "perceived and treated spriting itself as the product" (384) and responded to the sounds of their own recorded voices with new, adaptive vocal practices— "words, dialects, language patterns, and voice qualities" (381). Thus, for Shankar, the SpriterWriter emerges as a platform for sonic experimentation and play, opening up a space for students to take up their own voices as "composition material—malleable and plastic" (381) to create embodied, rhythmic, and even musical artifacts[60] with value as sound in itself. While she ultimately frames the potential of this outcome in conventionally metaphorical terms, wherein voices become opportunities to reflect on authorial "constructions of self and meaning," (381) Shankar's discovery stands as a promising opportunity to reimagine voice's potential as *material*

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[60] Reflecting on the children's tendency to "sing" their talkuments in the course of their experimentation, Shankar reflects upon the nonrepresentational aspects of voice—as "orchestration," "tonal and rhythmic"—and poses the provocative question: "Why are music and linguistic composition in separate boxes?" (387). This potential conversation between what we might call the "two compositions"—musical and textual (though not necessarily only linguistic)—is an area worthy of further exploration.

in both senses of the term: as a fleshy, vibrational substance[61] and a "malleable" resource for compositional invention.

We find a parallel opening to this dual materiality emerging out of Michelle Comstock and Mary E. Hocks's "Voice in the Cultural Soundscape," which, to my knowledge, stands as the only full-length article in the field to take up sounding voice as its primary object of inquiry. In this article, Comstock and Hocks take a step back from voice's long metaphorical history and work to stake a claim for a distinct new terrain of voice as a "tangible" element of multimedia composing ("Voices in Soundscapes"). Laying out their pedagogical approach to activities such as voice-over narration and soundtrack development, these authors call for a model of "sonic literacy," which they define as "a critical process of listening to and creating embodied knowledge, of understanding our soundscapes as cultural artifacts, of achieving resonance with particular audiences, and of developing the technological literacies involved in recording, amplifying, layering, and mixing sound" ("Introduction").

This project is particularly noteworthy for its effort to take up the embodied human production of voice alongside—and in paradoxical relationship to—its technologically mediated materiality. While Comstock and Hocks go great lengths to emphasize voice's "vibration[al]" character as an embodied production of the human vocal chords ("Voices in Soundscapes"), they also work to complicate any neat configuration of voice-speaker-body by expressly interrogating the role of technology in vocal recording and reproduction. Challenging popular assumptions of

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[61] Shankar's discovery here prompts what is, in my opinion, the most viscerally embodied description of voice to come out of rhetoric and composition scholarship on the topic to-date: "Our voice apparatus consists of moist, warm air compressed in malleable sacks that are crushed upward and in by the force of muscle and bone. On its way out of the body, the air passes through membranes that vibrate regularly and irregularly and into cavities with different resonant frequencies. What we hear is the product of physical mechanisms: sizes and shapes of fleshy cavities and bone, the protrusion of the lips, position of the tongue, elasticity and tension of the flesh and muscle." (387).

authenticity, these authors suggest that, "[a]s with any digital media," recorded voice can only ever be "an illusion of realism."[62] And, most importantly, they draw attention to the ways in which the "new tools" of digital audio technologies open up possibilities for the "framing, editing, and sculpting" of this illusion through alternative compositional practices ("Technological Literacies").

Despite this promising conceptual framework, from a pedagogical perspective, Comstock and Hocks's approach falls short of accounting for the many complex compositional possibilities opened up by this shift in the technological landscape. Notably, and similarly to Shankar's proposal for "spriting," all of the concrete pedagogical applications offered by these authors engage students in performing, recording, and reflecting on *their own voices* and primarily as instruments for the delivery of *linear narrative compositions*—with the documentary voiceover standing as their most highly privileged genre. Laying out their experience teaching with voice-based assignments, Comstock and Hocks write:

> As our students have discovered, listening to recordings of oneself inspires a self-conscious perspective (a form of analytical listening) on what's being said, how it's being said, who is saying it, and to whom. Along with this self-consciousness comes the impetus to revise and revise again in order to achieve resonance (or dissonance) with an audience. They learn to write (script) for a particular voice or rather, their sense of their own voice, which requires that they slow down, be deliberate, articulate, practice, and at the same time, experiment and revise, then re-record. ("Voices in Soundscapes")

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[62] In *The Audible Past*, sound studies scholar Jonathan Sterne goes further to suggest that there is no authentic "original" in sound reproduction in the first place—that "[b]oth copy and original are products of the process of reproducibility. The original requires as much artifice as the copy" (241). This is a concept on which I will build in the next chapter.

We see in this reflection a familiar set of pedagogical objectives—critical inquiry, self-reflexivity, style, and revision—as well as a familiar model of composition, one which assumes an *individual* rhetorical agent speaking in her *own* voice to produce and transmit *meaning*.

By funneling vocal practice through traditional modes of speech-based narrative performance, Comstock and Hocks are reproducing some of the traditional conventions of live oratory, which once again presume a neat connection between voice, speaker, and body. And by focusing only on the composer's own voice as the privileged composing material, they are effectively conflating voice with authorship in ways that hearken back to its longstanding metaphorical legacy. In this context, material voice becomes "personal" or "cultural," evoking familiar debates between expressivist and social constructionist pedagogies, and confining ethical engagement to the question of "what voices are heard and amplified and what voices aren't" ("Social Conscience"). Indeed, as Comstock and Hocks push to broaden their discussion from the practicalities of "technological literacies" to larger questions of critical and ethical practice, *voice*, as an embodied vibration and a mediated composing material, quickly slips beneath the shadow of '*voice*,' as a function of language, style, agency, and identity.

While these representational aims and activities are certainly valuable as cornerstones of our practice in the field, I would like to suggest this: that they by no means represent the *only* way to engage voice as a compositional material. Indeed, as Comstock and Hocks themselves allow, "modern digital sound tools" enable alternative practices of "splicing, mixing, and layering," which far exceed the conventions and limitations of linear, monovocal composing ("Technological Literacies"). Furthermore, given that digital distribution networks have the capacity to "[transform] listeners into DJs or soundscape artists" ("Voices in the Soundscape"), there is also no reason that composers need speak only in their *own* voices—or even seek only to

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"create meaning" in the first place. Thus, while Comstock and Hocks, like Shankar, offer vital openings to the question of material voice, I would argue that neither of these approaches goes very far toward making sense of the complex range of emergent compositional possibilities that this material opens up.

2.4   TOWARD A COMPOSITION-IN-THE-MAKING

In this chapter, I have sought to "recompose" the landscape of voice in composition studies in order to account for the needs and realities of our most recent "paradigm"—that of digital and multimodal composing. Admittedly, in my initial approach to this project, I imagined this "landscape" as a neat, binary division—even a teleological movement—between the silent past of a textual metaphor and the sounding future of a compositional material. However, looking back at this review of the literature, it becomes apparent that, in fact, there exists no such easy split or progressive evolution. Instead, it seems that metaphorical and material approaches to voice in composition have coexisted side-by-side for at least four decades, in both symbiotic and contradictory ways. Indeed, rather than standing in opposition to 'voice's' metaphorical legacy, we have seen how these three approaches to sounding voice have carried it forward into their own vocal imaginations—and, I would argue, in ways that dramatically influence their abilities to engage with this emergent composing material.

As we have seen, the *method*-based approach to sounding voice is notable for its efforts to reclaim the value of speech in relation to written discourse. By drawing upon the spontaneous and intonational characteristics of audible speech, "talk-write" and "oral composing" pedagogies offer a promising first step toward imagining voice's role in rhetorical invention. However, by

foregrounding voice's practical function as a carrier of spoken language, and by presuming alphabetic text as the exclusive end product of the composing process, these methodologies serve to instrumentalize sounding voice as a mere means to an end of written discourse, ultimately imagining language—as opposed to voice—as the core material of their practice.

In contrast, the *modal* approach to voice moves this conversation explicitly to the auditory realm, exploring the role of voice-as-sound in multimedia texts. As part of a larger disciplinary move to recover delivery for digital rhetoric, this trend highlights voice's performative capacities in relation to the sensory experience of a listening audience. However, by approaching digital voice through a somewhat nostalgic return to classical orality/aurality, this strand of practice has tended to tie the voice to the live, speaking body of the rational speaking subject and thus to reinforce the conventions of representational, rational, discursive transmission. Voice, here is reduced to a mere medium or mode through which external meanings are delivered; it matters not as a material in its own right, but rather for that which lies behind it, in its performance of representational discourse.

In the final category of work on sounding voice in the field, though, we find promising efforts to approach voice as a *material* in its own right. Here, voice appears both as an *audible vibration,* which is produced by the body but which also "matters" beyond the body, and as a *"malleable" material* with the potential to participate in the construction of new compositional forms. As an explicit response to the rise of digital audio technologies—technologies that make accessible not only the recording and reproduction of voice, but also its editing and recomposition—this approach is significant in offering first steps toward grappling with the complexities of digital voice's mediated materiality. However, at the level of concrete practice, it might ultimately fall short of accounting for the full range of new compositional possibilities

available in the present technological context. Falling prey to many of the same assumptions as its methodological and modal counterparts, in the end, the existing material approaches to sounding voice continue to confine their engagement with this material to familiar textual conventions of linearity, singular authorship, and representational ethics.

Of course, there is no question that all of these approaches—to the *method*, the *mode*, and the *material*—represent welcome contributions to the disciplinary discourse, working to recover voice from its long silence as textual metaphor and beginning to imagine how we, as a field, might take up voice, as a peculiar category of sound, in the context of digital composing. However, I would also argue that the existing scholarship in the field seems to be concerned largely with identifying the new opportunities sounding voice offers to carry out the work of a composition-*already-defined* as opposed to a composition-*in-the-making*. In other words, by taking as our starting point the linguistic, metaphorical, and oratorical attachments of voice in our disciplinary history, in the end, we appear unable to move beyond the present structuring logics of composition as we know it.

Taking this dilemma as a point of departure, I would like to pose the question: What would happen if we were to *reverse* our process here and start not from the disciplinary conventions of composition, but rather from the materiality of voice itself? How might a more robust exploration of voice as a sounding material help us to expand our notion of what it means, how it sounds, and why it matters to compose? In other words, how might voice—if taken seriously on its own terms and in its complex relations—enable us to recompose composition itself? If we believe, as Jack Selzer suggests, that "language is not the only medium or material that speaks" (8), then, perhaps we need to do more to understand the complex materiality of voice *beyond* language. Thus, in order to transcend the limitations of the existing literature in the

field, perhaps it is time that we look beyond our own disciplinary boundaries for ways in which we might productively reimagine our relationship to voice—and, more specifically *digital* voice—as a core material of compositional practice. As we have seen in the work of composition scholars like Heidi McKee, Tara Rosenberger Shankar, Michelle Comstock, and Mary Hocks,[63] we are already beginning to move in this direction, but we still have a long way to go.

Stepping back for a moment, we might ask ourselves: What is at stake in this project? After all of these years, why continue to attend to the question of voice in composition? At a basic level, I believe that it is precisely because of our field's longstanding disciplinary attachments to voice—or, more aptly 'voice'—that we are coming up against these questions and provocations in the first place. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the extent to which our long traditions of textual metaphor and classical oratory continue to inform our approach to sounding voice in contemporary composition practice is truly remarkable. And while these frameworks certainly go a long way toward helping us to account for the performative, stylistic, and expressive possibilities of vocal sound, they do not exhaust the compositional possibilities for voice in digital composing environments—neither the kinds of voices that we can take up, nor the ways in which we might use and *re*use those voices for rhetorical, aesthetic, and even political ends. As Collin Brooke has argued in his aptly titled *Lingua Fracta*, "[T]here are many new media 'texts' that do not 'mean' in the same way that we might argue that a particular poem or essay means something" (18). If we take this reality seriously, then perhaps we need to consider not only how voice might be mobilized to transmit semantic content or perform the tone or emotion of a pre-given text, but also how it might be edited, manipulated, re-composed, and

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[63] Other notable scholars working in this area—those working more broadly on the question of sound but attending to the question of voice in the process—include Jeff Rice ("Making of Ka-Knowledge: Digital Aurality") and Jody Shipka ("Sound Engineering: Toward a Theory of Multimodal Soundness").

recombined in ways that push beyond the intentionality and agency of the original speaker and even disrupt the possibility of meaning as we know it.

It is here that the question of voice becomes a question of *ethics*. Whether we like it or not, with the rise of digital audio, it seems that our technological capacities for composing with voice—and, more specifically*,* for composing with the voices of others—have begun to radically outstrip our ability to make sense of their ethical implications. In this context, we are left with a difficult decision: either to banish particular forms of engagement with digital voice from our repertoire altogether or to interrogate some of our most deeply held assumptions about voice— rooted in fundamentally rational, representational, and proprietary value systems—and consider how we might imagine them otherwise. If it is true, as Anne Wysocki has argued, that we can no longer take "persuasion" as a purely rational concern, then we must also attend to the many "means of shaping behavior and identity that are non-linguistic and that appeal, usually quietly and without direct address, to bodies and feelings rather than articulated logics" ("Unfitting Beauties" 94). As I imagine it, digital voice is one among many of these affective means of "persuasion," broadly conceived, with great potential, in Wysocki's words, to "impel us toward particular sensuous engagements with the world and each other" (94). This ethical "prospect"[64] serves as the primary catalyst for my engagement with digital voice in the chapters that follow.

[64] In his "An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto," Bruno Latour proposes the notion of "prospects"— or "the shape of things to come"—as a generative alternative to our cultural obsession with "the future," which, he argues, is ultimately only an act of "fleeing [our] past in terror" while looking backward (486).

3.0   A RESONANT MATERIAL VOCALITY FOR DIGITAL COMPOSITION

> The fundamental paradoxes of voice—embodied and moving between bodies,
> sonorous and signifying—have become even more complex as voice,
> always/already culturally (and politically) mediated, is remediated and remixed in
> networked and digital culture.
>
> — Norie Neumark, "The Paradox of Voice"

In Chapter Two, I suggested that much of the attention paid to sounding voice in contemporary theories and practices of multimodal composition has been either: (1) centered on the voice of the writer herself as a performative extension of traditional authorial practice or (2) folded into larger frameworks of sonic composing in general. This dual approach to voice has made great strides toward reopening the field to the embodied possibilities of human speech as a lasting means of rhetorical delivery, while harnessing the technical affordances of digital audio as a novel form of textual production. However, by splitting our attention in this way—between our classical roots in *orality* (speech) and our digital futures in *aurality*[65] (sound)—we risk losing touch with *vocality* (voice), as a peculiar category of sound that attends speech but also exceeds

[65] Media theorist Frances Dyson makes the point that the term "aurality" tends to obscure the role of technology in mediating and transducing sound and calls for an alternative framework of "audio." However, because "aurality"—and *not* "audio"—has been the term of choice among compositionists interested in sonic modalities, I have chosen to maintain this terminology in my discussion here.

it, and as a mediated material that pushes the boundaries of human embodiment and agency. Certainly, in the present technological environment, voice no longer implies the "presence" of a live speaking subject (if it ever really did), but neither is it reducible to the status of merely one sound among many. In this sense, it may be the case that our disciplinary attachments to linguistic, metaphorical, and oratorical voice have, in many ways, allowed us to *talk around* the question of voice itself, as a contemporary composing material.

As a response to this dilemma, in this chapter, I would like to move to explore the idiosyncrasies of *vocality*—and, more specifically, the mediated vocality of digital audio technologies—seeking to elucidate both the paradoxes and possibilities that it poses for digital composing practice. Taking as a starting point Anne Frances Wysocki's call "to define 'new media texts' in terms of their materialities" ("Opening New Media" 3), I propose that we might go one step further to first define and understand the materiality itself. To this end, my analysis draws together a range of perspectives on voice from fields such as philosophy, physiology, film studies, and digital aesthetics in order to take up the questions: What is vocality? Why does it matter? And what can it contribute to the practice of composition, broadly defined? I begin my discussion by working through a diverse body of theory on vocal ontology, phenomenology, and mediation, working to shift the conversation beyond familiar disciplinary conventions that have constrained our relationship to voice, as well as *its* relationship to language, bodies, and technologies. After that, I bring these interdisciplinary insights to bear on contemporary debates in the field, proposing a series of openings through which digital vocality—if taken seriously on its own terms and in its complex relations—might enable us to reimagine the embodied, performative, and collaborative possibilities of composition practice.

3.1   VOICE AND LANGUAGE

In order to answer the question "what is voice?"[66] we must start by first recognizing voice as something audible and material in the first place. On the surface, this move may seem so obvious as to be pedestrian. Despite a long tradition of silencing voice as a textual metaphor—both within the field of composition and beyond—if we stop and think about it, the fact that voice is sound is common sense. However, if we dig more deeply into the question of voice, both within the context of western thought more generally and within our contemporary culture of writing, we find that voice's sounding capacity has, in many ways, been placed in the service of language as an instrumental means to an end of rational speech and linguistic meaning. But why do we so readily confuse voice with language? What is voice *other than* meaningful speech? And what is at stake in this conflation?

The relationship between voice and *logos* is a highly contentious one in contemporary philosophical debates. Jacques Derrida has famously argued that the logocentrism of western metaphysics goes hand-in-hand with a form of *phono*centrism, which romanticizes notions of "presence" and assumes voice's ability to provide a form of direct, unmediated access to the essence of signifiers. Countering the essentialist belief in the primacy of speech over writing, Derrida has suggested that both speaking and writing are ultimately traces and nothing more, and thus that the sounds of speech are always already signs in themselves. Recently, however, we have seen a philosophical backlash against the so-called "phonophobia" (Schlichter 38) implicit in Derrida's critique of voice. Notably, Adriana Cavarero has charged Derrida with reducing

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[66] See Peter Elbow's "What Do We Mean When We Talk about Voice in Texts?" and Carl Leggo's "Questions I Need to Ask Before I Advise My Students to Write in Their Own Voices" for prominent examples of this project.

voice to the status of "an acoustic signifier" (35), wherein we lose a sense of "what is proper to the voice" (10) and are left only with its service to linguistic meaning. In order to combat this pitfall, philosopher Mladen Dolar suggests that we shift our understanding of voice as a "mere means" toward the end of language and embrace it instead as "a cast-off of sense" (16), as "the material element [of speech] recalcitrant to meaning" (15). Under this framework, voice is no longer a *medium* for conveying or transmitting language, but rather, in the words of Paul Zumthor, "an unutterability suited to clothing itself in language" (5)—and there is always a material excess.

Voice's inability to be reduced to language is evident, at least in part, in its inability to be captured or expressed *in* language. Dolar points out the radically impoverished vocabulary we have to speak of and describe voice, arguing that "words fail us when we are faced with the infinite shades of the voice, which infinitely exceed meaning," that, ultimately, "faced with the voice, words structurally fail" (13). Indeed, many elements of vocal sound—accent, intonation, timbre—escape our fundamental desire to signify and thus to capture, categorize, and control (20). Research in voice science, particularly in the area of forensics and voice identification, has worked to overcome this descriptive dilemma and derive a language for accurately and comprehensively capturing voice quality in linguistic terms. In the end, however, such efforts have been forced to treat the voice "as if it can be decomposed into a set of specific features or elements, whose presence or absence characterize a speaker's voice" (Kreiman and Van Lancker Sidtis 11), ultimately failing to express the unique and nuanced assemblage of sounds that make

up a particular voice.[67] In this sense, it seems fair to say—as Dolar suggests—that "if we speak in order to say something, then the voice is precisely that which cannot be said" (15).

Of course, the question arises: To what extent is this descriptive dilemma unique to voice and to what extent is it merely a feature of sound in general? We might argue that this linguistic paucity is due, at least in part, to the visual bias of western thought, which shapes our linguistic structures and imaginations. Certainly, we have far more words to describe visual phenomena than we do to describe sound and the extent to which our metaphors for thought and experience (perspective, view, lens, etc.) are visualist is noteworthy. Furthermore, there is also a fundamental complexity to sound that resists our attempts to break it down into its component parts. For film studies scholar Rick Altman, this "material heterogeneity" is a fundamental feature of all sonic events ("Material Heterogeneity" 19), which must be understood as complex, composite, and contextual and which thus elude simple analytical description. However, it also seems to me that there might be some features of voice that would make it particularly resistant to linguistic capture: namely its unique and relational character—a topic I will address later in this chapter.

Another obvious way in which voice resists language lies in its many potential (and actual) uses beyond verbal and even willful forms of vocalization. Because of our bias toward the linguistic, we may not often even consider nonverbal utterances—such as the cry, the cough, or the laugh—to fall under the purview of human voicing. Responding to this omission, philosophers like David Appelbaum have worked to reassert the value of nonverbal voice, suggesting that, in fact, these disruptive forces have been systematically excluded from the

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[67] As Jody Kreiman and Diana Van Lancker Sidtis point out, because of the challenge that the voice presents to linguistics, such descriptive systems have remained more or less the same since the time of classical Greek oratory (11).

sphere of voice by the abstract, disembodying forces of the western philosophical tradition. Asking whether or not the cough might be legitimately considered voice, Appelbaum reflects:

> The explosive noise has no less voice than the group of consonants known as voiceless. […] To the oscilloscope, the cough is as reliable a mark of individuality as any voiceprint. The coughs of a man's life may be as numbered as his days and words, but are they similarly recorded? Some philosopher's prejudice is at work (2).

For Appelbaum, the value of these nonverbal voicings lies in their ability to disrupt the steady flow of language and cognition and to draw attention to the erasure of "incarnate experience" from philosophical inquiry (19). Indeed, the extent to which "[i]ntense emotions arouse voice, though rarely language" (Zumthor 6)—and the extent to which such utterances are said to represent "voice out of control" (Neumark "Paradox" xxvi)—suggests voice's basic resistance to some of our deepest investments in the rational speaking subject.

Of course, the other side of this phenomenon of nonverbal voicing is that of intentional performance and play. Noting the voice's capacity to imitate both human and nonhuman sounds—for example, to "mimic the giggle of a baby and the approach of a steam engine" (362)—Philip Brophy emphasizes the extent to which "the voice can reach far beyond itself, and hence beyond the limiting definitions of being human" (362)—definitions that are, at least in part, rooted in linguistic values. Sound poetry stands as a fascinating example of an artistic tradition that has explored vocal performance at the limits of language, "believing in the power of the body and the thrust of word play to fully escape the constraints of linguistic meaning" (LaBelle "Raw Orality" 152). Sound poet and scholar Steve McCafferty discusses the evolution of the genre as a steady progression away from language, beginning with early approaches to word-as-material and moving toward technologically-mediated approaches that shirk off verbal

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orality in favor of "the shit of speech" (159)—or voice as the castoff of and antithesis to language.[68] In setting up this dichotomy between language and the body, such efforts bring up questions as to whether it is actually possible to strip voice of meaning.

In the end, it may be the case that any such attempt to rescue voice from language wholesale and move into a space of pure sonority is futile. From the perspective of human perception, it seems reasonable to suggest that, when we hear a voice speaking language, it is the language we hear first. At least this is what Don Ihde has suggested in *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound.* Contrasting the experience of speech with the experience of music, Ihde suggests that voice in everyday speech "does not draw attention to itself as sound" (158); rather, "the sounding withdraws as the context and setting in which *what* is *said* emerges as foreground" (157). Of course, it is ultimately Ihde's project to disrupt this inevitability and to develop a framework through which we might take seriously our experience of the world as a sonic phenomenon. But I would also go further to suggest that this argument—that language is what we hear first—might ultimately hinge upon what we mean by "hearing." If we approach hearing, as Derrida does,[69] as an analogue for "understanding," then there is no question that language is primary. However, if we step back from the authority of the linguistic turn and consider our lived experience from a more material or affective angle, vocal phenomenology emerges as something else entirely. If it is true, as Brian Massumi suggests, that "the skin is

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[68] Perhaps the most extreme example of this so-called "Raw Orality" is reflected by the work of seminal sound poet, Henri Chopin, who used techniques of "microphonics" (LaBelle 135) to produce compositions made up of nonverbal, and typically inaudible vocality—the sounds of the mouth that usually go unheard in everyday speech.

[69] Throughout his critique of phonocentrism in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida repeatedly conflates "hearing" with "understanding" as one in the same. For example he describes the system of auto-affective voicing as "[t]he system of 'hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak' through the phonic substance" (7). Because Derrida's primary interest is with the status of language, this is not surprising, but it is also certainly not the only way to define hearing.

faster than the word" (86), then perhaps we might argue that it is voice's sound, as a vibrational intensity, that hits us first.

Regardless of which is primary, however, it is safe to say that—despite bold efforts to the contrary—"one does not leave behind signification simply by speaking nonsense, or by turning the mouth into a noise machine" (LaBelle "Raw Orality" 152). In fact, it is possible that such efforts might even exacerbate and emphasize the core impossibility of voicing without meaning. For Mladen Dolar, these "presymbolic uses of the voice"—forms of voicing that work explicitly against the goals of signification—risk drawing attention to the process and structures of signification itself (29). In other words, even the most radical attempts to mobilize voice in an attack against language might ultimately serve to reinscribe the primacy of language by continuing to define voice in linguistic terms, even if in a relationship of opposition or lack. In this sense, whether or not voice is actually directed toward semantic meaning, we may be unable to escape our expectation of meaning's potential. As both Dolar and Cavarero have argued, it is not the fact that voice always signifies, but the fact that *we expect it to* that makes it stand out as unique among all other sounds. In the words of Dolar, "The voice is something which points toward meaning, it is as if there is an arrow in it which raises the expectation of meaning, the voice is an opening toward meaning" (14).

In order to move beyond this impasse, we must ultimately reject binary understandings that position voice in relation to language either as an expressive handmaiden, on one hand, or an embodied adversary, on the other. Certainly, to reduce voice to a function of language would be to overlook many forms and features of voice that exceed semantic transmission—to overlook the extent to which "[v]oice *speaks itself* at the very moment it speaks" (Zumthor 6). At the same time, to place voice in opposition to language is clearly not a suitable alternative. As we have

seen, such a move risks either reinforcing the dominance of the linguistic ideal or falling back onto essentialized notions of metaphysical presence. In this context, perhaps it is the case, in the words of Brian Massumi, that "[t]he trick is to get comfortable with productive paradox" (99). And Dolar provides us with an opening into this possibility: By locating voice at the intersection between language and the body, as precisely "*[w]hat language and the body have in common,*" he ultimately maintains that "*the voice does not belong to either*" (73). Not at home in linguistics nor in the body, voice emerges as a fundamental paradox. And it is the other side of this paradox—the uncomfortable relationship between voice and body—to which I will turn next.

3.2 VOICE(S) AND BODY/IES

Apart from its "opening toward meaning" (Dolar 14), one of the key features that sets voice apart in the sonic landscape is the fact of its *source*: its unique status as a sound produced by and emitted from the human body. Inevitably, when we hear a voice, we hear a body: "Listen, says a voice: some being is giving voice" (Connor 4). In other words, it is our sense of the voice's origin in embodied human activity that places it at the top of our so-called "hierarchy of perception" (Chion 5).[70] And, as is the case with any sound,[71] but perhaps more urgently in the case of voice, we as listeners find ourselves working "to *localize* and if possible *identify* the voice" (Chion 5)—to determine from whence and from whom it came. On the surface, then, to

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[70] Crucially, what Michel Chion calls the "vococentrist" quality of human listening (6) applies not only to verbal voicing, but to voice in general, as a sound we experience as recognizably, quintessentially human.
[71] In "Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism," Rick Altman describes how it is the nature of sound, phenomenologically speaking, to cause the auditor to ask the question: what is the source? Sound's diffuse nature and indeterminacy prompts us to want to identify it source, whether human or otherwise.

define the voice as an embodied phenomenon, to determine its origin in and relationship to the human corpus, appears to be a fairly straightforward endeavor. But, as it turns out, this is anything but the case.

Even in the field of voice science, we find hotly contested debates around the simple question: *What is the voice* as an organic bodily process? According to Jody Kreiman and Diana Van Lancker Sidtis, there exist at least two distinct definitions of voice among mainstream voice scientists: On one hand, a narrow physiological definition, which localizes voice in what is popularly known as the "voice box" as "sound produced by vibration in the vocal folds" (5) and, on the other hand, a broader framework, which takes into account "the acoustic results of the coordinated action of the respiratory system, tongue, jaw, lips, and soft palate" (6). While this distinction may seem pedantic, importantly, each of these definitions sets out a radically different relationship between voice and speech: the first *distinguishing between* voice and speech by confining voice to a process of vibration, and the second, effectively *equating* voice *with* speech by following it through to the act of articulation (6). In this sense, we might say that to define voice, even as a concrete physiological process, is a deeply consequential act.[72]

That being said, it is also possible that this impulse to localize the voice in a particular part of the body is problematic from the outset—that even the purportedly "broad" definition of vocal production does not adequately capture the physiological processes at play. For example, clinical voice specialist Robert Sataloff emphasizes the extent to which, despite our tendency to privilege the role of the larynx, in actual fact, "[p]ractically all body systems affect the voice" (53). Indeed, the function and sound of the voice is highly dependent upon the full

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[72] Kreiman and Van Lancker Sidtis emphasize that whether one's interest in the voice is physiological, acoustic, or forensic will influence one's attention to the source, the product, or the perception, respectively and, indeed, will determine the kinds of questions one asks of voice (7).

musculoskeletal system (posture, muscle tension, etc.) and, of course, on the psychological state and "gray matter" of the brain. Beginning as an impulse in the motor cortex, vocalization draws upon "[c]omplex interactions among the centers for speech, musical, and artistic expression" (79), which exceed the capacity for language alone, and bring together interconnected parts of the body into a relational assemblage. In this sense, voice offers a useful site at which we might challenge the artificial distinctions between rational and creative mental processes (the left vs. right brain), as well as the Cartesian mind/body split more generally.[73]

Looking beyond this privileged moment of vocal production, we must also consider what happens to the voice after it emerges from this complex set of physiological processes. Because, while the voice undoubtedly *comes from* the human body,[74] it also inevitably *leaves that body behind*—or, as Steven Connor puts it, "What I say goes" (7). This fact, in itself, raises important questions about our relationships to our own voices—relationships we tend to approach as a question of *property*, either as the rightful possession of a unique human body or as the authentic expression of a unique human subject. By insisting on the voice's necessary departure from its body of origin, Connor invites us to unsettle these assumptions of ownership and identity. For Connor, "[M]y voice is not something that I merely have, or even something that I, if only in part, am. Rather, it is something that I do. A voice is not a condition, nor yet an attribute, but an event. It is less something that exists than something which occurs" (4). By extending the body

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[73] It is important to remember that this voice-body relationship is not a stable, biological given. As the body changes over time—as well as with varying states of physical and psychological health—so does the voice. And this process also works in reverse, as the body itself is altered through specific forms of vocal practice, from professional voice training to spiritual chanting. Thus, in a very concrete sense, it is not simply the case that the body produces the voice, but also that the voice works to produce the body.

[74] Of course, the boundaries around what constitutes voice might also be drawn more widely to take into account digitally synthesized voice, which does not emerge from the organic processes of the human body. Indeed, such voices stand as a provocative challenge to the many humanist values we attach to the voice and raises fascinating ethical questions about the boundaries of personhood, more generally.

beyond itself in this way, such a reorientation toward the *voice event* encourages us to move beyond stable, bounded notions of body and self to imagine more fluid and permeable modes of being.

Popular metaphysical understandings of voice as "presence" have emphasized voice's role as "*a special sensory key to interiority*" (Ong 117). As Walter Ong points out, when we hear an object sounding (e.g. a hollow log being struck by a stick) what we are hearing is the resonance of its insides, its "interiors as manifesting themselves" to the external world (117). It is easy to imagine how, especially in the context of religious or spiritual philosophy, one might draw connections between sound and soul and position the voice as a window into essential personhood. However, to insist, as Ong does, that voice simply "moves from interior to interior" (125) is to overlook the extent to which voice interacts with other bodies and spaces in the larger material world. As Connor reminds us, the voice's movement from the body is one that both takes place within space and, in fact, appropriates the space it requires (12). And this reciprocal process of *voicing space* and *spatializing voice* is responsible for shaping the ways that we experience space itself. Thus, by "marking out the relations of interior to exterior"—and by suggesting that these relations are perhaps much more fluid than we might typically imagine them to be[75]—"voice […] announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and the environments in which they have their being" (6).

Of course voice's movement from a human body into space, more often than not, implies a movement *toward* another human body or bodies. For philosopher Adriana Cavarero, this

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[75] Dolar goes so far as to describe this phenomenon as "the voice problem," suggesting that the voice presents us with the dilemma of "how to establish a distance at all, to draw the dividing line between 'the interior' and the external world" (79). Here, voice challenges our tendency to divide our experience into "me" as an inside and "the world" as an outside, providing a crucial inroad into reimagining our relationship to the nonhuman world.

relationality stands as one of the core functions and values of speech itself. Challenging the logocentric emphasis on the *what* of voice—or, as she calls it, "the said"—Cavarero proposes an alternative to autonomous, rational subjectivity of western political philosophy: a fundamentally embodied "politics of saying" (200), wherein voice, in its most material sense, provides the basis for ethical engagement with others. Crucially, within this framework, it matters (in every sense) from what particular body a given voice emerges. Because, ultimately, we always hear in the voice, as Cavarero emphasizes, not just *any*body but a particular *some*body—a body which we may not identify as familiar but which we always recognize as "unique" and "unrepeatable" (9).[76] Voice, in this sense, serves a dual purpose: it is both that which unites us and that which sets us apart. In other words, at the same time as it is shareable, it also resists the abstract universals of western philosophy. Because "a voice is never a voice in general: it is always a voice of a particular kind" (Rée 2)—and because it is this "incarnate singularity" (Cavarero 7) that we experience in relational acts of voicing—voice provides us with the immediate capacity to recognize and engage others as "human beings in flesh and bone, with mouths and ears" (175)—in other words, as bodies-like-me-but-not-me.

On the surface, it may seem that Cavarero's emphasis on "a vocal phenomenology of uniqueness" (7), by focusing on the voice's expression of a singular human being,[77] is akin to the metaphysical essentialism that poststructuralism has so heavily critiqued. However, it is important to distinguish here between essence and event. While it is true that "[d]istinctive vocal

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[76] For Cavarero, "The voice is always unique, and the ear recognizes it as such. Indeed, the ear perceives the voice's uniqueness even when, never having heard it before, it cannot 'recognize' this voice" (177). In this sense, voice's uniqueness comes at the level of immediate sense perception, not cognition or abstract assimilation. This distinction seems crucial to Cavarero's effort to unsettle the abstraction of western philosophy in favor of a fleshier, more lived form of politics.

[77] This focus on vocal uniqueness does not account for the many ways in which we experience voice as a multiplicity, such as choral voices or the voice of the crowd. This is a topic that requires further study.

styles can identify people as sharply as their bodies or their faces" (Rée 2)—and that the "voiceprint" is as reliable a measure as the fingerprint for establishing "identity," in the most bureaucratic sense of the term (Appelbaum 2)—to make the jump from *identifiability* to *identity* emerges as problematic and ultimately unwarranted.[78] In this context, it seems useful to distinguish between the notion of the "individual" and the "personal." In his famous reflection on "The Grain of the Voice," Roland Barthes argues that "[t]he voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul; it is not original […] and at the same time it is individual: it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no 'personality,' but which is nevertheless a separate body" (182). In a sense, then, we have a strange potential, *through* the voice, for a kind intimacy with the Other that is visceral and vibrational but, at the same time, paradoxically impersonal.

Stepping back to consider voice within the context of sound-in-general, composer and musicologist Pierre Schaeffer offers a useful framework for approaching this paradox of identifiability without identity. His principle of acousmatic sound—and, for our purposes, acousmatic voice[79]—insists that we take up sounds not as secondary properties of their sources but as objects in themselves, which can be perceived and experienced independently of their sources. Drawing on Schaeffer's work, Christoph Cox explains that, unlike properties of visual objects,[80] "[W]e can experience a sound without experiencing its source, and the source without the sound. So while sources *generate* or *cause* sounds, sounds are not bound to their sources as properties" (156). In contrast to Cavarero's phenomenological approach to the "uniqueness" of

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[78] Darsie Bowden raises this distinction in "The Rise of a Metaphor: 'Voice' in Composition Pedagogy."
[79] Michel Chion's work draws heavily upon Schaeffer's concept of "acousmatics" and applies it explicitly to the voice, examining the mysterious power of voices without visible sources in cinematic narratives.
[80] Cox uses the example of a door that is painted red as an explanatory tool, suggesting that, while "[t]he redness of the door does not survive its repainting," the sounds a door makes "are not bound to their sources as properties" (156). For this reason, it seems reasonable to consider sound as an independent object vs. a property of its source.

the person behind the voice, this more radically materialist perspective suggests that we can experience the uniqueness of a voice as something apart from the person who speaks it. Certainly, this break from the incessant question of *who* produced a voice has the potential to offer a productive alternative to limiting textual frameworks of representation, which, as Cox argues, are fundamentally "inadequate" to the task of theorizing the sonic arts (146).

But the question arises: To what extent does this shift away from the sonic source disrupt the exceptionalism of the voice in the first place? If sound is independent from its source, why should we approach voice as distinct from sound-in-general? It is here that I find the notion of "effects" to be incredibly productive. To consider voices as "properties" is to subordinate them to their bodies of origin. Alternatively, to reconsider voices as "effects" allows us to account for their causal relationship to the bodies that speak them, while also allowing them a valid existence *beyond* those bodies, and even as bodies in themselves.[81] Under this framework, we can embrace "the impossibility of a perfect identity between sound and source" (Stanyek and Piekut 19), while at the same time understanding that voice is "necessarily pursued by the shadow of source and cause" (Kane 215).[82] Of course, the practical implications of this shift may appear negligible so long as we remain in the realm of *live* voice—for example, the rational speaking subject of classical oratory—where voice and body give the illusion of co-presence. However, in the context of recorded and reproduced voice, of voice that extends beyond the time and place of its body of origin, the notion of voice-as-effect becomes essential, radically expanding our abilities

[81] Steven Connor proposes the notion of "autonomous voice-bodies," which are "a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice" (35). Because of our need to attach sourceless voices to visible bodies, they have the capacity to become the bodies we project onto them.

[82] Stanyek and Piekut offer a useful concept of "*corpaurality*," or "the imbrication of sounds with fleshy bodies" (19). Here, not only does the voice emerge from a resonant body, but the body resonates in and through the voice.

to imagine what it means not merely to speak in voice but also to compose with it as a malleable material. It is this topic—the question of voice and technology—that I would now like to discuss.

3.3   VOICE AND TECHNOLOGY

In any reflection on voice and technology, it is important first to distinguish between the primary forms of technological mediation available to us:[83] (1) technologies of *amplification* (e.g. microphones, acoustic design),[84] which serve to project the sound of the voice into the immediate space in which it is uttered; (2) technologies of *transmission* (e.g. telephone, radio), which transport the voice as signals across broader geographical expanses; (3) and technologies of *reproduction* (e.g. phonograph, magnetic tape, digital audio), which produce an inscription of the voice's sound waves for recreation across time. Because my primary goal is to explore the function of voice as a compositional material, I am most interested in the last of these categories: that which allows for the translation of voice *into* a material that may be edited and manipulated and worked into something new. However, because sound reproduction necessarily builds on processes of amplification and transmission, I will begin by briefly discussing these other two forms of mediation and their influence on our relationship to voice as an embodied phenomenon.

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[83] It is important to remember that these divisions are not static and unassailable, but rather socially and culturally constituted over time. As Jonathan Sterne reminds us, the lines between these technologies—at least between the processes of "sound-recording" and "live-transmission media"—have not always been "so clearly defined" (197).

[84] While, today, we tend to associate amplification with the relatively recent development of electric microphones and sound systems, Christopher Johnstone reminds us that such technologies have, in fact, been in use at least as far back as classical oratory, wherein spaces and structures for public speaking were designed with their acoustic properties in mind. See Johnstone's article, "Communicating in Classical Contexts: The Centrality of Delivery," for an in-depth discussion of the role of architecture and acoustics in classical oratory.

Our first category of vocal technology—that of amplification—appears on the surface to be fairly straightforward, extending the voice across a defined acoustical space such that it can be more easily heard by a listening audience. But to say that amplification merely *extends* the voice, *as is,* beyond the limits of the live speaking body overlooks the fact that the voice—and thus also the body—may also be changed as a result of its encounter with this technology. According to Brandon LaBelle, amplification technologies shape the voice to the extent that they "multiply the body," "displacing it, throwing it beyond the here and now, toward other centers" (*Background Noise* 135). In other words, we might say that microphones work to distribute the apparently singular voice across space such that it can be heard both *by* many bodies and *as* many bodies at once. Furthermore, as Steven Connor proposes, amplification technologies also have the capacity to bring us closer to the body in the voice,[85] "mak[ing] audible and expressive a whole range of organic vocal sounds which are edited out in ordinary listening" (38). Beyond simply allowing for an intimate experience of the body of another,[86] however, Connor believes that "the imaginary closeness of [amplified] voices suggests to us that they could be our own" (38).

If technologies of amplification are notable for promoting visceral forms of identification *with* the other *through* voice, then technologies of transmission are notable for promoting identification *of* the other *as* voice. Because of its capacity to produce a specter of voice-as-signal that transcends geographical distance, early telephony was widely associated with occult

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[85] Connor's discussion of the role of these in making audible "the liquidity of the saliva, the hissings and tiny shudders of the breath, the clicking of the tongue and teeth, the popping of the lips" (38) is evocative of Barthes's characterization of the operatic voice in "The Grain of the Voice." While Barthes does not explicitly discuss technology, it seems reasonable to suggest that his sense of hearing "the cantor's body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages" (182) might be in some way a function of acoustics and amplification.

[86] That being said, intimacy is not always the outcome of amplified voice. For example, miked musicals often have the effect of distancing the actors on stage, while making their song and speech easier to hear. Thus, we might usefully distinguish between the intimacy of amplified *acousmatic* voices vs. the distance of amplified visible voicing bodies.

ideas about telepathy and the ether, particularly the notion that the presence of the speaking person was directly transported through the wires of a telephonic conversation (Dyson 19). And radio, for its part, further contributed to contradictory ideas about vocal "presence" (of body or self) through the mass phenomenon of broadcasting (31). In other words, at the same time as sound transmission technologies worked to radically dissociate the voice from the body that speaks it, as a cultural phenomenon, they also served to reinforce the myth of metaphysical presence, in which "a person's […] voice came to speak for their whole being" (9).

According to N. Katherine Hayles, we can attribute this persistent belief in mediated presence to the fact of sound transmission's "simultaneity" (76), or what has come to be known more popularly as *liveness*.[87] Of course, the very concept of the "live" speaking voice only becomes thinkable as a counterpoint to the possibility of the *dead* speaking voice of sound reproduction. Notably, sound studies scholar Jonathan Sterne highlights the role of "the voices of the dead" in the public reception of the phonograph, suggesting that, "*for its early users, death somehow explained and shaped the cultural power of sound recording*" (290). As Sterne explains, alongside the development of sound reproduction technology in the Victorian era emerged a belief in the ability of the human voice to "be preserved indefinitely on record" (290)—to be "embalmed" much in the same way that the human body could be embalmed through chemical processes.[88] Thus, rather than moving beyond the notion of embodied presence, the "canned" voice of sound reproduction comes to take on a decidedly eerier form of presence: what Sterne refers to as "a resonant tomb" or "the exteriority of the voice with none of its interior

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[87] While the notion of "liveness" has over time become naturalized, Frances Dyson suggests we should consider live transmission not as actually "live" but rather as producing a "live effect"—something which "affects belief and knowledge" about how we encounter mediated sound and voice in the world (102).
[88] Sterne situates this phenomenon as "an extension of a larger, emergent culture of preservation" (292) in the context of the Victorian ear's obsession with technological practices of canning and embalming.

self-awareness" (290). Thus, we have the notion that, while the voices of the dead cannot speak to us with conscious intention, they *can* in fact speak to us as a visceral human presence from across the threshold of death.

Of course, while the voices of the dead certainly "demanded commentary" a century ago (Sterne 289), so prevalent are such voices in our media-saturated lives that the phenomenon now appears as entirely unextraordinary. In recent years, however, new composing practices have begun to blur the boundaries between the living and the dead and once again raise questions about "presence" in voice recordings. In a provocative example, musicologists Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut explore the phenomenon of the "posthumous duet," using a case study of the 1991 production of "Unforgettable"—a collaboration between Natalie Cole and her father, Nat "King" Cole, nearly 25 years after his death. And Stanyek and Piekut's principle aim in this project is to demonstrate that this duet *is*, in actual fact, a collaboration—an act of mutually agential "co-labor," in which one of the key participants simply happens to be dead.[89] Drawing on the agential realism of Karen Barad, they arrive at this strange possibility by rethinking agency itself, no longer as present intentionality, but as future "*effectivity*" (18). Thus emerges the possibility for a radically new form of ethical composing practice: one that does not confine so-called "embalmed" voices within the limits of representation and "human exceptionalism" (18), but rather invites them to enter into "intermundane collaboration" (17) as material, agential participants in themselves.

While the posthumous duet is perhaps an idiosyncratic context, in many ways, what

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[89] In many ways, it is because "the voices of the dead no longer emanate from bodies that serve as containers for self-awareness" (Sterne 290) that they appear to us as among the most vulnerable to exploitation and thus the most deserving of our protectoral impulses under representational ethics. However, Stanyek and Piekut suggest that our desire to "[defend] the *memory* of the dead" may in fact have negative and paternalistic implications, serving to restrict agency to living humans and strip the dead of their own potential to effect (34).

Stanyek and Piekut are doing here is re-imagining is the act of sound reproduction itself. Rather than viewing the voices of the dead as closed and sacred objects of our protection, they challenge us to consider the possibility that "the only guarantee that sound recording offers" may in fact be this: the assurance of "being enrolled in futures (and pasts) that one cannot wholly predict nor control" (18). What is significant here, for our purposes, is a decisive shift away from the nineteenth-century culture of "preservation" and toward a contemporary "culture of the splice"— or what Stanyek and Piekut refer to as the "recombinatorial imperative" (17). In other words, more than simply capturing and preserving voices as inert relics of the past, today, we may be more concerned with the possibility of remixing and rearticulating them into new assemblages.

At the core of this shift in the cultural imagination is a shift in technologies of sound reproduction themselves. Hayles locates the "crucial difference" between the age of the phonograph and that of magnetic tape in the newfound capacity for "erasure and rewriting" (76). While the phonograph had permitted a certain fantasy of permanence,[90] with the tape recorder came a contradictory new possibility that we might call impermanent permanence—as Hayles puts it, "a mode of voice inscription *at once permanent and mutable*, repeating past moments exactly yet also permitting interventions in the present that radically altered its form and meaning" (77, emphasis added). By allowing people not only to hear their voices played back to them beyond their bodies, but also to manipulate and recompose their voices within the machine, tape recording enabled new configurations of subjectivity and embodiment,[91] which challenge

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[90] Sterne notes a sense of disconnect between the initial public enthusiasm for the phonograph as an archival medium and the actual ability for early sound recording to produce anything resembling a "permanent" record (288). This dream of vocal immorality through sound reproduction continues to drive—and elude—our approach to digital audio today to the extent that we might say that voice's temporality has been extended more than overcome.

[91] As I will discuss further in Chapter Four, Frances Dyson argues that the concept of "embodiment" is no longer an adequate framework for understanding our contemporary cultures of technology. Instead, she

our conventional relationships to our voices and to what it means to be human.

Of course, if it was the advent of magnetic tape recording that first made possible this "recombinatorial" dream, then the capacity for cutting, splicing, mixing, and reassembling voice has only become increasingly potent and widely accessible with the emergence of digital audio technologies. In place of razor blades and bulky reel-to-reel tape, we now have digital editing software that enables incredibly powerful feats of vocal manipulation with the simple click of a mouse. Reflecting on the phenomenon of digital voice in this context, media artist and theorist Norie Neumark describes a fundamental tension between increased "fidelity," on one hand, and increased "flexibility," on the other (95). In other words, at the same time as a digitally reproduced voice may *sound more like* the "original" voice of the person speaking, it can also quite easily be *made to sound* in ways that defy that speaker's original intention. Under a framework of representational ethics—which figures voice as a forensic matter of maintaining property and establishing identity—this tension presents an obvious liability. But if we look beyond questions of representation, as Neumark suggests, toward questions of *performance*, we also find in digital voice a certain promise and potential. Rather than focusing on what voice *means*, she encourages us to focus on what voice *does*. For Neumark, whether or not the voice is actually representative of some "authentic" human presence is beside the point. Instead, she proposes that we approach digital voice as an "authenticity effect"—a relational, vibrational performance of "intimacy and intensity" that we, as listeners, can't help but feel (95). Under this framework, digital voice becomes not simply a hazard, but rather a resource: a malleable compositional material with potential to act and to affect in its own right.

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proposes the notion of "atmosphere" as a means to understand the ways in which the material of human bodies is necessarily porous and connected to other materialities in the world—including those of technology—in a fluid interchange (16).

But what kind of material is digital voice in the first place? What do we make of the relationship between a voice spoken and a voice recorded? Certainly, at the root of sound reproduction technology is a deeply held cultural belief in the possibility of reproduction itself— the capacity of a technology to produce a faithful copy of an "original" sonic event. In recent years, however, sound studies scholars have challenged the very idea that what is created in the process of sound reproduction is a "reproduction" at all—at least not in the sense that we have come to believe. Film scholar Rick Altman emphasizes the contextual specificity of audio recording conditions—from the acoustical space to the microphones employed—arguing that "[w]hen we listen to recorded sound we are […] always listening to a particular account of a specific event" (16). In this sense, what we hear in digital voice is not a reproduction of the voice itself, in any intrinsic sense, but rather a representation of a voice-event. Taking this one step further, Jonathan Sterne asks us to consider the fundamental artifice of the recording scenario, in which the very notion of an "original" can only ever be a product of its own reproducibility (221).[92] As Sterne puts it, "Sound fidelity is a story that we tell ourselves to staple separate pieces of sonic reality together" (219), and thus what we experience as the "aura" in digital voice is ultimately a part of this fiction.

If this is the case, would it be fair to suggest that to compose in digital voice may be less akin to cutting up, say, the *Mona Lisa* itself (let alone the woman who posed for the portrait) and rearranging its pieces than it would be to cutting up one of those little postcards of the *Mona Lisa* that you can buy in the gift shop at the Louvre? This is a tricky question. Based on my own experience composing with voice, it certainly feels like the stakes are higher, that a two-dollar

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[92] Sterne is, of course, drawing from Walter Benjamin's thinking in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where he argues that, in Sterne's words, "the very nature of originality and authenticity is transformed in the context of reproducibility" (220).

postcard isn't quite a fair measure of the ethics at play. At the same time, it also seems as if we in composition have tended to place voice on a pedestal—to assume a strangely defensive role in relation to it—in ways that may be out of step with the realities of its digital reproducibility and in ways that may ultimately be constraining our ability to harness its potential as a material for composing the new. Thus, rather than persisting in our tired models of voice as *self* or as *speech*, perhaps it is time that we imagine a new framework for approaching voice in the digital age.

3.4   OPENING VOICE TO DIGITAL COMPOSING

Looking back at the preceding discussion of interdisciplinary theories of voice—in relation to language, to bodies, and to technologies—it seems that what we are left with is little more than a series of irresolvable contradictions: that voice is not language but is not entirely separate from language either, that voice comes from the body but always leaves the body behind, that digital voice is caught between fidelity and flexibility, and that fidelity is only a fiction in the first place. In this context, what can we fairly say about voice except that it is, at its core, a paradox? How should we, as compositionists, approach voice in this context? What does voice have to offer our practice? While I do not aspire to offer an exhaustive vision for the future of voice in the field of composition and rhetoric, I would like to conclude by proposing a series of tentative "openings,"[93] which might give us a place from which to begin.

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[93] Here, I am working in the spirit of Anne Frances Wysocki's "Opening New Media to Writing," which seeks to offer "some ranges of active possibilities that allow and encourage us to shift what we do in our thinking and classes so that we do not forget, so that we make actively present in our practices, how

3.4.1   Opening #1: Bridging Body-Language

In recent years, the field of composition and rhetoric has seen a rising interest in questions of embodiment, with increasing attention to the body's role not only in the perception of diverse sensory modalities, but also as an active compositional agent through practices like gesture and movement. One of the key challenges running through this trend in scholarship is the question of how to reconcile the relationship between the field's traditional roots in language and emerging theories of the body. On one side of this debate, we have radical approaches that seek to place the body in direct opposition to language and enter into a realm of pure affect, raising the question of why our field—with its disciplinary grounding in language—has any business claiming expertise in this space. And on the other side, we have more conservative approaches that seek to make the body legible and writable as language,[94] reducing it to a system of linguistic coding such that it may be picked apart and reassembled in the manner of alphabetic text. Unfortunately, neither of these approaches does justice to either language *or* the body, and, more importantly, it seems that neither side can speak to the other in any productive sense. Instead of either *alienating* the body from language on one hand or *appropriating* the body as language on the other, it seems to me that the field would do well to find a space in which each one can stand on its own while working in support of the other. And voice, I believe, provides us with a powerful opportunity to imagine how this new space might look—*and sound*.

As we have seen in the preceding discussion, voice plays a special role in relation to

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writing is a continually changing material activity that shapes just who we can be and what we can do" (2-3).

[94] Theo van Lleuwen's "A Semiotics of Voice" is an example of a recent attempt in this direction, which seeks to propose a physiologically and culturally coded typology of vocal expression. While I understand the impulse behind such projects, they ultimately risk collapsing the embodied effectivity of voice into an overly neat framework of signification.

these two spheres of linguistics and embodiment. As Mladen Dolar has argued, "*[I]t is precisely the voice that holds bodies and languages together*. It is like their missing link, what they have in common" (60). At the same time, however, Dolar has also emphasized that voice is in no way reducible to either bodies or languages, but rather stands in a relation of radical excess (73). In this sense, I wonder if voice might provide us with a promising means to find a common ground between the field's longstanding investments in language and our emerging investments in embodiment—while at the same time respecting the unique value and autonomy of each.

Of course, in order to pave the way for this move, it is crucial that we first distinguish between *voice* and *speech*—concepts that are too readily confused in the context of a field so deeply rooted in discursivity, and, as Adriana Cavarero has argued, in the context of western philosophy more generally, with its emphasis on the rational speaking subject. While the rise of writing has, over the centuries, made language increasingly silent, to simply map voice back onto language is ultimately to erase voice as *something more than* language—as *that which language cannot say*. And if we, as a field, can open our minds to voice's fundamental paradox—as an embodiment not opposed to language but always in excess of it—then the potential implications for our practice may be wide-reaching and profound. By exploring possibilities for *composing with voice* as opposed to merely with words, our field might begin to bridge some of the deep Cartesian fissures—between mind and body, word and skin, cognition and affect—which have abstracted our practice (and western philosophy more broadly) from the fleshy immediacy and visceral substance of primary lived experience.

3.4.2 Opening #2: Performing and Disrupting Identity

Voice has played a key role at the center of one of the most iconic debates in contemporary

composition, as a metaphorical symbol in the struggle over the question of identity.[95] Whether composition pedagogy should encourage writers to find their "authentic" 'voices' (and thus identities) through personal writing or should teach writers that their so-called 'voices' (as stand-ins for identities) are only ever social constructions was, for a time, one of the most pressing questions in the meta-discourse of our field. However, we have seen outlined here a number of arguments against the presumed marriage between human voice and human identity in the first place—arguments that push us to reimagine voice not as a personal attribute, but as a relational event. In this context, voice is no longer safely confined within the individual body, as the unquestioned possession or expression of an autonomous speaking subject. Instead, it must always, and by its very nature, *reach beyond itself* toward other bodies, *speaking itself* at the same time as it speaks language. And as we move voice into the realm of digital audio, with its high potential for manipulability, the necessary link between sounding voice and intentional speech (and thus identity) becomes increasingly tenuous. Thus, while metaphorical 'voice' has largely gone out of fashion in mainstream composition practice, we find in mediated, *material* voice an invaluable opportunity to rethink our approach to identity—and even to complicate the very possibility of identity itself.

As I have argued, one of the key limitations in our field's approach to sounding voice has been its continued investment in models of classical oratory, which necessarily tether the voice to the live speaking body and to the service of rational discourse. When we imagine voice in this way, we ultimately limit ourselves to a single compositional possibility: to take up voice as a direct representation of intentional speech. Even in the realm of digital composition, pedagogical

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[95] I'm referring here to an ideological struggle that has come to be metonymically represented as "The Bartholomae/Elbow Debates." See the 1995 *CCC* articles "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow" and "Responses to Bartholomae and Elbow" for a summary of this conversation.

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innovations like documentary voiceover and the audio essay—while they attend to the value of embodied, vibrational sound—have ultimately continued to confine voice's potential within the familiar conventions of linear (if layered), speech-based discourse, wherein the voice of the speaker and the voice of the composer are typically one and the same. But if we step back and take up voice on its own terms—as something always already beyond the individual body, as something that challenges the boundaries between self and other, as an effect rather than an essence—then I think we, as a field, might discover a range of new compositional opportunities: for experimentation, for disruption, and for play.

In order to embrace these opportunities, we must first open our minds to voice's potential to not only *represent* as communicative content, but also to *perform* and *enact* as a vibrational material. It is here that Norie Neumark's work becomes particularly productive. By focusing on the fundamental performativity of digital voice, Neumark works to divest the voice of its stifling obligations to identity, while at the same time recognizing the human tendency to hear in digital voice something that might *feel* like an authentic presence. In this sense, we might say that digital voice possesses the unique potential both to *evoke* our deepest desires for identity and then to *disrupt* their very possibility. As Neumark puts it, "I consider it still useful to approach voice as gesture and event—and to point to what voices *do*, how they *create and disturb* meaning and 'identity' rather than just conveying or expressing it" (96). It is in this context, I believe, that our field's longstanding attachments to voice-as-identity come to take on new significance—no longer a metaphysical liability but rather a material resource. Indeed, I wonder if digital voice, taken up as a malleable compositional material, might help us to perform the impossibility of representation itself.

3.4.3   Opening #3: A Material "Ethics of Effects"

Amidst the recent turn toward digital and multimodal composing, we have seen the field embrace an expanding range of media and materials as the new building blocks of composition practice. And, as part of this shift we have seen a parallel opening to alternative compositional forms, ranging from soundscapes, to collage art, to video remix—forms which radically upend the linear, expository conventions of the academic essay. But while popular music, photo archives, and online videos have arisen as uncontested fodder for such "recombinatorial" compositions, vast archives of digital voices—which circulate widely through the prosumptive networks of the social web—have remained a largely untapped resource. To "compose with voice" in the field of composition has been, for the most part, restricted to the practice of recording and editing one's own voice for linear replay. More experimental and disruptive approaches to voice-as-*material* may appear dangerous and out of bounds.

Considering our field's longstanding approach to voice as identity and language, it seems safe to suggest that this de facto proscription against interfering with the voices of others might be due, at least in part, to the constraints of representational ethics. In other words, when we are driven solely by the need to accurately reflect the *person behind the voice*, on one hand, or to accurately express the *act of intentional speech* on the other, recordings of other people's voices will always remain inert and sacred objects of conservation, closed off to the imaginative manipulation, recombination, and repurposing that digital audio affords. Thus, while there is no question that voice suggests a rich and vibrant source of material for composition in the digital age, in order to fully embrace voice *as* material, perhaps we must begin to imagine new ethical frameworks that start from the material itself.

As we have seen, one of the vital steps in moving away from a representational approach

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to voice is to reimagine the relationship between a voice and its source. On one hand, to completely abandon the relationship between voice and its human source—and thus to collapse voice into a framework of aurality (when "live") or audio (when mediated)—would be to deny the extent to which voice is phenomenologically set apart from all other sounds in our "hierarchy of perception" (Chion 5). On the other hand, to hold on too tightly to the idea that a voice is a possession or attribute of its human source would be to overlook both the extent to which voice always moves beyond the body from the moment it is recognized as voice (Connor 4) and the extent to which "we can experience a sound without experiencing its source" (Cox 156). In this sense, as I have argued, it may be fruitful for the field of composition and rhetoric to imagine the voice as an *effect*. This framework allows us to simultaneously acknowledge a voice's causal relationship to the human being who uttered it, while also affording it an independent existence as a *"sonorous body"* (Schaeffer 79) or "autonomous voice bod[y]" (Connor 35) with the vibrational potential to act and to affect in its own right.

It is here that Stanyek and Piekut's provocative proposal for a material "ethics of effects" (34) becomes particularly promising. By re-imagining *voice as effect* and *effect as agency*, these authors provide us with an unprecedented opening to interact with—and indeed to *collaborate* with—not only the voices of others, but even the voices of the dead. As I see it, this possibility has radical implications for the future of composition practice, opening up the vast archives of digital voice to innovative practices of compositional invention and intervention and encouraging us to approach these materials with a newfound appreciation for their role—indeed, their shared agency—in producing the effects of our work. Of course, it is important to emphasize that this

"mutual effectivity" does not imply a "mutual responsibility"[96] (34), and thus in no way divests the living, human participant in an "intermundane" collaboration of the obligation to approach vocalic composing with a critical sensibility. What it does do, however, is encourage us to move beyond the familiar knee-jerk reaction to vocal-manipulation-as-*exploitation*, making the way for exciting new practices of mindful experimentation and play. I believe it is in this sense, more than any other, that digital voice has the potential to recompose composition: by forcing us to reimagine our relationship to the materials of our practice more broadly—even going so far as to break down the boundaries we have erected between fiction and nonfiction, self and other, living and dead, body and machine.

In what follows, I will build on these openings by putting them into practice in two practice-based experiments in critical media production: In Chapter Four, an installation piece comprised of three two-channel videos, which employ a technique of reverse remix to digitally "coerce" confessions from the bodies of unwitting actors. And, in Chapter Five, an experimental radio drama, which mobilizes the recorded voices of deceased individuals from oral history archives as "actors"—and collaborators—in an imaginative work of dramatic storytelling. These two projects are designed to work together to cover broad conceptual and compositional ground, theorizing digital vocality in relation to questions of agency, performativity, and ethics across diverse source materials and media platforms. In the following two chapters, I will begin by describing the compositional methods and materials that went into the production of each project. Then, I will lay out the theoretical underpinnings beneath its conception, situating it in

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[96] While Stanyek and Piekut do not completely disavow the possibility for a move toward shared responsibility between human and nonhuman actors in so-called "intermundane" collaborations, this opening remains for them "the impossible question" at the root of their work: "What kinds of co-responsibility do the disparate yet mutually effective worlds of humans and nonhumans, material and immaterial entities, and the living, dead, and not-yet-born have for one another?" (34). I will consider these ideas further in the conclusion of this dissertation.

the context of related works and practices and considering the ways in which it builds upon and extends existing compositional engagement with digital voice across broad spheres of creative production. Ultimately, by engaging with digital voice in these divergent contexts, I hope to generate a rich and varied conversation that might contribute to theory and practice alike across a wide range of creative fields—those which already employ voice as core material of their practice and those which might productively take it up if catalyzed to do so.

4.0 *COERCED CONFESSIONS*: PERFORMANCE, EDITING, MANIPULATION

> One loses control of the voice because it no longer disappears. From bone to air to writing, permanence outside the subject invites greater mutability, where the primacy and purity of the voice are subjected to the machinations and imaginations of culture and politics.
>
> — Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*

In this chapter, I will discuss *Coerced Confessions*, an installation-based video series, which employs a method I call *reverse remix* to digitally "coerce" confessional performances from actors' bodies, against their will. As an experiment in compositional method, the videos in this series are produced as follows: First, by rearranging textual source material from real-life public confessions (letters, political speeches, YouTube videos) into scripted fictional monologues; second, by filming actors performing the monologues in live dramaturgical readings with no knowledge of the original confession from which they were produced; and, third, by reverse-engineering the resulting performances—word-by-word and syllable-by-syllable—back into the original confessional texts. What emerges out of this process is a set of two distinct performances: The first, a traditional dramaturgical utterance driven by speakerly intention, and the second, a digital rearticulation of that utterance driven by technological manipulation. Together, these two performances form a two-channel video designed for simultaneous, looping

playback on adjacent monitors in an installation environment. This configuration encourages viewers to experience the two channels both individually and in relation, elucidating the method of their production and ruminating on the startling relationships between word and voice, meaning and material, intention and intonation that their relationship provokes.

The left channel of each video features the actor's voice and body in synchronous audio and visual tracks, manipulated with rapid and precise edits—at the level of the word and in many cases the syllable[97]—such that s/he appears to be uttering the confessional text. However, because of the radical nature of the editing—with cuts ranging from a few seconds for breaths and pauses, down to only a few frames—the performance of this utterance appears anything but "natural." The visual track is framed as a close-up of the actor's face and torso, shot from just below the eyes, seeking to focus the viewer's attention on the movements and expressions of the face—and, in particular, the mouth—while partially (though not completely) occluding the actor's identity. In combination with the awkward spurts and mumbles of the vocal delivery (a phenomenon I will discuss further later in this chapter), the jarring visual effect/affect of the body's twitches and contortions works to exaggerate—as oppose to smooth over—the disjointed nature of the performance and thus draws attention to the manipulative or "coercive" nature of its production. Finally, deliberately timed breaths and pauses function to steady the pace of the delivery and match the timing of the second video channel, while also contributing to the affective charge and dramatic emphasis of the confessional performance.

Conversely, the right channel of each video features the unedited audio track of the

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[97] The concept for this project (and its radical, word-level editing) was inspired, early on, by examples of experimental video art, such as Omer Fast's *CNN Concatenated* (2002), which compiles discrete words spoken by different CNN newscasters into a cohesive 18-minute "monologue" posing questions about media authenticity, and Lenka Clayton's *Qaeda, Quality, Question, Quickly, Quickly, Quiet* (2001), which rearranges all of the words in George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address (the "Axis of Evil" speech) into alphabetical order.

actor's original dramatic performance of the fictional monologue, overlaid with a visual track that reflects the form and medium of the confessional source material. For example, in the case of a written document, fragments of alphabetic text gradually appear on the screen, one-by-one, as each word is spoken in the fictional monologue, such that, at the end of the performance, they reveal the complete text of the original confession. And in the case of a televised speech, the visual footage of the original confession is manipulated with the same process of precise editing, such that the confessor appears to be mouthing or lip synching—again, in a manifestly unnatural performance—along with the actor's monologue. When placed in juxtaposition to the left video channel, the audio track in this channel presents itself as a strikingly fluid performance, drawing attention to the jarring intonation of the "coerced confession," while creating moments of resonance, which reveal their common source in a singular human performance. The visual track, for its part, further supports the point of connection between the two channels, dramatizing the process through which the source materials have been remixed.

One of the crucial components of this project, beyond that which is immediately visible in the installation environment, is the voluntary but ultimately unwitting participation of the actors involved. In recruiting actors for the project, I was careful to inform them of the project's larger aims and methods—namely that I would be appropriating their performances toward alternative ends—while requiring that they remain ignorant of the precise ends toward which their performances will be re-orchestrated until after the filming was complete. They were provided only with the script for their performance of the fictional monologue, made up almost exclusively of the words and syllables found in the original confession but radically rearranged to disguise its identity, context, and meaning. In preparation for the filming, I insisted that the actors' performance be guided by the script alone and provided them with no additional coaching

on the emotional context or conflict in which their character was embedded. I invited them to select their own wardrobe and to direct their performance based solely on their empathic reading of the character and the situation that the script suggested, and asked only that they speak slowly and enunciate each word to enable greater flexibility in the editing process. In the end, I revealed the "coerced confession" to the actors, either by providing them with a copy of the original confessional text following the filming or by showing them the video of their "coerced confession" after the editing was complete. This element of mystery—and the surrender of control that it entailed—was an integral part of the ethical experiment at hand.

The source materials behind each of the three videos in the *Coerced Confessions* series reflect a variety of confessional sub-genres, figures, contexts, and media.[98] In selecting these materials, I sought to create opportunities for experimentation with a wide range of affective states, viewer identifications, and ethical stakes, such that each video would offer a vastly different expression or enactment of a common compositional method.

The first video, titled "Susan" (6 minutes, 25 seconds), is based on Susan Smith's 1994 letter confessing to drowning her two young children. In this letter, Smith describes in detail both her actions and her emotional state on the day she murdered her sons, situating her behavior as, in part, a desperate response to unrequited love. As the confession of a private citizen thrust into the public eye by the severity of her crime, Smith's letter resonates with the raw and contradictory emotions—grief and guilt, tenderness and callousness, self-loathing and self-justification—of a young mother struggling to make sense of her own senseless act, perhaps for herself as much as anyone else. At the heart of Smith's confession is an almost unbearable

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[98] In determining what source texts constitute confessions, this project follows Dave Tell's broad, reception-based definition of the confession as "any text that has been called a confession" (5), keeping in mind that, as Tell argues, "to call a text a confession or to deny the same is always a political act" (2).

vulnerability: the physical vulnerability of two sleeping children strapped into the backseat of a car as it rolls into a lake and the emotional vulnerability that drove their mother to push it in.

Figure 1. *Susan* **(Erin Anderson, 2011); 6 min. 25 sec. video with sound (channel 1 of 2)**

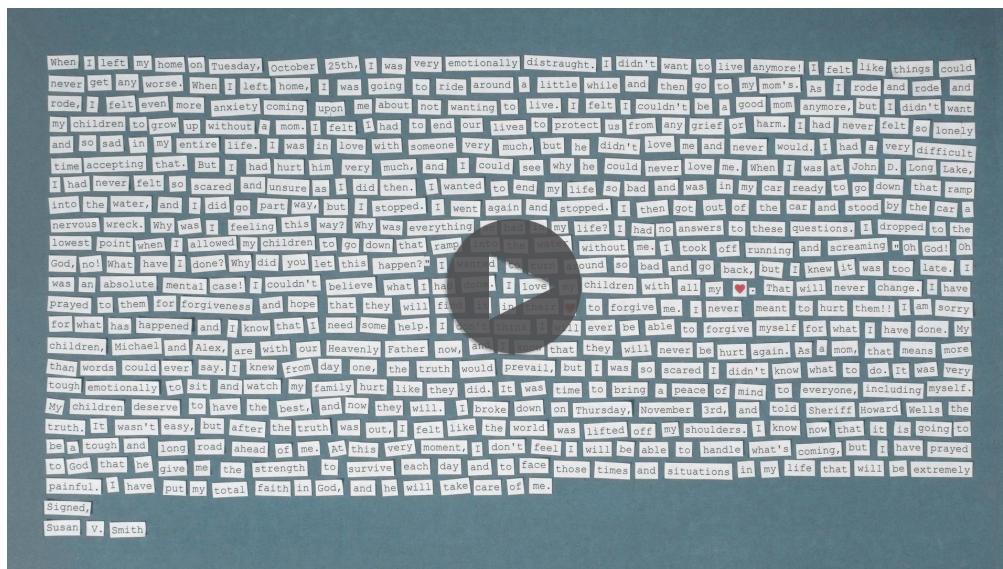**Video still of actress Jamie "Skye" Bianco and link to video.**

Figure 2. *Susan* **(Erin Anderson, 2011); 6 min. 25 sec. video with sound (channel 2 of 2)**

Video still of reconstituted source text by Susan Smith and link to video.

The second video, titled "Bill" (5 minutes, 30 seconds), works with then-President Bill Clinton's 1998 speech confessing to his affair with White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, immediately following his testimony before the Office of Independent Council and the grand jury. In this live network television broadcast, popularly known as "The Map Room Speech," Clinton expresses regret and takes responsibility for his actions, while emphasizing the legal accuracy of his previous statements on the matter and calling for an end to the "spectacle" that has surrounded it. As a highly public figure driven by his position (and by the controversial Kenneth Starr investigation) to divulge the details of his private life, Clinton offers a vastly divergent emotional and rhetorical context for the confessional act. Stiff, pragmatic, and coldly defiant, in this speech, he appears less invested in the confession itself than he is in protesting the conditions that called for it. His is a resentful, bureaucratic performance that knows itself as such. Defensiveness—not vulnerability—is its prevailing affect.[99]

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[99] Tell describes "The Map Room Speech," delivered on August 17, 1998, as "defiant and poorly received" for its lack of contrition. This speech stands in contrast to the considerably more apologetic, religious, and well-received "Prayer Breakfast Speech," which Clinton delivered to a group of clergy three weeks later (148). For more on these confessions and the public reception that they were met with, see Tell's chapter "Confession and Democracy: Clinton, Starr, and the Witch-Hunt Tradition of American Confession."

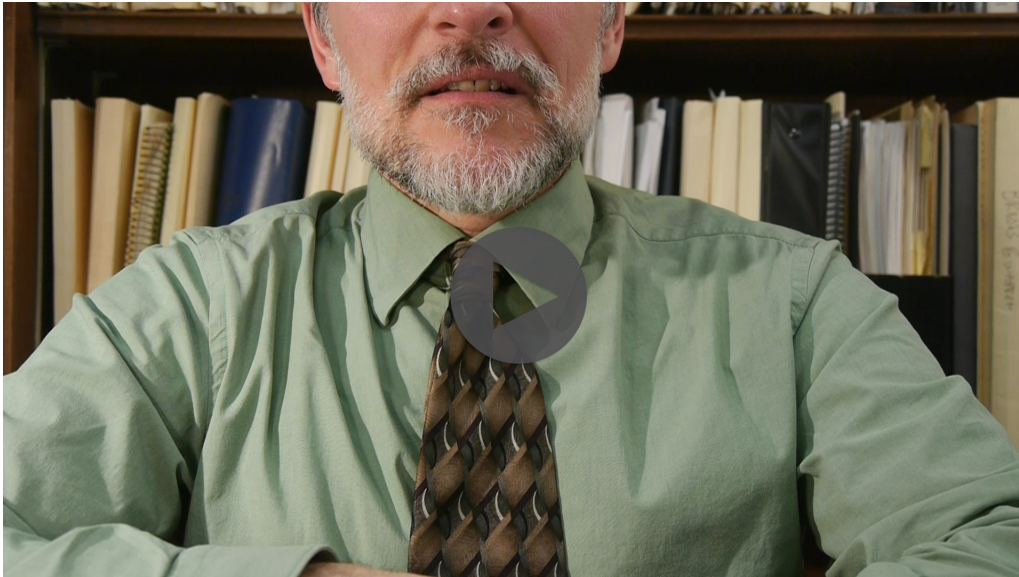**Figure 3. *Bill* (Erin Anderson, 2013); 5 min. 30 sec. video with sound (channel 1 of 2)**

Video still of actor Ken Bolden and link to video.

Figure 4. *Bill* (Erin Anderson, 2013); 5 min. 30 sec. video with sound (channel 2 of 2)

Video still of reconstituted source text by Bill Clinton (Courtesy, William J. Clinton Presidential Library)

and link to video.

The third video, titled "Chris" (4 minutes, 15 seconds), takes as its source material a 2009 YouTube confession by R&B artist Chris Brown, in which he publicly admits to and apologizes for beating then-girlfriend, pop star Rihanna. In this video, following at long public silence about the incident, Brown makes an intimate address to his viewers as disappointed fans. Speaking directly into the camera, he implores viewers to "forgive me, please" and expresses hope that others learn from his mistakes. As an artifact of celebrity confession in the age of social media, Brown's video was originally circulated through his MySpace page and his personal website, but it has since been reproduced and reposted across the Web, accompanied by running commentary from viewers expressing their approval or disdain. In this confession, Brown accepts personal responsibility for his actions, while at the same time framing them within a social context of domestic violence as a learned behavior. Here, the lines between perpetrator and victim become blurred through a narrative of regret and redemption.
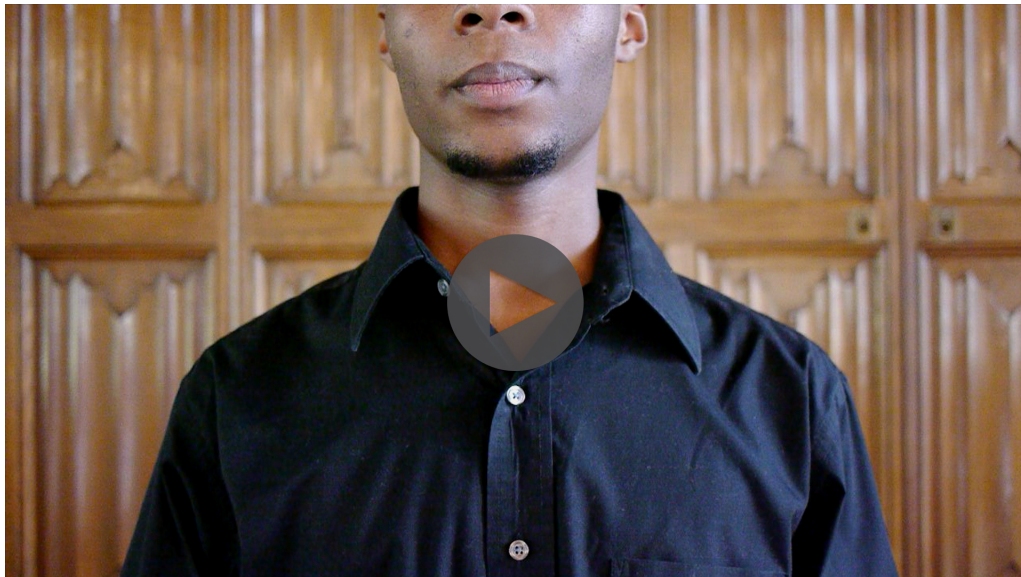

Figure 5. *Chris* (Erin Anderson, 2013); 4 min. 15 sec. video with sound (channel 1 of 2)

Video still of actor Harry J. Hawkins IV and link to video.

Figure 6. *Chris* **(Erin Anderson, 2013); 4 min. 15 sec. video with sound (channel 2 of 2)**

Video still of reconstituted source text by Chris Brown and link to video.

Each of these three confessions formed the basis for an alphabetic remix, resulting in the production of an original fictional monologue. In setting the parameters for the project, I decided that I would aim to remix the confession such that the resulting script would be comprised exclusively of the words and syllables of the original, and, with few exceptions[100], I was able to hold myself to this rule. While, in theory, I had complete authorial control over both the order in which the language was rearranged and the extent to which individual words were split and recombined, in practice, I was forced to share my agency in the compositional process with the text itself. Because of my desire to create a rigid one-to-one relationship between the two texts—as well as the added requirement that the resulting remix form a coherent monologue for an

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[100] Beyond a few small modifications of the existing words (e.g. one instance of the two instances of "ramp" in the Susan Smith confession became "tramp" in the remix), the only deliberate departure from this rule was made to compensate for the absence of sufficient pronouns necessary for the grammatically and semantically sound reconstruction of the text. In "Susan," additional instances of the pronoun "you" were included in the alphabetic remix; in "Bill," there were additional instances of "your"; and, in "Chris," there were additional instances of they.

imaginable character without giving away the identity or context of the original confessor—the available options for recombination were, in actual fact, highly limited, and the process of arriving at those options became a part of the discovery.

When faced with the overwhelming task of making a given utterance of several hundred words reinvent itself as a meaningful, but unrecognizable recomposition of *every one* of those words and syllables and, as much as possible, *only* those words and syllables, I found it necessary to first determine a starting point—a hook out of which the remainder of the text could emerge. In other words, the biggest obstacle to the composition process at the outset was the sense of seemingly endless possibilities for recombinatorial invention, with no clear idea of where to begin. In order to address this challenge, I determined that the most difficult words to transfer from one text to another without giving away their origin would be the proper nouns— the names of the people and places involved. It was in this way that "John D. Long" (the name of the lake where Susan Smith drowned her children) became "Dear John"; "Lewinsky" (the surname of Clinton's notorious intern) became "in lieu of"; and "Chris" (singer Chris Brown's first name) became "Christians" when combined with the second syllable of the word "questions."

Of course, it's important to note that, in producing the remix, I had to keep in mind that the ultimate destination of these words would be in vocal performance, as opposed to the printed page. In this sense, it was the *sounds* of the words and not their meaning that needed to translate. In some cases, this element of the compositional process afforded increased flexibility—for example, when an instance of the word "there" could become "their" or "they're" at will. In other cases, however, it presented a challenge, wherein unanticipated variations in pronunciation could easily thwart decontextualized reuses of the linguistic material—for example, an instance

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of the word "live," as in "the concert was live" could not stand in for the word "live," as in "I live there." Thus, in setting out to produce a textual remix for vocal re-performance, I was forced to encounter language as a fundamentally material phenomenon, to recognize the bias inherent to my primarily visualist approach to language-as-text, and to imagine its multiple possibilities as voice and sound. Because my method for managing the remix process—which involved online text analysis tools, custom spreadsheets, and a lot of patience—was, by necessity, based in visual representations of language, I sometimes learned the hard way how easy it was to forget the specificity of language-as-sound.

Ultimately, after days of trial-and-error experimentation and meticulous play, what emerged out of this process of recomposition was a set of three distinct utterances: Susan Smith's confession to drowning her children became a bitter if nostalgic "Dear John" letter reflecting on the end of a relationship with a former lover ("Susan"); Bill Clinton's recalcitrant public address on his relationship with a white house intern became a smugly resentful legal notice from an insurance executive denying someone's claim ("Bill"); and Chris Brown's pleading apology for the violent physical assault on his celebrity girlfriend became a frustrated minister's prayer for the ability to forgive those who perpetrate domestic abuse ("Chris"). While the content of these fictional monologues departs markedly from the original confessions (which is, of course, the objective of the remix process), in the end, each of these utterances is situated— as utterances always are[101]—in a recognizable genre of everyday speech that somehow seems to evoke the emotions and intentions driving the original piece. In other words, despite the fact that the intonation of individual words and phrases is noticeably aberrant, there is an extent to which the underlying affect of the original confession is translated from (con)text to (con)text, genre to

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[101] Later on in this chapter, I will discuss this project in relation to Bakhtin's theory of speech genres and their relationship to what he calls "expressive intonation" ("Speech Genres" 85).

genre, performance to performance. I am fascinated by this phenomenon—an unexpected outcome of the compositional experiment—and I will return to it in more detail later in this chapter.

4.1   CONVERSATION

The initial concept for the *Confessions* videos emerged out of my fascination with media artist and theorist Norie Neumark's work on digital voice and performativity. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Neumark's work speaks back to a fundamental paradox of digitally mediated voice: namely the relationship between its heightened "fidelity" (or perceived "authenticity") on one hand, and its heightened "flexibility" (or "manipulability") on the other (95). As Neumark points out, at the same time as digital audio affords higher sound quality, suggesting a more faithful representation of the "authentic" voice of the speaker, it also enables a radical departure from the identity and intentionality of that speaker through the affordances of digital editing. In other words, the more we, as listeners, experience a recorded voice as "sounding like" the person who spoke it, the less it must actually conform to the constraints of the speaker's intentionality and agency. Taking this paradox as my point of departure, in the *Confessions* videos, I am interested in experimenting with this performative potential—in playing with digital voice at the limits of its material manipulability, and in using the practice itself as a means of thinking through the ethics at play.

At the root of this practice is an effort to imagine the generative potential of vocal remix: of taking a given voice recording, slicing it into its component parts, and remixing them into a new configuration of speech-that-never-was. Indeed, this practice has a long history in the

creative and literary arts, stretching back at least as far as William S. Burroughs's "tape recorder experiments" and magnetic tape "cut-ups" of the late-1950s to late-1970s (Hayles 90). Building upon and extending the print-based "cut-up" method that he took from poet Brion Gysin, Burroughs's experiments with magnetic tape[102] included, on one hand, techniques of layered or interrupted recording, which used the tape recorder to overdub new sounds over existing voice recordings at random intervals, and, on the other hand, literal "cut-ups," which employed the systematic slicing and reassembling of a strip of magnetic tape itself. As an analog precursor to contemporary digital sampling, these experiments revel in the joy of spontaneity and emergence, driven more than anything by a desire to discover "what would happen if?"—which is, in many ways, the same sense of curiosity that inspired my work in the *Coerced Confessions* project.

In an interview with Daniel Odier, Burroughs describes in detail a particular experiment in which:

> …I took a short passage of my recorded voice and cut it into intervals of one twenty-fourth of a second movie tape […] and rearranged the order of the 24th second intervals of recorded speech. The original words are quite unintelligible but new words emerge. The voice is still there and you can immediately recognise the speaker. Also the tone of the voice remains. If the tone is friendly, hostile, sexual, poetic, sarcastic, lifeless, despairing, this will be apparent in the altered sequence (qtd. in Odier 178).

Situating this technique in historical context, Burroughs goes on to discuss the experiment in terms of its connection to speech scrambling devices used in wartime radio and telephone communications—devices whose primary purpose was "to make the message unintelligible

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[102] In his experimental novel, *The Ticket that Exploded* (the first in *The Nova Trilogy*), Burroughs outlines, in detail, the many possibilities for these experiments, marveling, in what becomes a repeated mantra, at the fact that "It's all done with the tape recorder…" (160).

without scrambling the code" (178).[103] While the method Burroughs describes here is quite different from the one I employ in the *Coerced Confessions* project, particularly in its willingness to embrace the "unintelligib[ility]" of the resulting composition, there are provocative moments of resonance in Burroughs's discussion of the project, which are worth considering further.

First is Burroughs's discovery that the identity of the speaker remains recognizable in the remixed composition despite even the most radical scrambling of the recorded voice. Comparatively, the *Confessions* videos take a much more literal, linguistically oriented approach to vocal scrambling, making cuts at the boundaries of words and syllables rather than at arbitrary, predetermined intervals. This method ensures that parallel vocal utterances will emerge and bounce off of one another in the space between the juxtaposed video channels, suggesting to the audience not only that it is the same person speaking in both channels, but also that each channel is in fact constructed from the same vocal material. Despite the fact that the visual track of the second video channel (which provides the audio of the original dramatic monologue spoken by the actor) does not reveal the physical likeness of the speaker, it is crucial to the ethical stakes of the project that this function of identity recognition be present, demonstrating that the "confession" in the first channel is a deliberate manipulation of a single person's voice. Reading Burroughs's reflection on this experiment, I am intrigued by the proposition that this recognition need not be grounded only in the pronunciation and accentuation but rather that they might be inherent in the quality or timbre of the voice itself, regardless of linguistic content or meaning.

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[103] While I had never considered my practice in the *Coerced Confessions* project in these terms, it is interesting to consider the extent to which the process of alphabetic remix through which I produce the script for the actor's performance, might be thought of as a process of encoding, carried out with the express goal of later unscrambling the coded message through digital editing into the desired confession.

Of course, there is another key difference between the experiment Burroughs describes here and my work in the *Confessions* project—specifically surrounding the question of whose voice is being manipulated. It matters, from an ethical perspective, that Burroughs is using a recording of his *own* voice as the basis for his manipulation—and, indeed, for many (though not all) of his magnetic tape experiments. In N. Katherine Hayles's discussion of Burroughs's *The Ticket That Exploded*, she describes his experiments as efforts to imagine possibilities for "tape-recorder-as-body" and "body-as-tape-recorder," and thus for an alternative subjectivity that is situated at the collapsing boundary between human and machine (85). Under this framework, it is one's ability to manipulate *one's own* voice (and thus "presence") within the machine—and, eventually, to give over one's subjectivity entirely to the machine—that is important. The ethics at stake are a question of human-machine relations and flexible subjectivities, with no attention to the potential for intervention by other human agents—or, indeed, for a notion of voice as something apart from subjectivity in the first place.

In contrast, in the *Confessions* project, I am making a deliberate intervention into the prevailing ethical standards surrounding the use of *other people's* recorded voices in compositional practice—standards that mandate a strict representational adherence to speakerly intention. In this sense, it is my own intervention, as an external human agent with no apparent claim to "ownership" over the voice in question, that is at the heart of the ethical provocation at hand. Certainly, both experiments are playing upon a shared fear—namely, that our voices might be "stolen" and made to speak beyond our control. However, the *Confessions* project represents an attempt to move the conversation away from the essentializing, metaphysical frameworks of vocal "subjectivity" and "presence," which Hayles is mobilizing here and to reimagine the recorded voice as something closer to what Jonathan Sterne has called "a resonant tomb, offering

the exteriority of the voice with none of its interior self-awareness" (290). Indeed, by flagrantly interfering with the voices of the actors involved, and by dramatizing this interference through the juxtaposition of the two video channels, I am seeking to challenge the very notion of "interference" itself and to reclaim the manipulability of digital voice as a constructive capacity for invention and performative play.

This leads us to the second key discovery that Burroughs notes in his discussion of this magnetic tape cut-up: the transference of "tone" from the original vocal recording to the scrambled sequence. Based on his use of the word "tone" in the singular, as well as the available tones he references—"friendly, hostile, sexual, poetic, sarcastic, lifeless, despairing" (Odier 178)—it seems that he is referring here to a phenomenon not unlike what I previously referred to as the "underlying affect" of the overall utterance, as opposed to the intonational accents of the individual words, which necessarily become new words and non-words in his voice-scrambling experiment. Interestingly, this affective transference was something that I noted in my own compositional process, both in the alphabetic remix, moving from the original confession to the production of the scripted fictional monologue, and in the video remix, moving from the performed monologue to the "coerced confession." While the latter shift suggests a commonality with Burroughs's experiment, functioning at the level of *vocalic* material, the former, emerging as it does out of a purely alphabetic process, must necessarily be functioning at a level of *linguistic* material. This distinction presents an interesting opportunity to reflect on the relationship between language and voice that the *Coerced Confessions* project provokes.

Unlike Burroughs, who embraced "unintelligible" speech as a viable outcome of his cut-up process (Odier 178), in scripting the fictional monologues for the *Confessions* videos, I was committed to remixing the confessional source text not simply into intelligible words and

sentences, but, furthermore, into a believable monologue for an imaginable character that might be enacted and performed by the participating actor. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, you might say that what I was aiming for in the alphabetic remix process was the production of a "concrete utterance" (63) structured by a recognizable "speech genre" ("Speech Genres" 72)—in this case, a Dear John letter, a formal business address, and a prayer of petition—as opposed to simply a string of linguistically or grammatically sound sentences. After all, as Bakhtin argues, "The sentence as a unit of language, like the word, has no author. Like the word, it belongs to nobody, and only by functioning as a whole utterance does it become an expression of the position of someone speaking individually in a concrete situation of speech communication" (83-84). What the utterance provides, then, is a socially imaginable configuration of speaker, listener, and topic or "hero," which forms the basis for the actor's dramatic interpretation. Because, as Bakhtin puts it, "[e]xpressive intonation is a constitutive marker of the utterance" (85), each of the resulting scripts necessarily suggests an overall tone, which may be something similar to what Burroughs describes in his discovery that "the tone of voice remains" (Odier 178). What is interesting (and perplexing) is the fact that this tone, while produced in the context of one speech genre in the fictional utterance, appears so appropriate to the vastly divergent genre of the correlating "coerced confession" when it is transferred to this new context in the audio remix. While it is difficult to say exactly what it happening here, I wonder if it might be a response to the limited combinations that are possible using only the constrained set of words and syllables available in the original text, particularly with the requirement that the resulting text form a believable utterance. In this sense, the project provides a fascinating window into the possible role of individual words and syllables as the linguistic building blocks of the utterance.

Taking Burroughs's discovery one step further, however, we might also consider how

tone functions at the level of individual words and syllables. Central to Bakhtin's work is an emphasis on the fundamentally appropriative nature of language as it is used, in which, "[t]he word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with is own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" ("Discourse" 293). In many ways, the *Coerced Confessions* project—as an appropriation of the speech of another for alternative intentions and ends—stands as an ethically charged dramatization of the same kind of appropriation, which Bakhtin suggests happens as a matter of course in everyday communication contexts. There is, however, one key difference: Unlike the appropriative "revoicing" that occurs in everyday speech—which necessarily implies a shift in the "expressive intonation" (85)—in the context of the *digital* appropriation that I am carrying out here, the precise intonation of every word and syllable remains stubbornly intact as it is trafficked from one context to another. Indeed, this may be one of the key distinctions between composing-in-words and composing-in-voices: That, despite the radical manipulability of digital voice that Neumark points to, there is an extent to which "the unsaid" always speaks itself beyond our control.

There is definitely a certain surrendering of control—to the technology, to the method—inherent in Burroughs's magnetic tape experiment, one which ultimately results in the muddling of the intelligibility and meaning of words. Conversely, because the *Coerced Confessions* project is built around a requirement for intelligibility and meaning, we might say that this surrender of control happens at the level of intonation, wherein the language continues to "make sense" but the intonational delivery of that language is jarring and detached from the norms of everyday speech. Juxtaposed against the fluid intonation of the original scripted delivery, what we see and hear in the confessional remix is the disjunction of a voice acting beyond its allegiance to the

rational speaking subject, but at the same time in full allegiance to speech itself. In this sense, we might argue that what is being dramatized in this project is simultaneously the material vulnerability of voice to the digital "coercion" we have been promised and its fundamentally social, intonational resistance.[104]

This surrender to intonational disruption is one of the key elements of the *Confessions* project, which sets it apart from other prominent examples of vocal remix to emerge out of literary, artistic, and popular contexts in the years following Burroughs's cut-ups. One such work worth discussing is media artist and scholar Douglas Kahn's 1980 experimental audio collage, "Reagan Speaks for Himself." Working with the reel-to-reel audio from a Bill Moyers interview with Ronald Reagan when he was a candidate for president, Kahn used a razor blade to slice up and rearrange Reagan's voice into an entirely new utterance composed entirely of words and phrases from the interview. As a work of "media ventriloquism" (Nelson), the resulting audio presents Reagan's voice stuttering out a series of awkward and absurd proclamations, punctuated by a flood of nonverbal utterances—uhhs and oohs and guffaws—which become more pronounced in their repetition. Opening with: "For the first time in Man's history, I uhhhh, I'm president!"[105] (Kahn), the piece goes on to feature humorous musings about "cans of poisoned meat" and a taskforce that works to break men's arms—*and* "the backbone of America"—over a car window. While these statements were, of course, never actually made by the former

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[104] In his book *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*, conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith suggests that "emphasizing [language's] materiality disrupts normative flows of communication" (35). I would suggest that this project demonstrates that the reverse is perhaps equally true: That precisely by performing a disruption in our "normative flows of communication"—in this case, through the intonational dissonance produced by the *reverse remix* process—we might also emphasize the materiality of language.

[105] The first version of the piece, which was released before Reagan won the presidency, opened with the phrase, "I want to say I'm President. I want to live in the White House!" The opening was revised in a second version of the piece, which was re-released after the election (Nelson).

President, at least not in the contexts and configurations in which they appear, in Kahn's remix, they sound as if they feasibly *could have been*.

Certainly, the success of this piece might rest heavily upon the particularities of Reagan's speaking style, which, as Brian Massumi points out, brings together the highly recognizable and affectively charged "timbre of his voice, that beautiful vibratory voice" (41) with a general tendency toward "verbal fumbling," "incoherence," (40) and "discontinuities" (41). In this sense, a certain degree of verbal and tonal disjunction might actually *add* to the illusion that Reagan is, in fact, "Speak[ing] for Himself"—which is, of course, the punchline at the heart of the piece. But however this illusion is achieved, what is notable is the extent to which the goal is, in fact, an intonational realism: a work of vocal appropriation that to some degree works to disguise itself as conscious, rational speech (however irrational it may be).

In a similar vein, and in keeping with the presidential theme, Dan Warren's 2011 vocal remix *Son of Strelka, Son of God* goes even further to create the illusion of natural speech—in this case, taking the audiobook version of Barack Obama's memoir *Dreams From My Father* and reworking it into an epic, 32-minute "audio fable" (Weigel). The story opens with Obama's smooth, measured voice, ruminating on a creation story: "I'm left mostly with images that appear and die off in my mind like distant sounds. Sacred stories. Stories of genesis and the tree where man was born. Starting with my father…" (Warren). In the nine chapters that follow, Obama's voice—acting as "Stanley," the dog-like son of a human woman and a "demigod […] born from a fruit tree"—goes on to narrate a mythical journey through "armies of singing children" and "apocalypses of falling buildings and burnings skies" (Weigel). Against a richly layered soundtrack of music and effects, he describes encounters with such mythical beings as "the

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tortoise of Hindu legend that floated in space" and "the great bronze Buddha at Kamakura,"[106] which, when extracted from their original context in storybooks and vacations in Japan, become sentient, speaking creatures that provide philosophical and spiritual guidance for Stanley on his journey. But if the content of *Son of Strelka* is a fantastical and absurd, the delivery is just as fluid and rhythmic and unbroken as even the most well rehearsed Presidential address. Even more than in Kahn's work with Reagan, we hear the illusion of Obama—apparently but at the same time obviously not—"speaking for himself."

In describing his process to *Slate Magazine*, Warren locates the inspiration for the project in the language of Obama's memoir:

> Obama had this habit of doing very grandiose, epic language, for day-to-day struggles or minor things that happened in his childhood […] And I realized: This is the language of an epic story, even though it's not an epic story. There really is enough of that language to tell another story altogether (Weigel).

But if it was the "epic" quality of Obama's language that sparked the concept, it was most certainly the particular quality of Obama's *voice* that led to the project's success. In fact, Warren explains that, following the completion of *Son of Strelka*, he set out to do a similar project with Sarah Palin's autobiography *Going Rogue*, but that: "I just couldn't get anything useful out of it […] The way she speaks, it's almost impossible to pull apart. There are non-natural points that you can't do anything with" (Weigel). Clearly, then, at the heart of Warren's approach—to a greater extent than Kahn's and with wildly different results—is an investment in using intonational verity to create an imaginable (if ultimately unbelievable) illusion of conscious,

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[106] Whereas, in Obama's memoir, the trip to see the "great bronze Buddha" was followed by green tea ice cream and a ferry ride, in *Son of Strelka*, the story proceeds very differently: "He was very gracious. He wore a blue, double-breasted suit and a large gold cross against his scarlet tie…"

willing speech.

Certainly, the broader approach used in these two Presidential remixes have much in common with my own compositional practice in the *Coerced Confessions* project. Like Kahn and Warren, I was interested in capitalizing upon the manipulability of recorded audio in order to appropriate the voices of others and to make them speak in ways that disrupt their original intentions. Like Kahn and Warren, I drew upon the speech of well-known figures (or, in the case of Susan Smith, a person brought into the public eye by her act of confession), with my use of former President Bill Clinton's confession standing as the most obvious parallel. Despite these parallels, however, there are also some key points of departure in the method I developed, which are worth teasing out further.

One of these points relates to the role of vocal intonation in the remix process. As I've pointed out in the previous discussion, both Kahn and Warren (and particularly Warren) appear to be invested in disguising—to whatever extent possible given the materials at hand—their intervention in the vocal recordings that form the material basis for their work. Taking as their starting point the sound and rhythm and intonation of the voice itself, these artists work to disassemble and recombine linguistic fragments of that recording in such a way as to mimic (if also exaggerate) the natural speaking style of each President. Conversely, in the *Coerced Confessions* project, you might say that I start not from the sound of the voice but from an act of speech. Driven by the requirement that I construct a precise, predefined configuration of words, as determined by the confessional source text, my editing process functions to force the vocal materials into that configuration, regardless of their intonational realism—and, as I have noted, with jarring and disruptive results. In some ways, then, the method of "reverse remix" that I have devised might be considered less a technique of *vocal* remix than it is a technique of *linguistic*

remix, wherein the voice simply performs its material excess—what Mladen Dolar calls "an excess of sounds over sense" (146)—as a consequence or a corollary, which plays out beyond my control.

In his book *Background Noise*, sound artist and scholar Brandon LaBelle makes a useful distinction between works that "[use] the voice in performance, as in traditional theater or spoken-word poetry" and works that actually "perform the voice" (134). While we might say that the former *delivers* language *in* voice, the latter, in LaBelle's words, "plunders language to reinvent the voice" (134). I find this notion of "performing the voice" to be an incredibly productive framework for articulating the larger aims behind my experimentation in the *Coerced Confessions* project—and perhaps behind my creative-critical practice in this dissertation more broadly. Indeed, one of the key objectives behind the method I have devised is to make a space for voice to perform *itself*, both its excessive relationship to language and its malleable potential as a digital material. At the same time, it is also the case that this project could not, in fact, "perform the voice" without also "using the voice in performance"—that, in the method I have developed, the two are deeply intertwined.

This brings us to another important distinction between my project and these predecessors: the role of performance in the remix process. Unlike traditional works of vocal remix, which take as their materials existing vocal recordings already circulating in the public sphere, in the *Coerced Confessions* project, I chose to create the materials that I would later remix—specifically, by recruiting actors to perform scripted monologues. Of course, because these monologues are alphabetic remixes of real-life confessional texts—texts, which I then work to re-perform through the "coercive" capacities of digital editing—there is a way in which the method itself simply requires this element of performance in order to function. At the same

time, it's important to remember that there is nothing intrinsic to this method that requires the original performance to survive the remix process and to sit next to the so-called "coerced confession" in the final installation. So how, then, do we understand the role that it plays?

Here, I find it useful to turn to philosopher Don Ihde's discussion of "dramaturgical voice"—the heightened voice of drama, ritual, and recited poetry. As Ihde argues, dramaturgical voice is distinctive to that extent that it "amplifies the musical 'effect' of speech" (167). In other words, in contrast to everyday conversation, which "gives way to a trivial transparency that hides its sounded significance," the voice of dramatic performance draws a certain degree of attention to itself *as* voice, while at the same time refusing to lose itself in the pure "enchantment" of song (167). If we understand the role of the dramatic monologues in the *Coerced Confessions* project under this framework, then we might argue that the dramaturgical character of the actors' voices gives extra emphasis, or heightened accentuation, to the language being delivered—crucially, an accentuation which cannot help but "stick" to the words and syllables as they are trafficked into a new context in the confessional remix. In this sense, the use of dramaturgical voice might only add to the jarring sense of dissonance in the "coerced confession" by exaggerating the intonational variation of the utterance.

On one hand, it could be argued that the vocal materials used by Kahn and Warren are in some ways equally "dramaturgical," emerging, as they do, from highly theatrical context of the political stage—for Reagan, a network television interview and, for Obama, an audiobook version of his best-selling memoir. On the other hand, what is distinctive about the performances that I have orchestrated in the *Coerced Confession*s project is the extent to which they require the speaker to imagine, empathize with, and inhabit the experience—and perhaps the "voice"—of another. Unlike Kahn and Warren, who appropriate Reagan and Obama's voices speaking (at

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least ostensibly) as themselves, in the *Confessions* videos, the voices I am appropriating are those of actors speaking not simply as others, but as *imagined* others, whose characters emerge out of the utterance produced in the alphabetic remix process. As Ihde describes it, the actor's voice, as a unique subcategory of dramaturgical voice, posits a dialectical relationship between self and other, wherein "[t]he actor speaks in a role, and the voice he speaks may in some sense be the voice of another" (171).[107] If we follow Ihde, it could be argued that the ethical stakes of the vocal appropriation I am practicing might be dampened by this turn toward drama, toward fiction, toward the other—and thus a muddying of the dilemma around vocal ownership. (In other words: Whose voice is it to steal?) At the same time, however, Ihde reminds us that "[t]he actor's voice does not obliterate the self." Instead, he argues, "There is a style to his voice which remains his own even while the other emerges into the foreground" (171). This notion of voice as a flexible multiplicity goes great lengths to unsettle the very basis for the ethical claim to vocal ownership in the first place, suggesting that, in fact, the "authentic" or singular voice of metaphysics is always already a myth.

Of course, this sense of connection and continuity between the voice-as-material and the actor-as-person may be only further reinforced by the physical, visible presence of the actor's body on the screen. In other words, the decision to record and edit these performances as works of audio-visual composition (as opposed to audio-only) was by no means an arbitrary one—and neither was the decision to frame the shot of the actor's body from just below the eyes, serving to

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[107] Going one step further, Spalding Gray, of the experimental theater company The Wooster Group, suggests that, in the end, "everyone is playing themselves" (Savran 63). Rather than look outside themselves for a sense of how to portray "those crazy characters," Gray suggests that "they simply look in, or they don't look in and they just do it. It's just an intuitive thing—this is the right voice, this is what comes—like a child playing. It's no different from a child playing" (63). This understanding of the relationship between acting and identity goes even further to support the notion that it is, in fact, the voice of the actor—both physical and metaphorical—that I am appropriating in the *Confessions* project.

emphasize the movements of the speaking mouth.[108] In his article, "Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism," film sound theorist Rick Altman argues for the central role played by the visible body—and, more specifically, the synchronously moving mouth—in "divert[ing] attention from the sound's true source" in the theater's loudspeaker and locating it, instead, in the world of the film's diegesis (75). As both Altman and fellow film theorist Michel Chion have argued, sounds, by their very nature, urge people to actively seek out their source. It is because of this that we are more than happy, upon seeing the moving mouth, to suspend disbelief and imagine that the sound is coming from the person (in actual fact, a rapid succession of light-as-images) who appears to be producing it. As Chion explains it, while we can't see the deeper, more visceral mechanisms of vocal production, which take place between lungs and larynx, "[w]e take this temporal co-incidence of words and lips as a sort of guarantee that we're in the real world, where hearing a sound usually coincides with seeing its source" (129).

In this sense, we might understand the visual component of the *Confessions* videos as a means of emphasizing the illusion that what we are seeing and hearing is a *speaking person*, as opposed to a representation of that person's voice and body produced through a process of digital transduction. While we tend to imagine audio-only voice recordings as stand-ins for the whole body (and thus being) of the person behind the voice, Chion suggests that "[r]eal embodiment comes only with the simultaneous presentation of the visible body with the audible voice, a way

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[108] While it was not an immediate influence on my decision to frame the shot in this way (I only learned of it after filming the first video), Samuel Beckett's dramatic monologue *Not I* (1972) stands as a notable precursor to my visual emphasis on the mouth. Beckett's monologue is staged in a darkened theater, with the actress's body entirely obscured save a spotlight illuminating her mouth as she enacts what performance theorist Herbert Blau describes as: a "tormented susurrus or superfetation of words, that 'sudden urge…to tell,' get it all out, if not a confessional, 'nearest lavatory…start pouring it out…steady stream…mad stuff…half the vowels wrong…no one could follow' (*Not I* 222)" (187). The connection between the bubbling "urge" to confess and the mouth-as-threshold between inside and outside, private and public, presents a provocative point of connection to my work in the *Coerced Confessions* project.

for the body to swear 'this is my voice' and for the voice to swear 'this is my body'" (144). Thus, by presenting an audio-visual illusion of "real embodiment," perhaps what the *Coerced Confessions* project offers is a heightened experience of the ethical stakes surrounding the practice of vocal appropriation, creating the illusion that it is, in fact, a *person*—as opposed to simply a voice—that is being "coerced" to speak beyond his or her conscious intention and control.[109]

At the same time, if it is true, as Altman argues, that "pointing the camera at the speaker […] dissembl[es] the work of production and technology" ("Moving Lips" 69), then what happens when we then radically fragment and re-edit the footage of that speaker's body, as I have done in this project? It seems reasonable to suggest that the reverse might be true—that, in fact, by presenting to the viewer the jerking, contorted body of an impossible speaker in this project, I am ultimately exposing*, even *flaunting* "the work of production and technology," which brought it into being. Whereas audio-only works of vocal remix, like Kahn's *Reagan Speaks for Himself* and Warren's *Son of Strelka, Son of God*, are able to accomplish a certain illusion of realism precisely because of the body's visible absence from the scene, in contrast, the *Coerced Confessions* videos—*as* videos—present an illusion that announces itself as such. In other words, far from committing an act of trickery, what I am seeking to accomplish in this project is precisely the opposite: Namely, to draw attention to the very real potential for the

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[109] In "Videotaped Confessions and the Genre of Documentary," Jessica M. Silbey discusses a trend in the American criminal justice system to require the filming of custodial interrogations—a phenomenon grounded in "the belief that filmed confessions uncontroversially demonstrate the circumstances of the confession and therefore the truth of the guilt or innocence of the accused" (791). Tying this trend to a parallel rise in the popularity of documentary film, Silbey suggests that this evidentiary approach to the filmed confession is based on "a basic heuristic of the relationship between knowing and seeing" (797). While the details of this phenomenon are beyond the scope of my present research, it is interesting to consider how my project might speak back to these broader social questions around the truth-value of the visible, speaking body.

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sounds that we imagine to be "our voices"—when recorded and transduced into digital data—to speak beyond us, in spite of us, and against our conscious intentions. Indeed, we might say that, in contrast to the (albeit ironic) dissemblance represented by a title like *Reagan Speaks for Himself*, the *Coerced Confessions* project is titled in such as way as to draw attention to the manipulation or "coercion" at its heart.

But then the question arises: Who—*or what*—is it that is being coerced? By drawing attention to the technological artifice behind the composition of the so-called "coerced confession," this project is working to complicate our preconceived notions of vocal authenticity,[110] to dramatize the radical manipulability of voice as a digital material, and, ultimately, to reimagine the ethics of this manipulation itself, framing it not simply as a destructive means of deception or "coercion," but also as a constructive means of performance and invention. In her argument for digital voice's "authenticity effect" (95), Norie Neumark has proposed that we might productively approach digital vocality as something that, while perhaps evocative of a certain feeling of personhood and presence, is ultimately capable of operating independently from the body and intentionality of the speaker that produced it. This project is, at its core, an effort to imagine the practical, compositional implications of this conceptual move, to make a space for voice to be taken up not only as an embodied means of communication but also as an independently vibrational medium of performance practice.

Crucially, central to this shift is an effort to complicate our commonplace understanding of performance itself. As Neumark points out, "Theoretical approaches to performativity have focused not on voice but more on the spoken word and its effects: they have thought about how

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[110] It is interesting to note that the confession itself, as a highly-charged speech genre, is also inextricably intertwined with the cultural politics of authenticity in much the same way as the human voice. As Dave Tell argues, "the simple act of labeling a text as a confession can either endow a text with an aura of authenticity or divest a text of authenticity" (13).

to do things with words" (96).[111] Here, Neumark is implicitly (though by no means subtly)[112] mobilizing J. L. Austin's speech act theory—in particular, his notion of "the performative," in which an act of speaking is also already an act of *doing*. Taken up under this framework, the confession, as an everyday speech genre, emerges as a prime example of Austin's "performative"—and, indeed, it is perhaps for this reason that the "coerced confession" strikes us as such a frightening possibility.[113] After all, to coerce a confession is to force a person not simply to speak words, but to actually commit an *act* against her will. That being said, what I am seeking to emphasize through my work in this project is precisely the ethical distance between the *actual* coerced confession, which involves the psychological manipulation of a rational speaking subject, and the *performative* "coerced confession" that I am practicing in these videos, which involves only the material manipulation of the digital recording. Ultimately, by disrupting the easy relationship between voice and the body, on one hand, and voice and subjectivity, on the other, the *Coerced Confessions* project points to the insufficiency of existing frameworks for approaching the complexity of performance in the digital age.

One of the key interventions here is my effort to rethink the potential agents of compositional performance. While Austin is adamant that "[a]ctions can only be performed by persons, and obviously in our cases the utterer must be the performer" (60), the *Coerced Confessions* project seeks to challenge this assumption, moving away from frameworks of human exceptionalism and imagining the performative agency located in digital vocality itself.

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[111] Reflecting upon this oversight in her article "Do Voices Matter? Vocality, Materiality, Gender Performativity," Annette Schlichter argues that, in fact, "[s]peech act theory used within a discourse that theorizes matter seems to demand attention to forms of vocalization" (41).

[112] Austin's seminal work on the topic is titled, not incidentally, *How To Do Things With Words*.

[113] Furthermore, more so than many other genres of everyday speech, the confession evokes expectations of "authenticity," for a deeply felt expression of responsibility—and thus agency—wherein the voice moves from interior to exterior as a making-public of the often painfully personal. In this sense, it offers the project heightened ethical stakes, which provide the conceptual provocation of the project.

Rather than hearing in the manipulated performance of the "coerced confession" simply the performance of "some pregiven essential body"—or, for that matter, identity—of the actor involved in the original monologue, this project invites us to listen for a new form of embodiment altogether: as Norie Neumark puts it, "an embodiment that the voice brings forth in the making" (114). In this sense, rather than approaching digital voice as neatly "disembodied," making a hard-and-fast distinction between the human body and the technology that mediates its vibration, this move to imagine digital voice as a performative agent in itself suggests the possibility for an alternative, emergent form of embodiment that takes place in the space where the human and nonhuman intertwine.

This possibility lies at the core of art historian Anna Munster's work in *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics.* Here, Munster argues that our current configurations of new media technologies—with their binary divisions of mind vs. body and natural vs. artificial—do not exhaust the full potentialities of digital media. She suggests that we should consider, instead, the possibilities for alternative, hybrid forms of "digital embodiment," wherein human bodies and technical materialities interact in mutually constitutive ways. As Munster explains it:

> Digital embodiment entails the capacity for us to conceive of and experience bodies as something other than inert, weighty masses distended in space and out of sync with the absolute speed of an unremitting technological tempo. Digital bodies engage incorporeally with the informatic universe precisely because digital machines can replicate, amplify and split us form the immediacy of our sensory capacities (18).

By distancing us from the "immediacy" of the voice as a direct route to human agency, perhaps the disruptive performance of the *Coerced Confessions* project might give us a point of entry into

this so-called "digital embodiment" at the level of sensory experience.

Imagined slightly differently, however, it is also reasonable to suggest that what we are hearing here, in the performativity of digital voice, is not, in fact, an "embodiment" at all, but rather, something closer to what media artist Frances Dyson refers to as "resonance"—a framework which privileges neither the body nor technology as the anchor for our experience of audio and new media phenomena, but instead situates them in a groundless "atmosphere" (179). For Dyson:

> [T]he atmospheric suggests a relationship not only with the body in its immediate space but with a permeable body integrated within, and subject to, a global system: one that combines the air we breathe, the weather we feel, the pulses and waves of the electromagnetic spectrum that subtends and enables technologies, old and new, and circulates […] in the excitable tissues of the heart (16).

Thus, rather than persist in our binary thinking, which places the body on one end of the spectrum and technology on the other, perhaps we might begin to imagine a more porous, "permeable" sense of what it is to be human, taking seriously the interpenetration between human bodies and other materialities—including digital technologies—as a necessary condition of our compositional practice. Regardless of what we decide to call this liminal space, and whether or not we insist on departing from the body entirely, the ethical implications are notable. Rather than approach media technologies in instrumental terms, as simply the latest "tools" we can use to carry out our bidding, this project suggests how composers and creative practitioners might forge new relationships with the core media and materials of our practice, even going so far as to imagine them as mutual participants. These questions of agency, performance, and participation are pivotal to the discussion at hand, and I will return to them in the next chapter.

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5.0   *OUR TIME IS UP*: ARCHIVES, CO-LABOR, AND IMAGINATION

> Oral history pivots on mortality; it hovers on the edge of death, reaches for the
> disappearing. More than fixing a life in place or saving a story from being
> forgotten, oral history profoundly honors ephemerality and loss by acknowledging
> its slipping away.
>
> — Gretchen A. Case, "Tic(k): A Performance of Time and Memory"

In this chapter, I discuss *Our Time is Up*, an experimental audio drama composed from recordings of oral history interviews with people who have died. In this project, I have sourced and selected audio clips from disparate oral history archives and then attempted to remix them—alongside my own voice and other recorded sounds—into a seamless dramatic narrative. Each voice included in this project has been given the space to "act" or perform as a unique character in the drama—a character who does not purport to represent the intentions or objective experiences of the original narrator,[114] but rather who is enacted by the material effects of the narrator's recorded voice. The story that emerges, then, is one that is constrained, both in content and intensity, by the finite nature of the interview materials, at the same time as it is enabled by their malleable, connectible, recombinatorial potential.

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[114] I use the term "narrator" here, and throughout, as an alternative to the more passive "interviewee" or "subject" of an oral history interview. This term has been widely adopted in the field of oral history in recent years, in the interest of affording the individual more power and agency in the interview context.
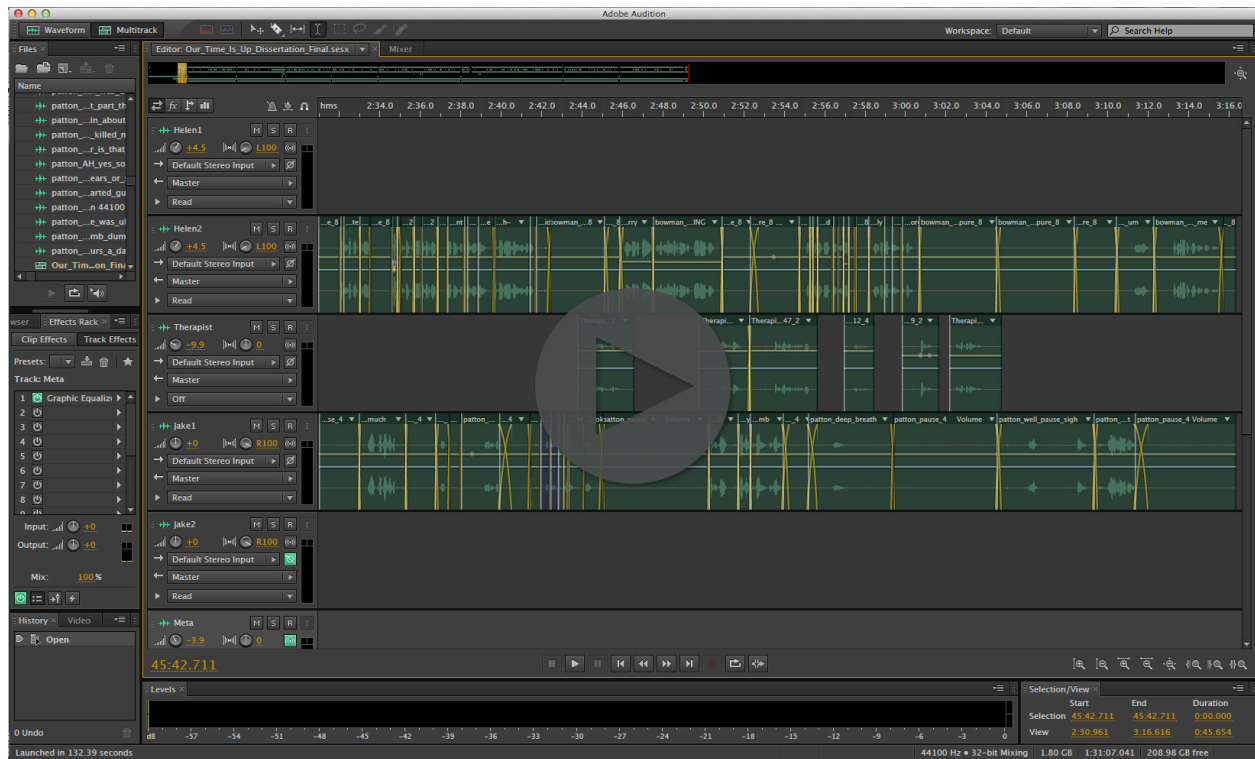
Figure 7. *Our Time is Up* (2014); 45 min. 45 sec. archival audio collage and performance

Produced by Erin Anderson; posthumous performances by C. Juanita Bowman and Josiah Patton;

screenshot of Adobe Audition multitrack session (Scene 1 dialogue, detail) and link to audio .wav file.

I began the project by casting a wide net for potential "actors," sourcing and downloading as many oral history recordings as I could find across a diverse array of online collections covering broad historical, geographic, and thematic territory. With the exception of my grandfather's interview—which I had recorded myself as part of a family history project in 2006—I did not own the copyrights to the recordings that I used, and neither did I request explicit permission from any of the archives or sponsoring institutions involved. Instead, after consulting with a couple of oral historians for guidance, I opted to proceed under the protections of the Fair Use Doctrine, with the assumption that (1) the materials were publicly available for

download on the web and (2) I would be altering and repurposing them in ways that would be sufficiently radical (and sufficiently noncommercial) to mitigate the risk of copyright infringement. This decision was motivated, in part, by my suspicion that I would very likely find few archivists sympathetic to the unconventional methods and ethics at the root of my project and, in part, by my desire to challenge the unfounded exceptionalism that we tend to ascribe to such culturally privileged materials—materials which, in practical terms, are just as open to intervention and reframing as any music video or home movie on YouTube. Indeed, while oral historians have lauded the so-called "digital revolution" for "democratizing" access to the core audio-visual materials of oral interviews (Frisch 111), the field is just beginning to confront the inevitable contradiction that arises when these ideals of radical openness come into contact with its persistent dependence on the proprietary restrictions of copyright law. In this sense, I imagine my project as a deliberate intervention into emerging debates around the question of "Who Owns Oral History?" in the digital age.[115]

Central to this project, conceptually, was the requirement that the people whose voices would be featured in the audio drama were no longer living—and thus no longer capable of "acting" in the sense that we conventionally understand it, as "live" intentional performance. The fact that the actors would be capable neither of consenting nor of "speaking back" to their participation in the project was key to the heightened ethical provocation that I was after, and for providing an opening to grapple with questions of agency and co-labor, which I will discuss in detail in the section that follows. For this reason, the first major criterion that I used to vet

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[115] I am alluding here to a recent article by oral historians Jack Dougherty and Candace Simpson, which calls for the field to adopt alternative practices of Creative Commons licensing in order to account for the many future uses and reuses of digital materials. While this move holds great promise for opening oral history to broader creative and compositional practices in the future, at present, most oral history collections continue to use traditional Deed of Gift forms, which ask narrators to sign over the copyrights to their interviews to researchers and sponsoring institutions.

potential voice recordings for the project was a purely conceptual one: the death of the narrator, which I either confirmed by cross-referencing the narrator's name and birthdate with local obituary records or safely presumed based on the age of the narrator at the time the interview was conducted. Of course, this requirement meant that many of the recordings I considered were not, in fact, *born* digital, but rather produced in analog formats (reel-to-reel or cassette tape) and only more recently converted to digital formats for preservation and presentation online.

This fact relates to the second key criterion that I used in my selection process: the technical question of *audio quality*. Inevitably, due to the technological limitations of analog recording equipment, the deterioration of the storage medium, and haphazard or amateur recording practices,[116] many of the interviews I sourced had either been rendered nearly (or in some cases completely) unintelligible or were too aurally grating to listen to for any length of time. For conceptual reasons, which I will discuss further in the following section, I could not afford to simply disregard all of the recordings that did not measure up to the standards of present-day digital production values. (Never mind the fact that, had I done this, I would have had little left to work with.) But also from a practical standpoint, because this particular project has an explicitly narrative component (and because I needed to be able to spend significant time listening to these voices and expected my audience to do the same), I made the decision to discard some of the recordings that fell on the most extreme end of this spectrum and could not be salvaged with some careful work in digital audio software.

After narrowing down the pool of recordings based on these basic conceptual and technical requirements, I proceeded to listen to the remaining voices once through somewhat

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[116] Because of the longstanding methodological emphasis of oral history on the alphabetic transcription, many of the recordings were likely produced as a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. I will discuss this issue further in the following section.

passively, not yet knowing what I was listening for, but attuning myself to the grains, rhythms, and cadences that they contained—and to the distinctive personalities and range of emotions that they expressed. At this stage, you might say that I was listening at the level of what Norie Neumark calls "an aesthetics of intimacy and intensity" (95), soaking in the experience of voices performing themselves. If I found a particular voice compelling, even if I could not pin down precisely what it was that compelled me, I would put it on a short list to return to later. In some ways, this part of the process was not unlike a casting call for a theatrical production. However, unlike a traditional casting director, who would typically audition and select suitable actors to fit predetermined roles, I took precisely the opposite approach, searching for vocal performances out of which characters and stories might emerge.

Of course, as I listened—even at this stage—I could not help but *also* hear the stories that these voices told and the memories and experiences that they recounted. Because the recordings were drawn from such a wide range of archives, these experiences varied widely—from a Russian garment worker discussing her role as an organizer in the labor movement, to a Mexican war veteran recounting the violence of *la Revolución*, to a Belgian-American man describing the traditional ice fishing practices of his father in rural Wisconsin. However, rather than latch on to any one of these stories as a template for the drama I would develop, what I listened for in the content of these interviews were moments of *multiplicity* or rupture—moments when a phrase uttered or a word spoken might be taken, out of context, in new and even contradictory directions. And, as I listened across interviews, I listened for *patterns*—moments of repetition or convergence, where grammatical or thematic content from one recording might overlap with another in ways that suggested a potential conversation. Ultimately, at this stage of the process, the possibilities remained radically open, but it was here that I began to form a mental list of

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possible scenarios and characters, which might provide the starting point for a dramatic narrative.

It was also at this stage in the process that I began to consider the constraints of oral history as a distinctive genre of archival voice recording, which I soon realized might not lend itself easily to rearticulation as audio drama. (I will discuss my decision to use oral history interviews as source material further in the following section.) As radio dramatist Tim Crook describes it, audio drama is built primarily around the language of "theatrical speech," featuring characters that act and speak *in the present* and through dialogue *with one another* (82). Capitalizing on the immersive quality of sound to create a sense of dramatic immediacy, the genre tends to employ "textual speech" or narration only secondarily—usually to "protect the credibility of characters while providing the visual landscape to enable the listener to perceive the environment in the imaginative spectacle" (82). Of course, these generic conventions stand in striking contrast to those of the oral history interview. As an unstructured interview and a form of co-constructed storytelling, oral history is necessarily characterized by a certain degree of dialogue or exchange. However, it is also a peculiar, one-sided exchange—one in which the primary speaker (known as the "narrator") answers questions, but seldom asks them; speaks as much to an imagined listener in the future as to a concrete "you" in the present; and speaks largely of lived memories and thus almost exclusively in the past tense.

As I realized this, I became concerned about my ability to repurpose these voices as materials for dramatic action in the present. However, the more I listened, the more I began to realize: that there were notable digressions from these rules. For example, on a rudimentary grammatical level, while the typical narrator only rarely used a direct pronoun to engage the interviewer in conversation (e.g. "Let me tell you what happened."), many used "you"

considerably more frequently as an indefinite or generic pronoun (e.g. "Sometimes you just get so angry," where "you" stands in for "one") in ways that could be readily repurposed as a direct address to a specific "you." Beyond that, however, the most fruitful source of present tense, conversational speech in these interviews was contained in the many instances of reported speech, wherein, in the course of recounting past events, the narrator would in a sense *reenact* either her own speech or that of another as if it were happening in the moment (e.g. "And then she said, 'I don't know who you think you are coming in here like you own the place!'"). As Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, in fact, "[t]he transmission and assessment of the speech of others, the discourse of another, is one of the most widespread and fundamental topics of human speech" ("Discourse in the Novel" 337)—and oral history, as a secondary speech genre, is no exception to this rule.

Ultimately, one of the key "actors" that I selected for the final piece—Clella Juanita Bowman ("Juanita")—I selected, in part, for her extreme tendencies toward reported speech, both her own speech and the speech of others. While I found that Bakhtin's suggestion that "of all words uttered in everyday life, no less than half belong to someone else" (339) did not appear to apply in the case of most of the oral history interviews I listened to, in Juanita's case this may have been an underestimate. Drawn from the "Rosie the Riveter Revisited" collection in the California State University Long Beach's *Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive (VOAHA),* Juanita's interview was conducted across four sessions in July and August of 1980, in her home in Long Beach. According to the *VOAHA* online record, Juanita was 79 years old at the time of the recording, and she would go on to live another twenty years following the interview, dying in January of 2000 (Cleary). In the approximately seven hours of audio—recorded on magnetic

tape[117] and later digitized for the online archive—Juanita speaks of her childhood in rural Indiana; her children and family life; her varied career in teaching, farming, real estate, healthcare, and wartime factory labor; and (at length) her tumultuous relationship with her husband, Roy. Throughout the interview, Juanita delivers long, richly detailed accounts of these events, often with little to no prompting and, in the process, frequently acts out both her own role and the roles of others involved in the dialogues that surrounded them. While Juanita's *VOAHA* record notes that "[h]er propensity to deliver long monologues made it difficult, at times, for the interviewer to follow the details and provide direction" (Cleary), ironically, it was this same "propensity"—that so frustrated the information-gathering objectives of the oral history process—which ultimately made Juanita's performance (and I will discuss it further *as* a performance in the following section) such a strong candidate for reactivation in the form of audio drama.

Alongside Juanita, I cast the voice of my paternal step-grandfather, Josiah Burrell Patton (1919-2009), which I recorded in an oral history interview as part of a personal project in family history in 2006. Conducted in a two-and-a-half-hour session, the interview was recorded using amateur digital recording equipment (an iPod with a cheap dictation microphone) in the dining room of his home in Covington, Washington. Eighty-seven years old at the time of the interview, my grandfather discusses—with immense nostalgia—his childhood in Nevada, his time in an elite military academy in California, his extensive travels in the merchant marines, his career in computer services management, and his family life, including the premature deaths of his parents and his first wife, his difficult relationship with his step-mother, and his second marriage to my

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[117] While the *VOAHA* record does not provide explicit technical information indicating the equipment used to record the interview, because of the interview date (1980) and notes indicating the "end of tape" in approximately 30-minute intervals in the interview annotations, I presume that the interview was recorded on audio cassettes.

grandmother, Olive. The emotional tone of his interview varies widely throughout, ranging from playfulness and humor to notable moments of confusion, frustration, and emotional vulnerability. Because of the familiarity of our relationship, throughout the interview, my grandfather interacts with me in a highly conversational manner and, at times, enlists my grandmother to verify or elaborate upon his memories. Combined with his generally lively and expressive self-performance, these dialogic qualities offered rich opportunities for dramatic reanimation. At the same time, this familiarity presented an additional challenge, pushing me, in a sense, to remove my grandfather from his life story—a phenomenon to which I will return in more detail later on.

Of course, I selected these two voices not only for their individual performative qualities, but also for their connective potential to interact in provocative and mutually inter-animating ways. Already quite familiar with my grandfather's recording, as I listened to Juanita's interview, I was struck both by the similarities in their performative personae and by the potential clashes of character that these similarities presented. Presenting themselves as proud, feisty, no-nonsense exteriors, both speakers also betrayed sensitive emotional underbellies, which could be easily hurt. Simply imagining these two voices as characters in a room together was a source of amusement (and mild concern), and when I went one step further to imagine them as husband and wife, I saw the seeds of a compelling dramatic conflict.

Building on this initial idea, I constructed the final drama around a series of couples' counseling sessions, in which "Jake" (performed by Josiah's voice recording from 2006) and "Helen"[118] (performed by Juanita's voice recording from 1980) seek help from their therapist (whose voice I performed in the present) with their marital problems. My decision to pursue this concept was based on a number of factors, which would allow me to address both the

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[118] The characters' names were drawn from names spoken by Josiah and Juanita in each of their interviews, which were repurposed as modes of address in the audio drama.

potentialities and the challenges of the materials at hand. At the most basic level, the therapeutic setting presented ample opportunity for the conflict of character, which had initially drawn me to the two voices to be played out in a concrete and imaginable context. Furthermore, the idiosyncrasies of the therapeutic genre—which encourages parallel accounts of past experience to a specified third party, while also allowing for moments of responsive (and conflictual) interaction between two closely related individuals—helped me to address some of the practical problems of adapting the past-tense, one-sided, self-centered speech of the oral history interview to the requirements of a present-tense dramatic utterance. Finally, at a conceptual level, I was intrigued by the possibility to build on the miscommunication that necessarily characterizes the marital therapy process, such that the drama would feature a performance of two voices talking to, but more often than not *past* each other, while at the same time being *about* this very inability to connect and be understood. This thematic focus went great lengths toward helping to account for the fact that Jake and Helen frequently appear not to be listening to one another—since, in actual fact, they are not—and toward mitigating the inherent limitations in constructing a natural conversation out of fragments of two unrelated utterances.

At the level of narrative content, the life experiences recounted in these two interview recordings had few obvious points of overlap. Rather than take this as a drawback, however, I took it as a challenge and a source of invention, ensuring that I would be forced to listen beyond the stories-already-told in these voice recordings, as they corresponded with the subjectively narrated pasts of each of the speakers, to reimagine the recordings instead as materials for new stories-in-the-making. At times, to accomplish this, I took up an actual experience recounted by one of the narrators—for example, Juanita's suspicions about her husband's infidelity—and then manipulated unrelated segments of the other narrator's voice to create an imaginable response to

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this scenario. In other cases I took advantage of the potential for multiplicity and rupture that the language itself presented and repurposed words and phrases for radically different contexts and meanings. For example, drawing on a linguistic pattern, in which both narrators repeatedly used the word *"see"/"sea"*—figuratively, for Juanita, as an expression of her inability to understand something (e.g. "I just can't *see* it") and literally, for Josiah, in an account of his time in the merchant marines (e.g. "That's when I went back to sea")—I used this language to construct a subplot about the couple's account of dealing with Helen's experience of "going blind" (another phrase that happens to appear in Juanita's interview, though not in reference to her own experience).

While audio drama, as a form, is largely grounded in dialogue, it is important that the dialogue also evoke a visual scene in the imagination of the listener. As Tim Crook notes, audio drama "is auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension" (8). That is to say, the lack of visual stimulation inherent to the medium encourages an "imaginative spectacle" in which listeners visualize their own "individual filmic narrative and experience" based on the auditory cues at hand (66). Keeping this in mind as I constructed the drama, wherever possible, I made efforts to evoke the particularities of the setting and the actions and movements of the characters. To this end, alongside of the three characters' voices, I made use of additional atmospheric sounds and effects—using, for example, footsteps, a slamming door, and the simple sound of a ticking clock (the ever-present clock in the therapist's office ticking away the 45-minute session) in order to tie the voices together into a shared space. In addition, I made efforts to construct lines of dialogue that would refer not only to a time and place outside of the immediate scene (for example, through Jake and Helen's accounts of the history of their relationship), but also to the present scene of three bodies

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interacting in the space of the therapist's office. For example, extending the subplot of Helen's blindness, I constructed a moment of dramatic action in which Jake taunts his wife with the sound of an object he knows she cannot see and then—drawing from Josiah's discussion of a house he once lived in that "looked right out over the [Puget] Sound"—says to the therapist, "Look at that, huh? / She / looked right out over the sound."[119]

The final audio drama is structured around a series of weekly therapy sessions, opening with the couple's entrance to the therapist's office on their initial visit (wherein they arrive late and bicker over whose fault it was that they did so) and ending with the conclusion of their final session (wherein they decide, after considerable disagreement, to dissolve the marriage). Over the course of the drama, the audience is invited to experience the evolution—and eventual devolution—of the Jake and Helen's relationship over a period of weeks, as they struggle to sort through challenges ranging from petty disagreements to traumatic life events, including Jake's infidelity and Helen's degenerative blindness. Each of the scenes provides a brief fragment (between one and eight minutes) of a given therapy session, which offers the audience a window into the conflict and context, but also invites them to participate in the narrative by filling in the gaps with their own inferences and imaginations.[120]

The decision to construct the drama as a series of fragments over this extended timeframe

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[119] I am using "/" here to indicate the seams in the original audio recording, where I stitched together three different audio clips (with consistent intonations) to create this single line of dialogue.

[120] In the initial iteration of this project, I designed *Our Time is Up* as a traditional audio drama, which would encourage a private listening experience of a linear narrative from start to finish, via mp3 download or streaming audio. However, I would also like to consider alternative formats for presenting the piece—most notably, as an audio installation piece, which would invite the audience to enter into an empty therapist's office (with a minimal setting including a couch and a chair facing one another across a coffee table with a clock on the wall) and inhabit the aural perspective of the characters, with each voice isolated on a separate audio channel and emitted from a directional speaker located in his or her seat. While such a format would render the narrative arc less central to the piece, I am ultimately interested in its potential to highlight the conceptual dimension of the project, playing with the associations of absence that the figure of the "voices of the dead" evokes.

was ultimately a practical necessity, given the constraints of the source materials at hand.[121] In many ways, this structure enabled me to develop a fuller more satisfying narrative arc with unexpected twists and divergences. However, it also had the unfortunate consequence of removing the audience from the immersive experience of the drama as it plays out in real time. In order to combat this potentially disengaging effect, I decided to add an additional layer of immediacy to the drama by presenting the session fragments as a continuous tape recording being played back in real-time by an anonymous listener—presumably, but not necessarily[122] the therapist herself. Thus, before the opening of the first session, we hear a cassette tape being removed from its case, placed in a tape recorder, and played. Then, each of the session fragments is introduced by the therapist's voice (e.g. "March 26th, Jake and Helen McCleary") in order to signal the transition from week to week and scene to scene, with the addition of a tape hum and the ticking clock serving to further distinguish between past and present, immediate and mediated action. Partway through the drama, we listen as the tape suddenly stops and the listener turns it over and presses play to begin again. At the end of the final session, we hear Jake speak the words, "Well, then, I guess our time is—," before the tape stops and rewinds to the beginning. This line is an explicit reference to the title of the drama, *Our Time is Up*. It suggests, most obviously, the stereotypical words of a therapist signaling the end of a session, but also potentially the end of the marriage and the end of life, tying together the narrative and conceptual elements of the project. Then, in the last—and shortest—scene, we hear the as-of-yet unheard

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[121] I had initially considered building the drama around a single therapy session, which would provide a snapshot of the couple's relationship at a pivotal moment in time, while holding the audience in the real-time drama. Ultimately, however, I found it prohibitively difficult to make convincing shifts in the tone and direction of the conversation and to stitch together the disparate elements of the story into a single, fluid scene within this condensed timeframe.

[122] This ambiguity is deliberate. Is it the therapist? Is it Helen? Or Jake? Is it an unintended listener who happened upon the discarded tape? Or is it the actual listener herself, in an act of discomfiting complicity?

beginning of the tape, in which the therapists asks Jake and Helen to state their name for the tape and requests permission to record their sessions. Again, building on the project's conceptual framework, this explicit return to the beginning offers commentary on sound reproduction's capacity to allow us to rewind, to replay, and also, implicitly, to re*write* lived experience—and in ways that complicate our notions of "liveness" and "the lived" in every sense of the term. It is precisely this conceptual framework to which I will now turn in the discussion that follows.

5.1   CONVERSATION

Our Time is Up emerged as a compositional intervention into prevailing cultural attitudes toward archival voice recordings and, more specifically, toward the voices of the dead. Expanding upon my exploration of vocal performativity and manipulation in the *Coerced Confessions* videos, this project seeks to shift the attention away from the realm of live dramaturgical performance— "live" in every sense of the term—and toward the classically preservational and representational sphere of the posthumous vocal archive. Whereas, in the *Confessions* videos, I started with the materials of an apparently fictional dramatic performance and reconfigured them as a performative reenactment of an actual historical event, in this experiment I seek to do precisely the opposite: to begin with the purportedly "nonfictional" voices of oral history recordings and to reimagine them as actors in a collaborative, fictional performance. And whereas, previously, my editing process sought to draw attention to itself *as* edited, manipulated, and thus "coerced," in the present project, I seek to edit the vocal materials in such a way as to create an illusion of seamless, simultaneous, "live" performance. At its core, through this compositional experiment, I

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am interested in exploring material applications of "polyphonic" poetics[123] and the collaborative possibilities for composing with the dead.

While this project might well have been carried out with any variety of archival recordings, my particular interest in vocal archives of deceased people stems, most immediately, from the work of Jonathan Sterne, which I introduced in Chapter Three. Notably, in tracing the history of sound reproduction, Sterne finds a compelling convergence between an emergent Victorian culture of "embalming" and an attendant cultural fascination with "the voices of the dead" (294)—a phenomenon made imaginable, and purportedly *preservable*, by the invention of the phonograph. It was in this context that the voice recording first emerged as the quintessential subject of sound reproduction, celebrated not for its own sake as a living intensity in the present, but rather for the future it promised as a protection against "the seemingly inevitable decay" of human embodiment (311). While this promise would ultimately remain unfulfilled, as the phonographic voice failed to overcome the ephemerality of its medium (287), the preservational dream of early sound reproduction and its consequent "trope of the voices of the dead" (293) have had a lasting—and, as I will argue, *limiting*—effect on the dominant cultural imagination of the vocal archive. While it may be true that, in the twenty-first century, "[we] now dwell without comment among these voices of the dead" (Sterne 289), it is also true that we continue to afford such voices a special status in the hierarchy of our vocal archives, as objects of posterity deserving our stewardship and protection.

This is the case perhaps nowhere as much as the field of oral history, which emerges, in the context of the present project, as an ideal site within which to examine and ultimately intervene in the established ethics of the vocal archive. As both "a field of study" and "a method

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[123] Here, I am implicitly referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's reflections on the "polyphony" intrinsic to Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels—a topic to which I will return in what follows.

of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" ("Oral History: Defined"), oral history is unique to the extent that it holds deep-seated investments in both metaphorical and material voice alike. On one hand, in keeping with what Rebecca Sharpless refers to as the "democratic impulses" of the larger social history movement (14), ideals of "giving voice to the voiceless" and "enabling silenced voices to speak for themselves" have emerged as widespread rhetorical commonplaces across the field, particularly in the stories that oral history tells about itself.[124] On the other hand, since it first emerged as an established research practice in postwar America, oral history has exploded into an international movement profoundly concerned with its role as the guardian of the material "voice of the people" in the form of archives and repositories of oral interview recordings.

Of course, it is important to recall here that, as Sterne argues, neither "[t]he very idea of making recordings for listeners in a distant and unknown future" (310), nor "[t]he desire to hear these voices" in the first place were ever "a given." Instead, they "had to be learned" (294). And, indeed, the field of oral history is by no means an exception to this rule. While audio recording has long been "a standard part of the definition of oral history in the U.S." (Sharpless 15),[125] it is important to acknowledge that, for much of the history of oral history, it was the alphabetic transcription and *not* the audio recording itself, which was seen as the primary text produced by the interview process. In fact, in the earliest stages of the field's evolution, some prominent oral history programs (for example, the Truman Library and Columbia University) "did not believe in

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[124] Mobilizations of the 'voice' metaphor in oral history began as early as 1978, with the release of Paul Thompson's seminal book *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Today, a keyword search for the term 'voice' in the Oral History Review will turn up more than 500 records.
[125] Rebecca Sharpless has noted the extent to which oral history, as a distinct research practice, arose alongside and in response to the development of magnetic tape recording in the late 1940s (12), "expand[ing] dramatically" in the 1960s with the availability of portable cassette recorders (14). In this sense, the history of oral history is intertwined with the history of sound reproduction technologies.

saving the tapes" from recorded interviews and would simply discard them after the transcription was produced (Sharpless 15). And it is only recently, as digital technologies and online repositories have provided improved access to audio archives, that the field has seen widespread interest in the material artifact of the voice recording itself.

This technological shift toward digital recording and networked distribution has been lauded as a "revolution" in the field (Frisch), serving to overcome the "inevitably flatten[ing]" effects of transcription and "help[ing] us get closer to the real human interaction at the heart of oral history" (Eynon 22). As a "corrective" to the field's tendency toward abstract, disembodied, or literary analysis, these newly accessible elements of vocal performance—"the silences" as much as the "intonation, pitch, and style of delivery"—have been taken up by oral historians as "an opportunity for more complex exploration of how people construct their narratives," with the potential to "add an entirely new dimension to the sense we make of people's stories" (Gluck 8). While a distinct orientation toward performance[126] is central to this discussion, such that it is not simply *what* the narrator says, but also *how* she says it that matters (Williams 47), with few exceptions,[127] oral historians have tended to mobilize vocal performativity not for its own sake, but rather as a practical tool for uncovering the hidden meanings of oral utterances.

This fact should perhaps not come as a surprise, considering the extent to which oral

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[126] In a 2001 article on the topic, Rhonda Y. Williams sets forth an alternative notion of big-V "Voice" as a framework for examining the "articulation" and "performance" of oral life narratives (44). While I have yet to see anyone pick up on this term, it is interesting to consider how the popularity of the 'voice' metaphor in the field may have necessitated a special designation for references to the material, sonic elements of vocal performance.

[127] Notably, in his Roundtable comments at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, Bret Eynon points to the potential for the experience of listening—as opposed to reading—oral history to "[connect] us to the speaker both affectively and cognitively, facilitating empathy and deepening our understanding" (22). This attention to affect has begun to surface in the dominant disciplinary discourse only recently, for example, with the publication of Siobhan McHugh's 2012 article, "The Affective Power of Sound: Oral History on Radio," in the *Oral History Review*.

history, as a research methodology, is embedded in the interpretive enterprise of historical study more broadly. And, indeed, it is in this context that the question of representational ethics—the question of *how to accurately and ethically represent the voices[128] of others*—has emerged as one of the most pressing methodological quandaries facing oral history. Responding to this dilemma, over the past two decades, critical and feminist[129] oral historians have worked to call attention to questions of power, agency, and authority in the research/narrator relationship and to propose more mindful and equitable approaches to collecting, transcribing, editing, and interpreting oral narratives. These methodological interventions—ranging from simple acts of transparency to full-scale "collaborations" that engage narrators (often marginalized groups) at every stage of the process[130]—were formative influences on my own introduction to the field, as a Masters student working on participatory and community-based oral history methods,[131] and they would go on to inform my thinking in "The Olive Project: An Oral History Composition in Multiple Modes" (Anderson), which (as I discussed in Chapter One[132]) I now recognize as my first attempt to confront the ethical dilemma of composing texts in the recorded voices of others.

But the question arises: is there anything inherent to the *materials* of oral history that requires this orientation? What would it meant to take up those materials *as* materials,

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[128] It seems reasonable to suggest that "voice" here refers less to the sounding, mediated materials of vocal recordings than it does to familiar metaphorical notions of speech, experience, and agency.

[129] See *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai for a prominent example of this scholarship.

[130] See Alicia J. Rouverol's "Collaborative Oral History in a Correctional Setting: Promises and Pitfalls" and Daniel Kerr's "'We Know What the Problem is': Using Oral History to Develop a Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness from the Bottom Up" for two prominent examples of the latter approach.

[131] My Masters thesis, "'Change Starts Here': Participatory Oral History for Community Development," discussed my work as the founder and facilitator of a community-based initiative, which engaged a group of low-income youth and adults in designing and producing an oral history project in their neighborhood and theorized the role of oral storytelling as a tool for community engagement and social action.

[132] See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of "The Olive Project" and the representational ethics that drove my conceptual and compositional practice.

independently of the disciplinary conventions that surround their creation? And, most importantly, what could we *make* if we did? Following my work on "The Olive Project," I began to struggle with these questions through further compositional experiments with archival voice— most notably, in a project called *Converse: Conversations Between My Grandparents*. Following my grandparents' deaths in 2009 and 2010, I found myself increasingly drawn to the sounds of their recorded voices and to the intensity of the feelings they evoked in me as I listened to them. I began to wonder what it would be like not only to hear these voices speak, but to hear them speak *to one another* beyond the lives of the bodies from which they were uttered. Following this impulse, I revisited my grandmother's oral history and brought it together with a parallel interview I had conducted with my grandfather three years earlier, setting out to create a series of imagined "conversations" between their recorded voices. As an experiment in compositional method, these conversations were composed entirely of *words actually spoken* by my grandparents—and, crucially, words spoken *in their own voices*. However, for the purposes of this project, I set out to extract those words and voices from the original context of their articulation and to remix them into something new. Drawing on the innate performativity of digital voice, what I sought to create was a series of impossible conversations—conversations that *never really happened*, but that I would invite my audience to experience as if they had.

When I first took up my grandparents' voices in the *Converse* project, like a good oral historian, my initial impulse was to trace their narrative connections to construct a collective story of the past. In the first "conversation" I composed, titled "Her Husband's Wife's Pancreas," my grandparents' recorded voices work together to tell a story of their fifty-year relationship—as neighbors, as friends, and as husband and wife. After a brief textual introduction, which situates

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the conversation in context,[133] the story unfolds as a layered dialogue between my grandparents'

recorded voices, which provide distinct and sometimes-competing accounts of shared life events.

While the content of the piece is grounded in my grandparents' actual lived experience, and

while none of the core facts involved have been deliberately altered, in piecing this conversation

together, I took liberties with the way that the voice recordings responded to and bounced off of

one another, taking fragments of speech out of context and rearranging them into new

combinations to create an illusion of dialogue between the two voices.[134] In other words, while

the particular exchanges that unfolded in this piece never took place in a "real life" conversation

between my grandparents, they felt to me—both in tone and attitude toward the subject matter—

as if they could have. In this sense, what I sought to create in this project was not only an

effective narrative, but also an affective performance, which could be *felt* and *experienced* as

much as it was understood.

Of course, I'm not the first to propose an alternative future for the materials of oral

history—a future that stretches beyond the traditional conventions of scholarly inquiry toward

something that may sound more like "art" than "history." In her introduction to *Remembering:*

Oral History Performance, Della Pollack outlines an emerging trend toward mobilizing oral

history—which is already, as Pollack argues, "itself a performance" (3)—as a material for

creating *new* performances through "the staged re-iteration of stories" in live theatrical contexts

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[133] This text reads as follows: "In 1953 Jay [Josiah] and Olive moved to Maplewood drive, three days and two houses between them. / They were neighbors. Jay's wife, Helen, was Olive's friend. / Helen died in 1957. Cancer of the pancreas. / In 1960, Jay and Olive moved to Boulevard Park, four kids and a dog between them. / They were married. Jay's wife, Olive, was my grandmother. / Olive died in 2010. Cancer of the pancreas."

[134] For example, in describing his relationship with his first wife, my grandfather explains, "It wasn't a happy marriage. Because of her health, she drank a lot." And, in the conversation as I have composed it, my grandmother's voice responds by saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" (My grandfather: "What?") "Actually. Every day. *Every day* without fail, Helen would come up and we'd sit and have coffee."

(1). Framing such work as a "unique integration of theory and practice, research and poetics" (2), Pollack suggests that oral history-based performance is not simply an aesthetic practice but also an ethical one, with possibilities ranging from a simple "expression of devoted reception" to a deeply consequential "way of practicing the interdependence of human selves and of seeing through the past into an as-yet unspoken (much less written) future" (4). Crucially, then, rather than locating the value of oral history in its *re*presentation of past lives and events, Pollack suggests that oral history-based performance opens up opportunities for enacting and experiencing possible ethical futures (7).

In a prominent example of oral history performance, at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, I attended a live theatrical production of *May 4th Voices*, in which a cast of current Kent State students (and others) re-perform the words and stories from oral history interviews with anonymous students, guardsman, and community members involved in and affected by the 1970 Kent State shooting. Not unlike my work in the *Converse* project, this piece is constructed around interconnected fragments from individual narratives, which are woven together into a kind of "conversation" between discrete monologues to create a collective narrative performance of a shared event. However, unlike my project, *May 4th Voices*—like most documented examples of oral history-based performance—mobilizes "voices" only metaphorically, not audibly, taking up the alphabetic transcripts from the May 4th Oral History Project as its primary compositional material. In this sense, we might say that the fundamental "performativity" upon which most oral history-based performance is based is largely linguistic and narrative, taking up the voice as a powerful instrument for re-performing stories, but not as a performative material in itself.

In a counterexample to this trend, Australian oral historian Siobhan McHugh draws

attention to "The Affective Power of Sound" in oral history recordings, arguing for the value of radio as an alternative platform for producing and disseminating oral history. Here, McHugh describes her work in *Marrying Out*, a 2009 "oral history-based radio series" on themes of mixed-religion marriage and sectarian conflict in Australia. While the series appears, in many ways, to be a fairly traditional example of the audio documentary genre, the compositional process that McHugh describes is notable in that it accounts for not simply the stories and memories recounted by the voices of oral history, but also the emotions and effects that they produce in their listeners. Reflecting a keen appreciation of performance, McHugh emphasizes the importance of selecting recordings not only on the basis of the content of the narrators' speech, but also the affective quality of their voices (198), and describes her decision to integrate dramatic reenactments and short performed scenes into the narrative (204). However, while McHugh certainly makes great strides toward opening the field to the performative effect/affect of archival voice—even going so far as to acknowledge that "the infinite modulations of the voice and the expressiveness of the spoken word may also elicit an emotional response distinct from the meaning of the words themselves" (192)—she ultimately remains committed to traditional documentary values tied to "accurate representation of the topic" (198) at hand.

Similarly, in his article, "Painting in Sound: Aural History and Audio Art," American historian Charles Hardy III recounts his practice crafting oral history-based radio programs in Philadelphia in the early 1980s. Unlike McHugh, however, Hardy recalls finding himself "increasingly imprisoned by the standard radio documentary formula that alternated continuity (narration) and actuality (recorded events), transitioned by music and sound effects" (151). Delighted by the sounds of people's recorded voices and seeking an alternative to the traditional documentary form, Hardy describes his experience applying artistic practices of "paint[ing]" or

"sculpt[ing]" (153) to the materials of oral history. Framing his project as a response to conventional documentary values, which take up oral history interviews only "for the information contained within them," Hardy calls for a reorientation toward the "physical properties—both psycho-acoustic and electroacoustic" and the "aesthetic qualities" of archival voices (159). In making this move, Hardy is working to shift the conversation in oral history away from an exclusive focus on *meaning* and toward emerging questions of *materiality*—a shift reinforced by his use of the term "aural history" in place of the more traditional "oral." And while his approach to voice is often more celebratory than overtly critical, Hardy productively positions the voice *itself*—as opposed to the stories it speaks—as "living history, a historical artifact, a vessel of culture" with value in its own right (151).[135]

At the same time, rather than take this status as requirement that we *close* off archival voices to creative intervention, Hardy does precisely the opposite, encouraging readers to listen to oral history "with an ear toward what you might create as the universe speaks to you in response to your own purposes" (155). Describing his own experience producing oral history-based audio art, Hardy uses as an example his 1986 archival audio project, "Mordecai Mordant's Celebrated Audio Ephemera." In this series, Hardy worked under the auspices of his "alter ego" (Mordant) to draw together "fragments of voices and instruments and sounds fossilized on ceramic discs in the early 1900s" and, using "analog open reel electrical-acoustic technologies" (155), interweaves them into a series of five-minute audio montages or "past pastiches" (153). For example, Hardy describes how, in one of the pieces, titled "It's Just Like Anything Else":

> I combined a septagenarian's recollection his own rite of passage when he had crossed
> the threshold from childhood to maturity by leaving his house – by the back door – for

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[135] Hardy even goes so far as to pose the question: "What might it sound like if the aural historian […] treated sound artifacts as ends in themselves?" (153).

the first time in a pair of long pants with an octogenarian's still empowering account of having the local barber cut off her long, beautiful hair in the early 1920s against the wishes of her father, and three octogenarians laughing recollections of their first rule-bending applications of lipstick and rouge.

Layered with atmospheric recordings and music from the period (for example, a clip from the 1920s jazz classic "Masculine Women! Feminine Men!"), these archival voices work together with the intention to, in Hardy's words, "reanimate the lost worlds" contained within them (153).

As Hardy recounts it, the biggest obstacle to his practice in the "Mordecai Mordant" series was poor sound quality, wherein "the limited dynamic range and noise of archival recordings restricted our ability to layer sounds" (157). While the most obvious and immediate solution to this challenge was to separate out the recordings into two stereo channels, so that the listener might more easily distinguish them,[136] with a subsequent project, titled "This Car to the Ballpark" (1986), Hardy pushed the boundaries further to create an 18-minute "quadraphonic audio arcade" (157). This installation-based audio montage brings together four distinct voices produced by four very different individuals[137]—people who had never met and would likely never have an occasion to meet outside of the world Hardy and his collaborator have created for them. Layered together with "archival recordings, contemporary music, and sound manipulations created on a digital sampler" (157), each of these four voices sounds from a designated speaker

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[136] Taking a cue from Hardy's experience in my own work on *Our Time is Up*, I opted to separate Jake and Helen's voices—which are less-than-broadcast-quality, to say the least—onto two discrete stereo channels, with the therapist's voice evenly balanced between the two.

[137] According to Hardy, these voices included: "100-year-old William Robinson's account of how a white landlord threatened to put him on a chain gang for stealing three peaches in the 1880s, ninety-five-year-old Louise Smith's account of resisting peer pressure to become a prostitute and her own desire to kill her philandering husband in the 1920s; seventy-eight-year-old George Baker's reminiscence of fire engine horses in the 1910s, and eighty-year-old Virginia Bartow's recollections of the tragic life of her Princeton educated husband (class of 1922), who 'never learned to dance'" (157).

located in each corner of the room, recounting memories of poignant yet apparently unrelated life events. At the core of this montage is a 1930s "novelty recording" of a street car conductor announcing stops en route to "the ballpark" (158), which serves as the glue that holds these disparate voices and stories together, such that, as Hardy explains it, "the featured pivotal memories of each person's life become stops on an imaginary trolley ride" (158).

What is most interesting about Hardy's work in these projects, for our purposes, is the extent to which it privileges the affective immediacy of the listener's experience in the present over the accurate representation of the speaker's experience of the past. Like my work in the *Converse* project, there appears to be no deliberate departure from or subversion of the core context of the speakers' experiences. However, there is also no explicit effort to *foreground* context as a primary concern. For the most part—and, in this case, in contrast to my work in *Converse*—the identities of the speakers who produced the voices featured in these works are never made explicit, and neither are their narratives situated with any contextual framing or scripted narration. Ultimately, the only context we receive is that which emerges out of the juxtaposition of the voices themselves—in conversation with one another and against additional layers of music and archival sounds. In this sense, we might say that the time and place and personhood behind each audio piece is never precisely spoken or situated, but rather *conjured* or *reinvented* as an experience in the present.

In many ways, Hardy's work opens up important conversations about *method*—about how the materials of oral interviews might be mobilized *as* materials for creative practice. Bringing to mind frameworks like Bruno Latour's "compositionism" ("An Attempt" 473) and Brian Massumi's call for "*affirmative* methods" (12), Hardy's work maintains a radical openness to "techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact

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that they add (if so meagerly) to reality" (Massumi 12-13). Beyond traditional documentary methods of "identify[ing] intersections between multiple oral history interviews" (McHugh 198), then, perhaps we might say that Hardy is practicing a more emergent, generative practice, based not simply on *identifying* preexisting connections in the materials at hand, but rather on *creating new* connections-in-the-making.[138] Ultimately, for Hardy, audio art presents itself to aural historians as "a realm of open exploration," within which we might use archival voices not simply to analyze, interpret or represent, but rather to "compose, sculpt, fabricate, [and] reveal" (161).[139]

While Hardy does not explicitly acknowledge it, the notion of "fabrication" here is a provocative one, connoting a generic practice of making or assembling at the same time as it points toward more controversial and value-laden acts of deception and forgery. Indeed, while Hardy remains fairly faithful to the basic facts and speakerly intentions behind the stories he presents, the experimental techniques of performance and pastiche that he mobilizes also blur the boundaries of traditional nonfiction narrative. For example, in the "Mordecai Mordant" series, every episode begins with a theatrical introduction by "Mr. Mordant" himself—as performed by Hardy, complete with the heavily affected diction and faux-European accent used by radio announcers in the early twentieth century. And, similarly, while Hardy's own voice never appears in "This Car to the Ballpark," the novelty recording of the trolley conductor ultimately serves similar ends, mobilizing a fictional character to create an imagined stage on which the real-life drama of his narrators' stories might play out. In this sense, Hardy's practice stands in

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[138] Following Massumi, we might say that Hardy's interest in the materials of oral history here lies not in determining their place within an established "network of systemic connections," but rather in harnessing their potentially infinite "connectibility" with other resonant materials (20).

[139] Indeed, Hardy even goes so far as to invite his readers to add to this list by "insert[ing] the verb or verbs of your choice" (161), suggesting a radical openness to ongoing invention and discovery.

contrast to traditional scholarly conventions of "accurate representation" (McHugh 198), working toward alternative objectives of "reanimat[ion]" (153) and world-building.

That being said, while there is no doubt that Hardy's material orientation toward the voices of oral history foregrounds an alternative set of priorities—based not only on meaning and knowing but also on feeling and experiencing—it is also true that the way he actually *uses* archival voices in his audio montages does not stand in overt conflict with their traditionally authorized uses under our prevailing frameworks of representational ethics. Far from embracing the recorded voice at the limits of its material manipulability, Hardy employs considerably more subtle methods—excerpting, layering, and combining voices in such a way that the stories and memories they recount remain more or less intact. While he readily presents voices independently of the original context of their articulation, he does so not in order to radically reorient them outward toward new contexts and constellations, but rather to focus the listener's attention inward on the essential "deep truths and beauties" at their core (151). In this sense, while Hardy certainly recognizes and draws upon the material performativity of recorded voices themselves, imagined as "sonic artifacts" (153) and "acoustical vibrations" (155), in the end, he is arguably *more* concerned with the original, *human* performance of the speaker-as-storyteller—after all, "[o]ral history interviews, as we all know, are performative" (151)—and works hard to remain faithful to the intentions behind it.

Though Hardy never references him as a direct influence on his work, outside the disciplinary boundaries of oral history, we find in the work of Canadian pianist and composer Glenn Gould a strikingly similar dedication to this immersive, performative aesthetic in nonfiction storytelling, which is worthy of mention. Produced for CBC radio over a ten-year period between 1967 and 1977, Gould's *The Solitude Trilogy* is comprised of three hour-long

experimental radio documentaries, in which Gould applies "musically derived" (Gould 193) techniques and arrangements to the traditionally non-musical sounds of recorded speech. In "The Idea of North," the first and most famous of the three, Gould assembles five distinct voices from five separate audio interviews—each reflecting on his/her lived experience of the Canadian North—and weaves them together into an intricate audio collage. Evoking the aesthetic of theater and symphony at once, like Hardy's oral history-based audio art, Gould's "The Idea of North" appears to be equally concerned with the sounds of the voices as it is with the words that they speak. At times, the voices are edited and rearranged such that they appear to speak back to one another as if engaged in a mutual conversation or debate on a common theme. And, at times, they are overlapped such that they speak over top of one another in a cacophonous symphony of "contrapuntal" lines (393).[140] And beneath all of these voice recordings is the "basso continuo" of a moving train (393). Much like Hardy's trolley car in "Last Car to the Ballpark," this so-called "basso continuo" provides both "a foundation for the vocal textures we wanted to concoct above it" (Gould 393) and, in a sense, a kind of aural stage which draws together the disparate voices into a single, imaginable, immersive space of theatrical performance. However, while "The Idea of North" might in many ways "[think] of itself as a drama," to the extent that it remains wedded to the practice of representational, nonfictional storytelling, it remains, in the end, "technically a documentary" (392).

While this is certainly one way to approach oral interview-based audio art (and, might I add, with stunning results), it is also important that we acknowledge that this is not the *only* way—that, in fact, to open the voices of oral history to artistic intervention is to open the door to

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[140] Gould came to call this technique "contrapuntal radio"—where "contrapuntal" typically applies to a work of music in which independent melody lines play simultaneously (393).

a much broader, more subversive set of practices that unsettle our established ethical conventions at their core. This is precisely the realization I came to in my work on the *Converse* project, as I set out to "fabricate" imagined conversations between my grandparents' recorded voices. Like Gould and Hardy, I heard in these voices the resonant potential to "reanimate" stories and worlds—in my case, as illusions of spoken exchanges between two people who could no longer willingly converse. However, also like Gould and Hardy, I first heard in these voices *only* the potential to reanimate *stories already told*—stories that corresponded with the actual memories and experiences of my grandparents' lives. But the more I worked with these materials *as* materials, the more I cut and pasted and layered and rearranged them into new configurations, the more I began to feel limited by my own attachment to this pre-given past, and the more I began to realize: that this was not the only way for my grandparents' voices to converse; that, beyond their representational potential to recount experience already-lived, these voices also contained within them a visceral, recombinatorial potential to invent new, livable experience in the present and future—toward imaginative and even fictional ends.

This conceptual shift from fabrication-as-*assembly* to fabrication-as-*fiction* was a pivotal one in my work with archival voices—a provocative possibility that would go on to shape my subsequent experiments in posthumous poetics and, in many ways, my larger inquiry into the material ethics of digital voice more generally. Notably, however, it was a possibility that has been left unrealized in my work with my grandparents' voices in the *Converse* project. While I had originally imagined the project as a much larger series (and while I may very well return to it at some point in the future), following the completion of "Her Husband's Wife's Pancreas," I went on to produce only one more conversation—based around two parallel but radically divergent stories of schoolyard altercations that left each of my grandparents with a black eye—

and then promptly lost momentum. While I got immense pleasure from this close work with my grandparents' voices, and while I did allow myself a certain degree of creative liberty in remixing them, ultimately, I found that I was simply too close to the people and lives and stories *behind* the voices to listen for the fullest potential of the voices themselves, as compositional materials. And I made the decision to set the project aside and move on to explore new archives—and new *ethics* for composing with them.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in my survey of the methodological literature in oral history, I did not encounter any precedents for work that explicitly uses voice recordings as materials for fictional storytelling. And for his part, while Hardy makes great strides toward encouraging oral ("aural") historians to use their interview recordings to "compose, sculpt, fabricate, reveal" and, ultimately, "to make sense of the human condition through recorded sounds" (161), he never explicitly addresses the ethical concerns surrounding these very practices. On one hand, this omission is incredibly refreshing, following decades of rigid proscriptions and admonitions in the field's methodological literature, which have too often left storytellers little room to move. In a sense, we might say that Hardy's major contribution lies in his ability to look beyond these knee-jerk reactions against intervention and propose another way forward. On the other hand, however, one has to wonder: What is at stake in this opening? How do the artistic techniques and values that Hardy proposes either reflect or deflect our present ethical frameworks? What responsibility do we have, as audio artists, to the materials of our practice?

Traditionally, our ethical relationship to archival voices—both in the field of oral history and in our broader culture of memory—has been one of benevolent stewardship, with the archive serving as a "cemetery" for the so-called "speaking dead" (Sterne 327). As Sterne argues, this preservational impulse might be understood as a fight against time, driven by the tripartite sense

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that: "we must preserve the voices of dying cultures so that we have them (linear-historical time); we must then preserve the recordings themselves so that we can keep them (geologic time), so that we may then break them down and study them at our leisure (fragmented time)" (330). Crucially, while we understand this preservational act as an "intrinsic good" (238) for the benefit of future generations, in fact, the only "future" that we allow archival voices *themselves* is one fundamentally oriented toward the past. Certainly, by imagining ourselves as the self-appointed guardians of the voices of the dead, we ensure that these voices will in some sense "live on" and continue to "speak" beyond the lives of the bodies that produced them. At the same time, however, by approaching those voices as static memory objects and dead relics of the past, we erect substantial boundaries around their ability to do so.

As Sterne has noted, since the earliest emergence of sound reproduction technologies, voice recordings—as present or future "voices of the dead"—have never been collected and preserved for their own sake, but rather so that they "may continue to perform a social function" (297). In the case of oral history, this social function has shifted over time, in line with the tides of history-at-large, from a function of historical "data," or objective Truth, to one of memorial "text," or subjective truth (Grele). In this context, we have seen increasing interest in the oral history narrative *as* a narrative—and, importantly, a narrative that is always co-constructed through the interaction between interviewer and narrator.[141] Indeed, the term "narrator" itself has come to replace the more conventional "interviewee" as the preferred term as part of an explicit effort to afford due agency to the "voices" of oral history. Despite this shift, however, there is no question that the field tends to frame these voices largely in terms of their *representational*

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[141] As oral historian Alessandro Portelli puts it, "There is no oral history before the encounter of two different subjects, one with a story to tell and the other with a history to reconstruct" (28).

value—or what they *say* as interpretive windows into the past (or at least a particular human being's subjective experience of that past)—as opposed to their *material* value—or what they *do* as sonic events in the present and future. In this sense, we might say that the agency of these voices is seen to start and end with the interview itself, couched, as it is, in the conscious intentionality of live human speech. In other words, once a voice has been committed to tape (or the digital equivalent) and deposited in an archive, its job is complete. The voice becomes an *object*, not an *agent*—and, crucially, an object of our protection.

Returning here to the work of Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut—and to the idiosyncratic phenomenon of the posthumous duet—we find a provocative critique of this seemingly benevolent arrangement, in which "the living […] one-sidedly handle the dead" (14). As I discussed in Chapter Three, Stanyek and Piekut are notable in their efforts to push against the limited, human-centered notion of agency-as-intentionality in favor of Karen Barad's alternative framework of agency-as-"effectivity" (18)—and, in doing so, to open up a space for the recorded voice to continue acting beyond the life of its speaker. Under this framework, the voices of the dead become not simply inert relics of the past, but rather vibrant material forces with the ability to create effects in the present and future—and, indeed, the ability to participate in relationships of "mutually effective co-laboring" with the living (14). In this sense, while it may be true that "the dead cannot respond, cannot change or adapt to their living counterparts" (18), this does not mean that they are simply passive objects at the mercy of the whims of the living. Instead, Stanyek and Piekut ask us to consider how these recorded voices—as complex "interanimations of voice, body, and identity" (17)—work to structure the possibilities and effects of our practice in substantive and lasting ways.

In their case study of "Unforgettable," a 1991 duet between Natalie Cole and Nat "King"

Cole, Stanyek and Piekut describe a complex set of "intra-action[s]" (34), through which Nat comes to assert an "effective presence" (17) in the duet despite the fact that it was produced almost 25 years after his death. Certainly, following Norie Neumark's notion of the "authenticity effect," we might take for granted that fact that Nat's voice—as a vibrational performance of "intimacy and intensity" (95)—would continue to assert a large degree of influence over the ultimate effect/affect of the song as the audience experiences it. However, Stanyek and Piekut go further to suggest ways that his voice also served to shape the production of the song along the way, as a mutual co-participant in the contemporary composing process. They explain this function through the concept of "matching," in which particular qualities of the original recording would help to determine the shape and arrangement of the later composition. For example, fluctuations in the tempo of Nat's voice—which was recorded prior to the development of mechanized "click tracks" for keeping the beat—served to modulate the tempo of Natalie's own vocal performance (29). However, just as she was forced to adapt her performance to that of her father, just as she might have in a "live" or antemortem duet, Stanyek and Piekut are careful to point out the ways in which his performance was also required to give way to the requirements and limitations of hers—for example, through the use of post-production "hard limiting" and dynamics processing to regulate variations in vocal amplitude (29). In this sense, rather than understanding matching as a process of "mere mimesis"—a rudimentary "fidelity to an inert aesthetic past"—Stanyek and Piekut propose it as "a method for reactivating the latent capital stored in recorded performances"—and, crucially, one which is always "shared" and "co-performed" by past and present, living and dead (29).

Furthermore, Stanyek and Piekut emphasize the extent to which this co-participation does not stop at the boundaries of the immediate human actors (in this case, Nat, Natalie, and the

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accompanying musicians—many of whom had played with Nat during his lifetime) but rather extends to encompass the many *non*human participants that also contribute to the effects of the final performance. And in this context, for these authors, "the role played by technology cannot be overstated" (33). Citing "[m]icrophones, cables, tape heads, headphones, and architectures" as some of the many technological players, Stanyek and Piekut describe how, in the production of "Unforgettable," a major factor in the matching process came down to a question of microphone selection, wherein Natalie was provided with a vintage microphone of the same model her father had used in the original recording in 1961, in order to more closely match the distinctive "grain" or quality of his voice. In this sense, the form of "collaboration" that Stanyek and Piekut are asking us to imagine is one that takes up humanly-produced sounds as part of much larger material constellations of nonhuman bodies and technologies, which challenge the very categories of "living" and "dead" at their core.

Certainly, in my work on *Our Time is Up*, I encountered many of these same requirements for "matching" and "co-labor" with the posthumous vocal recordings I was working with. Of course, as a dialogue-driven dramatic narrative, my work was not constrained by some of the more complex musical requirements of tempo and pitch, which were necessary in the Coles' two-part harmony. However, because I sought to create an illusion of seamless dramatic co-presence, the overall consistency of the audio quality was a fundamental concern in my compositional process. In other words, because I wanted it to *feel as if* these three actors— who were in fact speaking from three radically different times and places—were performing coterminously in a shared narrative space, I faced the challenge of conjuring and creating a shared *acoustic* space, which would provide a basis for this experience. While I was forced to consider how to match *my own* vocal performance to the posthumous performances, much as

Natalie Cole did in "Unforgettable," because this was a composition for *three* voices instead of two, I was faced with the additional task of matching the two archival voice recordings with one another—and in some cases, as I will explain, with themselves.

As a born-analog audio file dating back to 1980—when oral history approached audio interviews largely as a means to an end of alphabetic transcription—and digitized after years of deterioration, Juanita's interview was by far the lower-fidelity of the two archival recordings, with a notably limited frequency range due to signal overload (otherwise known as "clipping") and a fair amount of extraneous noise ranging from tape hiss to sporadic background sounds. Ultimately, because it is far easier to remove information from a digital audio file than it is to add information that simply is not there, of the three voice recordings, Juanita's came to assert the most powerful influence over the overall audio quality of the final piece. While it may seem counterintuitive from the perspective of production value alone, in order to create a consistent acoustic texture across the three voices, I used digital audio software to deliberately reduce the quality and complexity of both my grandfather's voice recording and my own vocal performance, both of which were recorded with amateur digital recording devices—for example, cutting out the higher and lower vocal frequencies and reducing the dynamic range to create a more classic analog aesthetic.

At the same time, however, rather than aim to simply mimic the conditions of the lowest common denominator (and I mean that in strictly audio terms), I began by first cleaning up Juanita's recording to the greatest extent possible, using dynamics processing, frequency equalization, and noise removal techniques to enhance the quality and clarity of her voice in relation to extraneous noise. In keeping with Stanyek and Piekut's insistence on matching as "co-labor" as opposed to simple mimicry, then, I enlisted the participation of all of the voices

involved in negotiating the optimal aesthetic balance between audio production values and the "authenticity effect" (Neumark 95) of a shared performance. Furthermore, because Juanita's interview was conducted over four sessions stretched across a two-month period,[142] the audio quality is also fairly inconsistent across the segments, presumably changing with microphone placement and movement around the space. In this sense, in addition to matching three different people's voices with one another, I was also faced with the challenge of matching different iterations of the same person's voice with itself (with varying degrees of success)[143]—a phenomenon that points to interesting questions of vocal multiplicity.

Background noises in both of the archival recordings presented an additional challenge to the "matching" process, creating myriad sonic discontinuities and interruptions that intruded into the imagined space of the drama at random intervals. Like many oral histories, both Juanita's and Josiah's interview recordings were produced, at best, as *records* of a performance-already-given, rather than *materials* for a future re-performance in sound. And, like many oral histories, these interview recordings were produced far from the sanitized confines of the soundproof recording studio in the domestic spaces of the narrators' homes. As such, these archival voices necessarily

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[142] This timeframe (perhaps combined with short-term memory problems) also contributed to notable narrative repetition throughout the interview, in which Juanita told the same story—often in almost the same words and intonation—at various moments, suggesting a kind of rehearsed performance of stories that have been told before and providing fodder for creative recombination in the final audio piece.
[143] One of the strategies I used to smooth over the transition between different segments of a single "actor's" voice recording was to use clips in which the speaker coughed or cleared her throat, providing a kind of physiological apologetic for the sudden change in vocal tone or quality. This technique was inspired by Neepa Majumdar's discussion of a song sequence in the Hindi film *Naseeb*, in which "[t]he clearing of the throat" is used to mark out the transition between the voice of the visible actress and her voice double, since the sound "could be coming equally from [either]" (178).

carried with them not only the sonic register of the acoustical space itself,[144] but also the many other sounds and rhythms of day-to-day life. Ranging from chirping birds and traffic sounds to the voices and activities of family members in adjacent rooms, these unwanted sounds, once committed to the recording, become largely inseparable from the voice itself—in the most practical, material sense—sounding behind it and with it and, in some cases, against it.

Stanyek and Piekut might make sense of this phenomenon in terms of a so-called "*leakage effect*," wherein "an activity in one area expands unexpectedly into another area, setting in motion a second process, project, or concern" (20).[145] From a purely practical standpoint, such "perforations" (22) in the archival voice recordings I was working with stood as profoundly irritating obstacles to my best efforts to create an illusion of seamless dramatic co-presence. In many cases, an audio clip that I wanted to use for the sentiment or utterance or intonation it expressed would be unexpectedly imbricated with a revving engine or a chiming clock—or frequently a stray laugh or vocal affirmation from the interviewer or another person present in the room. (Indeed, in the case of my grandfather's recording, it was frequently my *own* voice, speaking from the past as a granddaughter and an interviewer, which became an uninvited distraction). Not only did I often have difficulty imagining how these sounds might have reason to exist in the diegetic space of the drama that was taking shape, but also, because of the radically recombinatorial nature of the project—which drew together minute vocal fragments

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[144] As Brandon LaBelle suggests "[s]ound… *performs* with and through space" (*Background Noise* xi) in a dynamic relation wherein "the materiality of a given room shapes the contours of sound, molding it according to reflection and absorption, reverberation and diffraction" (x).

[145] Stanyek and Piekut describe how this problem of "leakage" precipitated a trend toward "the ever-increasing spatial segmentation of recording studios," through "[p]artitioning disarticulated the bodies of engineers from those of the performers, as well as those spaces marked as 'technological' from those signifying 'music'" (22). Indeed, they remind us that, despite the appearance of "liveness" and simultaneity, audio-visual media exist within an unspoken "culture of synchronization," in which previously disarticulated sounds and bodies are sutured together to create an illusion of unity—or, more aptly, to recapture some original unity that itself is only a product of reproducibility itself (25).

from discontinuous moments across the interview—more often than not, these sounds in themselves were not sufficiently "whole" to make sense as plausible sounds-in-themselves.

In my efforts to combat these leakages in my experiments with posthumous audio drama, I found I was left with the following options: First, to *mitigate* them with careful audio editing techniques that targeted specific unwanted frequencies; second, to *incorporate* them into the time and space of the dramatic narrative, often through conspicuous vocal references to revelatory external events;[146] or, third, to simply *accept* them as (at worst) inevitable occupational hazards, or (at best) fascinating conceptual provocations, at the heart of collaborations with posthumous vocal archives. Indeed, despite my desire to sanitize, compartmentalize, and ultimately *control* the voices in this project, these leakages serve as an important reminder of the highly constructed, abstracted nature of the idealized voice sounding alone. As Frances Dyson explains it, "[s]ound is always a polyphony" and "[t]o isolate a particular sound within that polyphony a reduction must occur" (76). Thus, if it is true that "sounds and the bodies they emanate from surround, immerse, and belong to […] the multiple" (Dyson 80), then an oral history recording is never simply a recording of, in the words of Mladen Dolar, "a voice and nothing more." Rather, we must take up the archival voice as embedded in a complex assemblage of other sonic events. In this sense, as we consider the fullest range of "entities that have effects" (Stanyek and Piekut 33) in this compositional collaboration, perhaps we must consider not only the immediate human agents (both living and dead) who produced the voices in question and the immediate technological agents (microphones, recording devices, storage media, etc.) which helped to commit those voices to audio, but also the many marginal or coincidental agents—both human

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[146] For example, in a deleted scene, when a chiming clock from Josiah's interview recording intrudes into the diegetic space of the drama, I had the therapist respond with, "Excuse me. Sorry about that. Please continue," suggesting that the sound was in fact an unwanted interruption, perhaps from her telephone or the doorbell to her office.

and nonhuman—that unwittingly attended or obstructed or constructed the voice as such.[147]

Of course, thus far, I have only addressed the question of agency and co-labor in this project from the perspective of *sound*. For Stanyek and Piekut, who are approaching this question from an explicitly musical perspective, the sounds of the voices stand as the primary concern. While there are certainly words involved in the posthumous duet in the form of lyrics— and while these lyrics necessarily structure the possibilities of Natalie's performance, as she sings as an echo, and, at times, in anticipation of her father's "pre-echo, sounding ahead from the past" (31)—presumably, they take a back seat to what we might call the *unsaid* of the music, which, as Christoph Cox suggests, "has always been recognized to be a peculiarly non-representational art" (148). At least, this is the ultimate aim of good music, as Roland Barthes understands it, where the signification and meaning of voice in song is subordinated to its richly corporeal "grain"—"something [which] is there, manifest and stubborn (one hears only *that*), beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form (the litany), the melisma, and even the style of execution" (182). But if the question of voice-as-speech is not yet a part of the conversation Stanyek and Piekut have initiated, then what happens when we take the foundational principles of the posthumous duet and apply it to an overtly narrative art?

Indeed, the initial concept for the posthumous audio drama was motivated, at least in part, by precisely this question—and by the ethical provocation that it arouses. If it is true, as Stanyek and Piekut argue, that objections to the presumed "exploit[ation]" of intermundane

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[147] Indeed, if we were to follow a method like Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory, or "ANT" (see Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*" for a detailed explication), it would be possible to move ever outward from even these tangibly registered sonic actors, to consider all of the actors responsible for bringing the clocks and cars into existence and into the precise temporal-spatial configuration at hand. While this endeavor is beyond the scope of the present project, it is worth considering in its philosophical and methodological connection to the additive, affirmative approach I am taking to archival voices in this recombinatorial composition.

collaboration are "ostensibly concerned with defending the *memory* of the dead" (34), then it is safe to assume that these objections would only be heightened as we move from the non-representational values of musical performance to the deeply representational values of oral history—a field of practice for which memory serves as the primary *raison d'être*. In this sense, we might argue that Stanyek and Piekut's analysis has failed to account for what Jonathan Sterne has called the "social function" (297) for which these voices of the dead were recorded and preserved. Notably, in the context of the posthumous duet, Nat "King" Cole's recorded voice is being repurposed toward a musical performance (not to mention a musical performance of a song that he knowingly recorded during his lifetime and with the voice of his own daughter). Thus, it follows that, while Nat may not have participated as a conscious actor in the particular configurations that constituted the performative event of the 1991 "duet," there is still an extent to which the general "social function" for which his voice was originally recorded is being preserved.

This underlying loyalty to social function stands an obvious point of departure between the posthumous duet and my experiments with posthumous audio drama in *Our Time is Up*. By taking the archival voices of oral history and repurposing them toward fictional narrative ends, there is no question that my work here is subverting the original purpose for which these voices were committed to tape: namely, to serve as nonfictional narrative accounts of the lived experiences and memories of the people who spoke them. To the extent that I have spliced, extracted, and rearranged fragments of these recorded voices into new configurations, contexts, and conversations, there is a sense in which I have removed Juanita and Josiah from their own life stories, such that they are no longer speaking of the people and events and experiences that their oral histories set out to chronicle. And, crucially, to the extent that I have mobilized this

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recombinatorial labor toward the construction of an imaginative dramatic narrative—where Juanita becomes "Helen" and my grandfather becomes her husband, "Jake"—there is a way in which, at a fundamental level, these voices are no longer even speaking as themselves.[148] (And, for that matter, as I play the role of their marriage counselor, neither am I.) In this context, when we account for the narrative content and speakerly intentions of oral history, my experimentation with posthumous audio drama might seem to suggest deeper, more troubling ethical quandaries that outstretch the stakes and boundaries of the posthumous duet.

At the same time, however, if we take Stanyek and Piekut's focus on the posthumous duet as simply an occasion for exploring the possibilities for "intermundane collaboration" more broadly, then the question of social function quickly recedes from view. Indeed, at the root of these authors' argument is an effort to bracket the very notion of intentionality upon which this notion of "social function" is based and to consider the voices of the dead, instead, from the perspective of their effects. And, importantly, as Stanyek and Piekut understand it (via Karen Barad), effectivities are not *proper to* the voices themselves, as closed and discrete entities, but rather "are constituted, diffracted, translated, and variously deferred by other agencies in [temporary] assemblages" (18). In other words, agency is not a possession but a potentiality, which can only be actualized through mutual participation with other effective entities. In this sense, if we understand agency as effectivity, on one hand, and effectivity as relational, on the other, then the dilemma at hand becomes clear: In our very efforts to protect the voices of the dead from "exploitation" in the present, we are ultimately "fail[ing] to register their *agency*, their

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[148] Of course, the question arises: Is it ever really possible to speak "as oneself"? Certainly, to make this claim would require us both to subscribe to a belief in some authentic, singular voice, which necessarily correlates with some form of essential, stable identity and to overlook the extent to which, even in everyday speech contexts, we are always already performing ourselves as fluid and multiple beings—or perhaps more aptly *becomings*.

effectivity within a mundanity from which they seem to have been banished" (34). That is to say, by holding them within the confines of their past intentions or social functions (as we imagine them to have been), we are ultimately denying these voices—and, crucially, the people who once spoke them—the opportunity to continue participating in the ongoing construction of *new* social functions with other agents and agencies in the present and future.

On one hand, at its root, the form of agency and mutual effectivity that Stanyek and Piekut are after here is deeply *material* and deeply grounded in a notion of "*corpauralities*" (20) or sounding-bodies-in-relation. Rather than understanding voice recordings as mere "traces" of a past embodiment, which has come and gone with the life of the singer or speaker, these authors invite us to imagine them as existing in "an emergent, interactive, dialogic presence," such that "we must hear the voice emerging from the resonant body as the body resonates in the voice" (31). And, crucially, for Stanyek and Piekut, this corpaural "imbrication of sounds with fleshy bodies" (19) does not stop at the boundary of the particular human body that produces a voice, or even at the boundary of the human body in general. Rather, it participates in an ongoing, relationally entwined agency with all manner of material bodies, begging the question: "Where does one body—one sound—begin and the other end?" (31)—and thus, by extension, where does one agency—one effectivity—begin and the other end?

Of course, in the case of oral history and audio drama, as explicitly narrative arts, we might argue that it is not simply the sound of the recorded voices but also the words that they speak, which have the capacity to produce effects. If this is the case, then perhaps we need to think further about the extent to which *language* might also participate in the relational effectivity of an intermundane collaboration, and the extent to which it challenges or extends the possibilities for an "ethics of effects" (34). I find it useful here to return to the work of Mikhail

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Bakhtin for a perspective on the fundamentally lived, dialogic nature of language. Rather than understand language as something apart from, other than, and superior to what Stanyek and Piekut call the "fleshy bodies" of the material world, Bakhtin's approach to language allows for a similar form of mutual "imbrication" (19) through his attention to the socially-situated phenomenon of "expressive intonation" ("Speech Genres" 85). And, as I have argued in the previous chapter, this material dimension of language only becomes more palpable when we make the shift from writing in words to writing in voices.

Indeed, in my work on *Our Time is Up*, it was not simply the *linguistic* material of the oral history recordings that structured the possibilities around which the drama could emerge, but rather, the fundamentally audible, intonational material of the spoken utterance. Importantly, unlike the *Coerced Confessions* project, where I sought to "perform the voice" as an intonational disruption, here I set out to "use the voice in performance" (LaBelle *Background Noise* 134) in such a way as to create an illusion of "natural" human speech. In this sense, it was not enough that the recordings I used contained words and phrases that would "make sense" in the context of the emerging dramatic narrative. Rather, there was an additional requirement that those words and phrases be accentuated or intoned with what Bakhtin would call an "emotionally evaluative attitude toward the subject" ("Speech Genres" 85), in order to suit the appropriate social context of the new performative utterance. Thus, while language played a key role in what we might consider the "matching" process of the posthumous audio drama, it did so in a way that was inextricably tied to with the material performativity or effectivity of the voice itself.

As I sifted through my index of audio files from Josiah and Juanita's recordings and worked to reassemble them into a dramatic dialogue, I was forced to confront this material excess at every turn, adapting my compositional process to the reality of the materials at hand.

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There were countless instances in which, however much I might have wanted "Helen" to respond to "Jake" (or vice versa) with a particular configuration of language that I had located in my clip index,[149] if the speech context called for solemnity but Juanita happened to have been laughing in her delivery, more often than not, I was forced to look elsewhere. Notably, unlike a director in a traditional work of live theater, in this project, I did not have the luxury of asking my actors to shift the tone of their performance to accommodate my artistic vision.[150] In this sense, Josiah and Juanita's role as "actors" in the drama went well beyond the (albeit far from simple) act of bringing to life a performance-already-scripted. Instead, they became co-participants in imagining the shape and possibilities of the story itself, such that the processes of scripting and performance became rolled together into a single, co-responsive compositional process.

At the same time, however, this is not to suggest that what I am referring to as the "sticky intonation" of these digital voices in any way guarantees that the speakers' original intention is preserved. Far from it. Rather, as Bakhtin reminds us, in seeking to "divine the real meaning of others' words in everyday life, the following are surely of decisive significance: precisely *who* is speaking, and under *what* concrete circumstances" ("Discourse in the Novel" 340). In other words, *context matters*. And, in this compositional experiment, while my practice was constrained by both the finite set of words contained in the archival recordings and with what Bakhtin might call the "brute materiality" (340) of their original intonations, it is precisely the context that becomes malleable as I work to disarticulate and rearrange fragments of these voice

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[149] Because I had chosen to name the audio files in my index largely according to the words they contained for the ease of retrieval in the re-composition process—only in the most extreme cases adding a vague intonational qualifier (eg. "sadly," "laughing," etc.)—my experience of working with these materials was characterized by a constant rising and falling of expectations, such that I would be sure I had found the missing piece of the puzzle, only to listen to the clip and find my plans to be thwarted.

[150] In a few instances, I took advantage of the capacity of digital audio editing to change the speed (but not the tempo) of an audio clip to make a fragment of speech more closely match the pace of adjacent fragments that made up a given phrase or utterance.

recordings into new recombinatorial configurations. And, indeed, through my close work with Josiah and Juanita's voices in this project, I found that Bakhtin is quite right in suggesting that, "[b]y manipulating the effects of context, it is very easy to […] make even the most serious utterance comical" (340). In fact, as I took up fragments of speech laced with laughter from my grandfather's recording and repurposed them for new contexts as convulsive expressions of pain, I found the opposite to be true, as well. In this sense, while it might be tempting to presume that intonation gives way to a form of posthumous agency-as-intentionality, we must remember that the archival voice, as recorded sound, is only, in the words of Jonathan Sterne, an "exteriority" or "a resonant tomb" (290).

With this in mind, perhaps I should also be careful not to underplay the extent of my participation in this process. Effectivity aside, as the only conscious, intentional agent in the collaboration, there is no question that I did, in fact, possess a great degree of compositional "author-ity" (Frisch *Shared Authority* 226) over the final shape of the work through a range of activities and capacities, which were fundamentally unavailable to the two posthumous actors. While the material speech and performative effects of Josiah and Juanita's recorded voices did provide formidable constraints, and thus considerable direction, for the thematic and aesthetic development of the drama, in the end, the decision of precisely *how* to recombine these materials within the given structures of possibility and toward *what end* was ultimately mine to make—not to mention the very decision to undertake the project in the first place. In this sense, while I sincerely believe this project to be a work of collaboration—between myself, my grandfather, a woman named Juanita who neither of us has met, and a whole range of other material agents—it would be absurd to suggest that it were somehow a collaboration between equal partners. Undoubtedly, certain "asymmetries of power—and thus of responsibility—persist" (Stanyek and

Piekut 34). However, as Stanyek and Piekut are quick to point out, "[C]ollaborations with the dead are no different in this regard than those with the living, and we should be careful not to condemn intermundane projects out of hand" (34).

From an ethical standpoint, then, if we can begin to move beyond our knee-jerk objections to intermundane collaboration as a *concept*, then perhaps we can look more closely at how this collaboration is actually playing out in *practice*—and how it fits into our existing frameworks for ethical writing practice, in particular. Certainly, if we imagine spoken language as something "owned," as the private property of closed and individuated agents, then it becomes difficult to imagine how my appropriation of these posthumous oral histories for the audio drama would be anything but a work of thievery and exploitation. (And our prevailing cultural conventions around copyright, citation, and plagiarism might indeed suggest this to be the case.) Furthermore, if we consider the ways in which I have abstracted, rearticulated, and recombined these words and stories such that they no longer even attempt to reflect the intentions of the original speakers, then we may have no choice but to view this project as a flagrant work of misrepresentation. But are these the only ways to approach the ethics of this project? How might we productively reimagine not only the voice but also its manifestation as language in such a way as to make possible new forms of inventive and collaborative practice?

Again, Bakhtin's sociological theory of language offers a productive inroad into this project. Recall that, for Bakhtin, human language use is, at its core, an appropriative practice. Rather than presuming that we own the words we speak (or, for that matter, the words we write) in the particular configurations that we speak them, Bakhtin suggests that we are always already *revoicing* the words of others—that if we ever succeed in making words "our own," it is only for a fleeting moment, before they are taken up again, in new contexts and for new intentions, in the

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"mouths" of others ("Discourse in the Novel" 293). Following a Bakhtinian understanding of language, then, we might argue that the appropriative revoicing that I am practicing in this project—as I take up speech, quite literally, from "other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" and "make [them my] own" (294)—is neither an ethical abomination nor even an anomaly, but rather something more like a self-conscious, technologically mediated, material enactment of precisely the way that language functions in the first place. "[I]t is not, after all," Bakhtin reminds us, "out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!" (294).

Notably, Bakhtin's appropriative theory of language applies not only to the context of everyday speech genres, but also, in a very particular way, to the secondary genres of literary and artistic practice. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin famously argues for the concept of "heteroglossia" or "double-voiced discourse" (324) as a special form of speech through which the prose writer "makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master" (300). In this context, we find a provocative distinction between the practice of speaking (or, more aptly, writing) "*in* language" in some abstract sense, and speaking (writing) "*through* language," imagined as always already "the linguistic medium of another" (313). In this sense, rather than glorifying the novelist as a master of linguistic invention, conjuring literary language out of thin air, Bakhtin works to reimagine authorship as a form of highly practiced "ventriloqu[ism]" (299), through which every act of novelistic speech brings together "two voices, two meanings, […] two expressions" and, ultimately "two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (324).

For Bakhtin, this meeting of "voices" and intentions is necessarily a "struggle," through

which each of these competing forces "oppose or dialogically interanimate each other" (354) in a dynamic interaction. Importantly, however, rather than lauding those authors whose own "voices" win out over those of their characters in this battle of wills, Bakhtin holds up as exemplars those who succeed in creating a "*plurality of independent and unmerged voices,*" which remain "capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" ("Dostoevsky's Poetics" 6). Indeed, in his writings on "Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics," Bakhtin identifies this quality as *the* defining feature of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, suggesting that his mastery lies in his unique ability to create "*a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*" (6). Importantly, these voices are not simply the dummies or puppets at the mercy of the author's will, as the earlier notion of "ventriloquism" might suggest. Rather than serving only as inert "*objects of authorial discourse,*" these voices stand as autonomous "*subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*" (7), which, when brought together into the common space Dostoevsky has designed for them, bring with them their own personalities, wills, and worlds.

Considered in this context, we might say that my experiment in posthumous poetics is drawing not only on the appropriative nature of everyday language use, in the world according to Bakhtin, but also on a venerated tradition of literary practice. In much the same way that the novelist draws from her experience with the actual, audible voices of others in everyday contexts as the material for her characters' speech, in this project, I am drawing my characters' speech quite literally from the voices of others—in this case, the recorded voices of Josiah and Juanita, which, as digital archives, make themselves materially accessible for subsequent "re-voicing" and reanimation in new contexts and with new intentions. And, following Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" (324), we might say that these new intentions are fundamentally multiple,

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expressing my own authorial purposes at the same time as they express the divergent intentions (if we may call them that) of my characters—both of which are necessarily informed by the expressive intonations and material effects of the original speakers to create a form of what we might call *triple-voiced* speech. Finally, we might even go so far as to suggest that the compositional practice I am exploring here might be in some way an audible materialization of Bakhtin's notion of "polyphony," to the extent that, by its very nature, the posthumous audio drama cannot help but bring these in(ter)dependent wills and worlds—imagined not as intentions, but rather as effects—together into a fundamentally heterogeneous unity. And, indeed, if the posthumous duet was one source of inspiration for my work in this project, then Dostoevsky's "polyphonic novel" (30) was certainly another.

Despite these parallels, however, it is important to keep in mind a key factor that sets my practice apart from those that Bakhtin's theory addresses—namely, that the notion of *voice* he is mobilizing is, at least from the perspective of method, most certainly the silent "voice" of textual metaphor, as it is manifested through the equally metaphorical notion of "speech" on the page. By no means unaware of this fact, Bakhtin himself is quick to point out the inadequacies of "polyphony" as a metaphor for print-based, novelistic practice.[151] Certainly, we have seen how the audible, material nature of my digital voice-based practice has allowed me to enact and even in some cases extend Bakhtin's ideas about human language use in both colloquial and literary contexts—for example, helping to dramatize the materiality of speech through expressive intonation, as well as the centrality of context to meaning. However, there are also ways in which my use of actual, audible voices in this project necessarily serves to complicate the act of

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[151] According to Bakhtin, "[T]he material of music and of the novel are too dissimilar for there to be anything more between them than a graphic analogy, a simple metaphor. We are transforming this metaphor into the term 'polyphonic novel,' since we have not found a more appropriate label. It should not be forgotten, however, that the term has its origin in metaphor" (22).

appropriation, raising further ethical quandaries that are worthy of consideration.

Thus far in this dissertation, I have tried to suggest how we might productively reimagine the voice—like speech for Bakhtin—not as the private property of an individual human body/speaker/subject, but rather as a fundamentally relational "event" (Connor 4) or "effect" (Neumark 95), moving beyond forensic questions of who owns a voice toward more flexible and relational modes of being—and, by extension, more relational and even *collaborative* modes of composing. In many ways, this move parallels the move Bakhtin is making with regard to human speech and literary language, in that it seeks to reevaluate our cultural attitudes toward the act of appropriation, framing it no longer as a negative act of pilfering and deception, but rather as a positive, generative, and even inevitable act of reinvention and reuse. At the same time, however, we must still acknowledge the fact that the act of mediated, material appropriation—which takes up not simply the words and (silent) intonations of others' speech, but rather the vibrational performativity of their voices-as-audio—is a relatively recent phenomenon (made possible in earnest only in the middle of the last century, as N. Katherine Hayles has argued, with the rise of magnetic tape), and one that Bakhtin's work does not address. So the question arises: What difference does the voice make to the ethics of appropriative composing? Why—*and how*—does vocality matter in the context of re-voiced speech?

Questions of ownership and identity aside, the question of *identifiability*[152] re-emerges here as a legitimate ethical concern—one which is understandably not within the scope of Bakhtin's theories of appropriation and literary speech. While, in an alphabetic work of fiction like those Bakhtin considers, the characters' "voices" (metaphorically speaking) might be drawn from the actual audible voices of others in everyday speech contexts, when they are translated

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[152] Again, this distinction between "identity" and "identifiability" (185) is one that I am drawing from Darsie Bowden's writing on the history of the voice metaphor in composition pedagogy.

into alphabetic text on the page of a novel, they no longer bear the identifiable traces of their original speakers. In other words, these "voices" may very well contain and express the implicit intentions and (silent, textual) intonations of someone else's speech—of course, alongside the refracted intentions of the author as a form of "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin "Discourse in the Novel" 324)—but, from a reader's perspective, they do not necessarily appear as the speech of a *particular, identifiable, embodied* someone else.[153] In contrast, in my work on *Our Time is Up*, Josiah and Juanita's recorded voices, after being radically "re-voiced" toward new contexts and alternative configurations of fictional characters' speech, still remain audibly and inextricably identifiable as the voices of the two particular people who spoke them. Whether we frame this phenomenon empirically through the notion of the "voiceprint" (Yancey "Introduction" viii), philosophically as an indication of "incarnate singularity" (Cavarero 7), we cannot get around the fact that the material, audible voice is always heard as the voice of a particular someone (Cavarero 177).

Of course, the primary risk here is that the posthumous actors' participation in this project—which we have thus far reconciled through a combined theory of agency-as-effectivity (Stanyek and Piekut) and speech- and authorship-as-appropriation (Bakhtin)—might be mistaken by its audience for another kind of participation altogether: namely, intentional performance (if not precisely speech). Drawing as it does from the conventions of the audio drama form, this experiment in posthumous poetics necessarily invites its audience to experience an illusion of simultaneous, live performance—or at least *conscious* performance by witting "actors," in every sense of the term. As would be the case in nearly any work of drama, in *Our Time is Up*, Josiah

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[153] For Jonathan Rée, this distinction represents "the vital difference between speech and voice: speech by its nature can be repeated, whereas voices can only be imitated. The repetition of people's words signifies something very different from the imitation of their voices" (68).

and Juanita do not purport to be playing themselves, but rather the fictional characters, Jake and Helen McCleary, around which the narrative has been constructed. At the same time, however, it is important to recall that neither Josiah nor Juanita have had the capacity to make the conscious decision to use their voices to enact these characters in the first place—and, crucially, that there is nothing built in to the construction of the work itself that makes this fact clear to a listening audience. In this sense, we might say that the ethical dilemma that arises here is not an ontological question of *being* or *owning*, but rather a phenomenological question of *being received*—and thus *being implicated* in the consequences and effects of the work at hand.

Ultimately, if we take seriously Stanyek and Piekut's suggestion that "[a]ll entities" in intermundane collaborations "are co-responsive but not always co-responsible" (34), then perhaps we must consider what kinds of responsibilities might be expected of those of us capable of exercising them—and, in particular, what forms of accountability we owe to our posthumous collaborators in a project like this one. While there is no question that Josiah and Juanita should receive credit for their participation in this project, which, in so many ways, would not have been possible without them, it is also important that this credit be clearly defined and delimited. At the same time as we must be careful not to treat Josiah and Juanita's voices as inert, passive objects at the mercy of my compositional whims, it is also important that they not be mistaken for conscious, intentional subjects with the ability to direct and account for the consequences of their participation. With this in mind, speaking from the here and now, perhaps we might say that ethical approaches to intermundane collaboration are those which are transparent about their status as such, making evident both the power and the limitations of all entities involved. Perhaps what is called for is a new model of compositional ethics, one that does not preemptively restrict the terms of our engagement with compositional materials, but rather seeks to make our

relationship with those materials self-evident as a core requirement of the composition itself.[154]

As a tentative opening into this possibility, in the context of the present project, I find it useful to turn to another practice of aberrant vocal performance for a potential inroad. In my earliest experiments with posthumous vocal archives, I became intrigued by the potential parallels with the practice of *ventriloquism*, as an idiosyncratic art of "speaking in another voice or even in another's voice" (Goldblatt 38) for performative effect. Despite the obvious points of departure between these two practices (not least of which is the fact that, unlike the ventriloquist, I am not "throwing" my own voice, but rather digitally manipulating the recorded voice of another), the points of convergence are certainly striking. Like the ventriloquist, I am engaged in a practice of mobilizing other voices in order to "facilitate the appearance of conversation" (38)—a strange kind of conversation, which is at once an act of talking with myself and with talking with another. And, like the ventriloquist, my practice is characterized by a back-and-forth responsivity in which I must "act as if listening to another while, at the same time, speaking for that other" (39) in turn. Building on these connections, I wonder if we might take inspiration from what David Goldblatt has called the guiding principle of the ventriloquial performance: the performance of "illusion without deception" (37). Unlike puppetry, which attempts to hide the source of the dummy's voice behind a curtain, "in ventriloquism the voice-source appears with, is present to the figure and is itself a character in the performance as the ventriloquist impresses the appearance of the singularity of her role" (39). And, unlike the magician, whose success is based on the audience's inability to determine how the act was performed, "[a] ventriloquist who actually deceives an audience would undermine his own act" (41).

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[154] Indeed, in the vocal introduction to *Our Time is Up*, I make explicit reference to the fact Josiah and Juanita's deaths, years before the conception of the project, while at the same time crediting them for their role not only as *performers*, but also as unconscious but integral *collaborators* in the work's production.

It seems to me that this model—of "illusion without deception" (Goldblatt 37)—might be a powerful ethical framework not only for "intermundane collaborations" with the voices of the dead, but also for recombinatorial work with archival voices more broadly. As I have noted, in *Our Time is Up,* one of my core compositional goals was to fracture and recombine these recorded voices to create an illusion of simultaneous, "live" drama through fluid, intonationally driven editing—a feature that sets this work apart from my approach in the *Coerced Confessions* videos. At the same time, however, it was in no way my intention to trick my audience into believing that the actors' voices—as voices of the dead—are in fact the voices of conscious speaking subjects. To the contrary, to succeed in passing off Josiah and Juanita as intentional, "live" performers would be to undermine the very foundation of the conceptual experiment I am undertaking, as well as the uncanny nature of the experience I am seeking to create. Far from aiming to dissimulate the highly constructed nature of the piece and the true sources of the voices from which it is comprised, my goal here is to present to my audience an impossible dramatic encounter between the voices of the living and the voices of the dead—voices which *feel as if* they could be sitting in a room, speaking to one another, sorting through their differences in the familiar ways that people do, but which we all know obviously cannot.

Like ventriloquism, then, I see this experiment as an "occasion for letting strange voices speak" (Goldblatt 42)—and, in the process, an occasion for letting the voice itself become strange in ways that allow us to hear it differently and to reimagine our relationship to it. Just as ventriloquism asks us to challenge "one general assumption of our adult form of life: that *things do not speak*" (Goldblatt xii, emphasis mine), my work here asks us to examine our fundamental assumption that *the dead do not speak*—or, perhaps more aptly, that we cannot speak with or through the voices of others. Importantly, in doing so, this practice may have the potential, like

ventriloquism, to "[extend] the domain of relationships we have with things"—or, in our case, voices—which are "ordinarily off-limits to conversation" (xii). By taking on this ventriloquial experience of "being outside the self" by speaking through and alongside other voices, perhaps we, as composers, might even begin to "recogniz[e] other voices in ourselves" and to "problematiz[e] the idea that the self is located in the behavior of a single mind or body" (49). Indeed, it is in this sense that I see my experiment in posthumous poetics not simply as a challenge to our prevailing model of representational ethics and its negative proscriptions against certain forms of engagement with vocal materials, but also as an opening to a positive, generative ethical alternative. I will consider this possibility further in my concluding chapter.

6.0 MAKING. VOICE. MATTER. A REFLECTION ON MATERIAL ETHICS

"Compose. (No ideas but in things) Invent!"

— William Carlos Williams

One of the key underlying questions which has run throughout this project, but which has been left unresolved (as if it could be resolved), is the question of *ethics*. In my opening chapter, I described how the impetus for this dissertation emerged out of my own practice with voice recordings in digital composing contexts, where I first confronted the ethical quandary of what it means to compose texts with the voices of others. As I explained, it was through early work with my grandmother's oral history recordings that I came up against a provocative and troubling gap: between what digital audio technologies *allow us to do*, in practical terms, with other people's voices, on one hand, and what we actually *allow ourselves to do* under our present frameworks of representational ethics, on the other. Reflecting on this contradiction, I began to wonder if there might be other ways of making sense of these compositional practices and, if so, what new ethical frontiers they might suggest.

Over the course of my dissertation, I have sought to address this question, taking up digital voice both as a concept for critical examination and as a material for compositional experimentation. In Chapter Two, I began by tracing the history of theoretical and pedagogical approaches to audible, sounding voice across the disciplinary discourse, describing how our

attachments to voice as language and identity might be limiting the extent to which we can imagine voice, in the digital age, as a material for compositional invention. In Chapter Three, I drew together a diverse body of voice scholarship from across fields and disciplines, working to construct the foundation for a comprehensive model of "digital vocality" for contemporary composition—and positioning it as a catalyst for new forms of embodied, performative, and collaborative practice. Finally, using a hybrid creative-critical approach in Chapters Four and Five, I pushed my theoretical engagement with digital voice one step further, putting it into practice through production-based experiments in audio-visual composing and using my experience with these projects as a springboard for further reflection. Ultimately, in working with digital voice across these disciplinary and methodological boundaries, I have sought to develop a richer, more nuanced sense of voice's possibilities for inventive and ethical practice, branching out from narrow definitions of composition *as a field* in order to speak more widely to composition *as a practice* across broader spheres of creative production.

Building on this opening—and by way of conclusion—I would like to take this final chapter as an occasion to draw together some of the ethical insights and opportunities that have emerged out of my creative-critical engagement with voice in these preceding chapters, and to extend them through a focused reflection on their implications for compositional practice. I will begin this chapter with a brief reflection on the historical role of the voice in Western ethics and political philosophy, picking up on earlier discussions of work by Mladen Dolar and Adriana Cavarero and expanding them to account for the contemporary lived experience of voice in networked digital culture. Next, I will return to discuss, in greater detail, the practice-based method that I have set forth in this dissertation, situating it in the context of a larger conversation about the relationship between ethics and aesthetic experience—represented, most notably, by

the work of Anne Frances Wysocki. Finally, I will take up my *own* aesthetic experience with digital voice as it played out in my experimental audio and video projects, reflecting on some tentative ethical openings that these projects present. Ultimately, in this concluding chapter, I hope to push my inquiry beyond the question of voice itself to consider the broader methodological and ethical implications of this work.

6.1   THE ETHICS OF VOICE: A POINT OF ENTRY

I began my analysis, in Chapter Two, with a reflection on the metaphorical tradition of 'voice' in composition and rhetoric, which has long taken up the human voice as a proxy for notions of style, agency, or presence in alphabetic writing practice. Looking back at this conversation, it occurs to me that, at times, I referred to metaphorical 'voice,' erroneously, as "*the* 'voice' metaphor" (emphasis added), in ways that might suggest it to be a singular or tightly bounded phenomenon. To the contrary, however (and as I have already argued), 'voice' is by no means *a* metaphor, but rather, it is part of a vast multiplicity or constellation of divergent metaphorical usages—or even, as Kuang-Ming Wu might suggest, part of an ongoing and reciprocal process of "metaphoring" (37). While I have attempted, throughout this dissertation, to address it as such, I should acknowledge the fact that, in addition to the many diverse manifestations of metaphorical 'voice' that I have explicitly or implicitly alluded to in my analysis, there are no doubt countless competing and even contradictory constructions that I have left unspoken and unexamined. Perhaps the most striking of these omissions, at least in the context of our present conversation, is the ethical figure of *the voice of conscience*.

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In his chapter, "The Ethics of the Voice," Mladen Dolar explores a rich metaphorical tradition of voice across the history of Western ethics and moral philosophy, from the divine "Socratic voice" (83), to Kant's universal "voice of reason" (88), to Heidegger's ontological voice of "pure injunction" (95). Marveling at the extent to which "the voice has been the guiding trope of reflections on moral questions, both in popular reasoning and in the grand philosophical tradition" (83), Dolar works through the philosophical nuances of each of these divergent manifestations and ultimately identifies two key points of convergence among them. First, is the location of the ethical 'voice' in a paradoxical relationship to the subject, such that "the voice comes from the Other, but this is the Other within" (102). And, second, is the extent to which all of these formulations of ethics "[require] a voice, but a voice which ultimately does not say anything" (98).[155] In other words, finding the "argument, particular prescriptions and prohibitions" of signifying discourse to be inadequate to the task, it seems that Western philosophy has adopted the voice as the fundamentally "nonsignifying, meaningless foundation of ethics" (98). Referring to this ethical figure as an "*enunciation without a statement*,"[156] Dolar argues that, in fact, "[t]his is the crucial point, the touchstone of morality: the voice is enunciation, and we have to supply the statement ourselves" (98).

For our purposes, this move to locate ethics "beyond logos" (Dolar 85) and in the "imperative resonance" (98) of the voice appears as a provocative opening and, if nothing else, perhaps an argument for the importance of attending to questions of voice and ethics in the

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[155] While these voices do not "say" anything, Dolar explains that they do have varying degrees of content, even if this content is not speech in any linguistic or logocentric sense. For Socrates, the voice is one that "dissuades him from certain actions, preventing him from doing wrong" (84). For Kant, it is "merely the injunction to submit to reason" (90). For Heidegger, however, the voice has no content whatsoever; rather, it simply "insists as pure injunction" (95) and serves as "an opening toward Being" (96).

[156] On the surface, the use of the term "enunciation" here seems problematic, considering its connection to words and language. However, as Dolar imagines it, enunciation might stand as "the invisible surplus of a statement" (98) in such a way as to maintain the figure of the statement without its content.

present project. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the ethical 'voice' that Dolar traces through the Western philosophical tradition is not simply "a voice which ultimately does not *say* anything" (98, emphasis mine); rather, like all metaphorical 'voices,'[157] it is fundamentally *silent*, and thus not rightly a "voice" at all, at least not in the vibrational, material sense that I have been approaching voice in this dissertation. As Dolar explains, the silence of the ethical voice is, in fact, essential to its function in the sense that "only the voice which is completely silent can 'overcry' all other voices" (90). And, of course, a silent voice can only ever be heard if it comes from within—not as *one's own* voice, as Dolar has noted, but still "placed at the most intimate kernel of the subject" (102). Indeed, what is most striking about this approach to ethics is the extent to which it requires the figure of a singular, bounded subject without considering its interrelationship with others—save the silently shouting Other within—or with the broader material world. Clearly, this "ethics of the voice," as it has been imagined by the dominant philosophical tradition, stands in stark contrast to the material, relational theory of voice that I have been working to construct in this dissertation. And we are left wondering: How might we begin to imagine an ethics of voice as *sound*? And how might such an alternative help us to understand ethical personhood in more fluid and relational ways?

We find a powerful opening to this possibility in the work of philosopher Adriana Cavarero, which I briefly introduced in Chapter Three. In line with the philosophical tradition

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[157] For Dolar, whether or not the voice of conscience *is*, in fact, a metaphor remains an open question and, in many ways, serves as an impetus for his analysis, as evidenced by the questions he poses in the opening of the chapter: "Is this internal voice of a moral injunction, the voice which issues warnings, commands, admonishments, the voice which cannot be silenced if one has acted wrongly, simply a metaphor? Is it the voice that one actually hears, or is the internal voice still a voice, or is a voice that has no empirical manifestation perhaps the voice in the proper sense, closer to the voice than the sounds one can physically hear?" (83). I am intrigued by Dolar's attempt here to imagine the possibility of a silent but still non-metaphorical voice—a possibility that he pursues throughout the book. However, because I am dealing specifically with the materiality of digital voice in the context of this dissertation, I have chosen to constrain my definition of voice to its audible manifestations.

that Dolar presents, Cavarero's approach to ethics is notable in its attempt to reach "beyond logos" (Dolar 85) to take up the voice as a "nonsignifying" (Dolar 98) excess, which attends language but is in no way reducible to it. However, Cavarero departs from this tradition quite markedly in her attention to the voice as a audible, corporeal, and relational phenomenon. As Cavarero explains it:

> Every act of speaking is thus from the start the relation of unique beings that address themselves to one another. They reciprocally expose themselves to one another, in proximity; they invoke one another and communicate themselves to one another. Or, better, they do not only communicate something, some content, some intention, some knowledge, or even less, a language. Rather they simply communicate, in the act of speaking, the radical proximity of their reciprocal communication (29).

Thus, rather than locate the ethics of voice in a silent, transcendental "injunction" that sounds (without sounding at all) from within the autonomous and abstract subject, Cavarero offers an alternative ethical imaginary, which emerges out of the "reciprocal invocation" of two speaking bodies, bodies which establish their "corporeal uniqueness" through the audible act of vocalization itself (207). What we find in Cavarero's proposal, then, is a route to ethical and political personhood through speech, but where "speech" is imagined *not* as linguistic content or rational discourse, but rather as a visceral, relational behavior. As Cavarero describes it, "One could call it a politics of Saying where the uniqueness of each speaker makes itself heard as a plurality of voices that are already linked to one another in resonance" (200).

While Cavarero's "politics of Saying" stands as a radical departure from prevailing logocentric traditions, from Aristotle on down, her work draws its inspiration from other key intellectual traditions, which are worth noting here. Most immediately, is the work of political

theorist Hannah Arendt. Central to Arendt's work, as Cavarero mobilizes it, is the notion of speech as a relational politics, which communicates the "unrepeatable uniqueness of each speaker" (Cavarero 190)—and, by extension, the notion that "[t]his is what men have in common: uniqueness in plurality, or the uniqueness that makes them plural and the plurality that makes them unique" (191). By placing value on the *act* of speaking, over and above the *content* of that speech, and by highlighting the fundamentally sharable potential of specific lived experience, Arendt offers a provocative opening to Cavarero's project. Ultimately, we might think of Cavarero's contribution as an embodied extension of Arendt's political vision, which presents the voice as a lived, material manifestation of, or medium for, this relational mode of being—which we might productively call a *being unique together*.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt offers the simple metaphor of a table as a tangible inroad into understanding this relational politics of "uniqueness in plurality" (Cavarero 190). Conjuring up the image of a group of people seated around a table, Arendt invites us to consider that table as an object that simultaneously brings us together in a gathering, while at the same time separating us from one another. In Arendt's words, "To live in a world together means that a world of things is between those who have it in common, like a table. Worldly things relate and separate us at the same time" (52). While Cavarero does not explicitly mobilize Arendt's table metaphor in her analysis, I find it productive to imagine her project as an effort to take up the voice as just such a "worldly thing"—an actual, material manifestation of the table and chairs, which is intrinsic to the act of speech itself and which, in this sense, we are always already sitting around.

Of course, Arendt is not the only contemporary thinker to work toward a relational ethics through speech. Cavarero's project also builds quite directly on the work of philosopher

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Emmanuel Levinas. As Cavarero explains, Levinas is notable in his effort to establish an ethics of mutual responsibility based on the relational act of "Saying," as opposed to the semantic content of "the Said" (29), a proposal on which she draws very explicitly throughout her book. Furthermore, unlike Arendt, Levinas is invested in pursuing a sensory, material grounding for this relational act, locating in the lived experience and embodied co-presence of face-to-face communication—and, more specifically, in the visual recognition of uniqueness in the human face itself (29). Picking up on Levinas' sensory investments, but questioning his visual emphasis on the face, Cavarero offers up the voice as an alternative route to corporeal uniqueness—one which, unlike the face,[158] establishes its uniqueness only in and through the act of speaking itself (30). In other words, while two people can look at one another from across a room and recognize the uniqueness of each other's faces without ever approaching or even acknowledging one another, Cavarero suggests that it is through the immersive and identifiable vibrations of the voice that they actually come to *experience* one another's uniqueness as a lived reality.[159] For Cavarero, then, the voice possesses a unique capacity to bring us together with the other in a special kind of sensory encounter that we cannot experience through one another's words or faces alone.

In the context of my own work on voice in this dissertation, where I have sought to illuminate precisely these sensory and relational characteristics, Cavarero's "politics of Saying" (200) emerges as an exciting point of entry into a possible material ethics, which is grounded in the resonant potential of the voice itself. But while Cavarero's work is promising in its effort to move beyond a visualist focus on the *face*, the model of ethics that she proposes ultimately

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[158] Cavarero argues that the face establishes its uniqueness in a passive manner prior to and independent from the act of speaking.

[159] Identifying the elements of *sensation*, *proximity*, and *respiration* as central to Levinas' theory, Cavarero argues that the voice embodies these qualities perhaps even more so than the face (31).

remains firmly grounded in the same idealized scenario of *face-to-face* interaction that this previous model presumes. Positioning her politics, quite explicitly, "in contrast to those contemporary tendencies that celebrate the advent of the posthuman," Cavarero imagines her project as firmly "rooted in [the] vocalic meaning of the human" (210). While there is one point, toward the end of her book, where Cavarero makes a brief nod to the existence of "[t]he intercom and the telephone," noting their capacity to collapse the physical distances across which the human voice can travel (208), ultimately, she does not take this line of thinking any further. Instead, she quickly and simply concludes that such technologies "do not negate the material relationality of the vocalic" (208) and leaves it at that. Furthermore, in addition to this near erasure of sound transmission technologies, Cavarero also omits from the conversation entirely any mention of the other primary means through which we experience the voices of others—namely, through sound reproduction technology, which redeploys the sound of the voice across both space *and* time. For Cavarero, the idea that "[t]he voice belongs to the living" appears entirely unproblematic, in that "it communicates the presence of an existent in flesh and bone; it signals a throat, a particular body" (177). As we have seen, however, the temporal dimensions of sound reproduction technology have—since the invention of Edison's phonograph in the nineteenth century—profoundly complicated this notion of "presence," making possible, or at least as an imaginable, the uncanny specter of "the voices of the dead" (Sterne 293).

As I have noted previously, this tendency to disregard or underplay the role of audio technologies, and thus to approach the voice, instead, "as a medium of an unmediated body," is broadly characteristic of the work of voice scholars across the disciplines (Schlichter 46) and, in this sense, not a shortcoming of Cavarero's work, in particular. However, if we step back and consider the many diverse ways in which we actually encounter voices in our day-to-day lives—

not simply over intercoms and telephones, but also in voicemails and podcasts, through live streaming video, even as the artificially intelligent "personal assistants" on our handheld devices—then, certainly, this tidy model of immediate, "live," incontrovertibly human conversation can't help but appear a little nostalgic or out of touch. That is not to say that we do not *also* encounter one another as physically co-present voices in face-to-face conversations; obviously, we do, and I don't mean to downplay the value of such treasured, dare I say "analog" traditions of human communion. I am merely suggesting that, if we wish to imagine a material, relational ethics that is truly relevant to the complex ways in which we *actually live*—materially and relationally—in today's networked digital culture, then perhaps we must also consider the ethical valences of these other, less straightforward manifestations of vocal practice.

As I have argued, up to the present, our dominant cultural approach to the ethics of vocal technologies has been characterized by a narrowly proscriptive question of *what not to do* with the recorded voices of others. By clinging to the safety and security of our text-driven representational frameworks, we have erected formidable boundaries around the terms of our engagement with these technologies and effectively closed down the many forms of creative and compositional practice with recorded voices, which might fall outside of these value systems. What we have not done, however, is imagine the shape and possibility for positive, generative forms of ethical engagement with such voices, as writers, as media-makers, or simply as listeners. Indeed, if we imagine ethics, as Dolar suggests we might, as an "*enunciation without a statement*" wherein "we have to supply the statement ourselves" (98), then perhaps we might best seek out such a statement by *engaging with*—as opposed to shying away from—the material complexities of our world.

6.2   COMPOSING ETHICS: THE CASE OF DIGITAL AESTHETICS

In her essay, "Unfitting Beauties of Transducing Bodies," Anne Frances Wysocki provides a promising inroad to this project, exploring the intersection between ethics and aesthetics in digital arts and media. Starting, in this essay, from the premise that "our senses are persuadable" (110), Wysocki pushes us to think beyond purely rational and discursive notions of rhetoric to consider the role of bodily perception and aesthetic experience in our cultural formation as ethical beings. Again, we are reminded here that ethics is not simply an argument for doing the right thing—or, for that matter, an argument against doing wrong. Rather, as Wysocki imagines it, it is a richly embodied, sensual orientation toward others and toward the broader material world—an orientation that begins from the ways we experience the world as sensing, perceiving beings. In this context, she argues that the multisensory texts, which we routinely produce, consume, and interact with in contemporary digital environments, have the palpable potential to "shape our senses of selves by shaping our senses themselves" (95), providing a platform through which we might come to experience our bodies in new sensory relationships and configurations. Ultimately, Wysocki suggests, "By highlighting current aesthetic possibilities of our texts—digital as well as nondigital—we might practice having bodies that can alertly convert sensuous experience into ethical practice" (95).

Central to Wysocki's argument here is a critique of eighteenth century approaches to ethics, which are grounded in a fundamentally "solitary, ahistorical, nonparticular" notion of aesthetic experience (101). Working against this false presumption of "natural" and "universal" sensory experience—which she locates as a persistent theme in writing on contemporary digital

art[160]—Wysocki suggests that, today, we must instead "learn to be bodies that somehow perceive not alone but socially" (107). Importantly, as she argues, it is not enough that we are simply convinced, through conventional rhetorical argument, "to believe that our sense experience is the result of being raised within a particular social regime" (107). Rather, we must also come to "*experience* having such an unnatural, learned body" (107, emphasis mine) through visceral sensory encounters, which work to unsettle our culturally habituated relationships to our own bodies, the bodies of others, and the many non-human material bodies that make up our world.

Taken up in this context, I wonder if we might fruitfully consider our vibratory, sensory experience of the voice—both at the level of perception and the level of production—as one of these many modes through which we have been taught by our own "social regime" (Wysocki 107) to mark off and maintain our present ethical boundaries—between subject and object, self and other, human and nonhuman, living and dead. As I have argued in this dissertation, we have been taught, as a culture, to hear in the voice primarily the *language* it transmits and the *identity* it expresses, as a marker of the closed, self-contained, speaking subject. If we follow Wysocki here, then perhaps we should consider not only the ways in which these sensory orientations have come to influence our ethical ability to take up and compose with the recorded voices of others, but also the ways in which we fashion ourselves as ethical beings in relation to those others. And, while scholars like Dolar and Cavarero might prefer to present the voice as if it were a pure, unmediated, and indisputably human phenomenon, Wysocki's work also suggests that we would do well to consider the role of technology in this process and, more specifically,

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[160] As Wysocki notes, "The digital art that [Mark] Hansen, [Oliver] Grau, and [Anna] Munster consider is most often shaped to emphasize isolated, individual, private experience. These writers talk about a participant's sensuous perceptions of the art as though the perceptions result not from how the participant's repetitious and socially sensuous history shapes her to perceive but rather from a single technologized event experienced in isolation. This is to hold onto, and perhaps encourage, an eighteenth-century notion of bodies" (105).

our sensory experience of the recorded voice.

Of course, as we all know from experience, there is always something distinctly uncanny—and often unpleasant—in the simple act of hearing our own voices played back as a so-called "reproduction"[161] in audio media. Douglas Kahn explains this phenomenon as a kind of rupture in the habituated auto-affective circuits through which we typically experience our voices "as [they are] conducted from the throat and mouth through bone to the inner regions of the ear" and "sensed intracranially" (7). In other words, rather than hearing our voices resonate from within our own skulls, "full with the immediacy of the body," through sound reproduction technologies, we experience what Kahn calls "a deboned voice"—our voices as they are heard from outside of ourselves (7). Because we have been so well trained by our own social regime to hear our voices precisely as expressions of our selves, it makes sense that we would experience this sensation as deeply unsettling.[162] However, rather than enabling us to distance ourselves from our "selves," as closed and self-determining subjectivities, it is easy to imagine how such an experience might ultimately have the opposite effect, reinforcing the boundaries between self and other and only sending us deeper inward.[163]

Aside from allowing us to hear ourselves *beyond* ourselves as foreign voices, the other achievement of sound reproduction technology lies in its ability to capture those voices as objects or media, which persist over time. As I have emphasized, with the rise of digital audio,

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[161] Recall that sound theorists like Rick Altman and Jonathan Sterne have disputed the very assumption that sound reproduction is, in fact, a "reproduction" of one's voice in the sense that we tend to assume. See Chapter Three of this dissertation for a fuller discussion of the topic.

[162] Of course, with the increasing accessibility and ubiquity of recording technologies over time, it is *also* possible that our sensory apparatuses have been gradually habituated, through repeated exposure to these technologies, such that we experience the sounds of our recorded voices as increasingly normalized.

[163] Hearing aids represent another technology that contributes to this "deboning" effect, changing the way that a speaker experiences his or her own voice, not as a recorded playback, but rather in the simultaneity of live speech. A fuller examination of the hearing aid's role in vocal phenomenology is warranted.

these objects have become both infinitely replicable, with no loss of "fidelity" in relation to their perceived "original,"[164] and at the same time infinitely "flexible," with radical potential to be manipulated and made new (Neumark 95). Thus, along with the potential to purportedly "preserve" the voice, and thus to submit it to our economies of writing, we find attendant anxieties emerging around the vulnerability of these very inscriptions. In other words, in the age of audio, "one loses control of the voice because it no longer disappears" (Kahn 8). Ultimately, then, in the sensory regime of our present commodity culture, we come to hear our voices as both potentialities and liabilities. Either way, we come to experiences our voices—like our words in the economy of citation—not simply as proper*ties* that define our personhood, but as yet another form of private *property*, which we own and must therefore protect. In this context, we can see how our experience of the voice might come to condition our experience of ourselves as ethical beings who always already *stand apart* from one another and from what we have come to call the "outside world."

Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed the overwhelmingly individuated, linguistic, and proprietary approach to voice, which characterizes our dominant ethical imagination. Then, drawing on the work of voice scholars from across the disciplines, I have worked to unsettle the notion that this approach is somehow "natural" or inevitable, proposing alternative theoretical openings through which we might begin to listen differently to our own voices and the voices of others. Following the work of theorists like Steven Connor, for example, I have suggested that we might more productively hear the voice not as an object, but as an "event" (Connor 23, Cox 156) or an "effect" (Stanyek and Piekut 18). And, taking a cue from philosophers like Adriana Cavarero, I have sought to reorient our attention away from language

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[164] See Chapter Three for my discussion of Jonathan Sterne's critique of "fidelity" and "originality" in sound reproduction.

and toward the rich, vibrational resonance of voicing bodies-in-relation. However, as Wysocki has noted, it is one thing to simply *argue* for (and, perhaps by extension, against) the culturally conditioned formation of our sensory apparatus. It is quite another to actually *experience* that formation as an embodied, affective encounter. Because our senses are so habituated, it seems reasonable to assume that we might have difficulty experiencing them as anything but a given, at least in the context of our everyday bodily practice. Perhaps it is here that we might imagine the ethical value of works of art and artifice: By forcing us outside of our conventionalized sensory orientations to the world and confronting us with disruptive and unfamiliar bodily terrains, such works may have the potential to make our own sensory experience accessible to us in ways that we might not otherwise encounter it.

In this dissertation, I am interested in considering how my hybrid, creative-critical methodology might serve as potential point of entry to this project—or, at the very least, as a potential "[opening] to critical understandings of how our senses shape our relations with others" (Wysocki 109).[165] Through my critical analysis, I have worked to create a sense of distance between the material vibrations of the voice and the deeply rooted cultural values, which have taught us to hear those vibrations as something we *own*, something we *are*, or something we *say,* in order that we might be recognized and understood as an autonomous, rational subject. On one hand, we might reasonably imagine this work of theoretical distancing as a necessary ethical prerequisite for the practice-based aesthetic experiments that I carried out in subsequent chapters, working to justify—before the fact—the otherwise ethically troubling compositional practices in which I engaged. On the other hand, I like to imagine the projects themselves functioning as a

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[165] While Wysocki emphasizes the fact that "our senses are trained through repetition" (104) and thus privileges the ethical value of *repetitious* aesthetic experiences (e.g. video games), she also allows for the possibility that nonrepetitive experiences might serve as such ethical "openings," as well (109).

form of emergent ethical practice, which unfolds through the sensory encounter between artist, audience, and materials. More specifically, I am interested in how these projects—precisely by disrupting our habituated sensory encounters with voice in everyday life—might begin to enable us to *hear ourselves hearing* the voices of others in ways that suggest new, more permeable ways of acting, voicing, and being.

Central to this approach is a spirit of ethical experimentation—not in a scientific sense as hypothesis-driven empirical research, but rather as an open-ended, curiosity-driven act of aesthetic inquiry. Importantly, rather than taking up our pre-given ethical frameworks as the necessary limits of my creative practice, in these projects, I have sought to use my practice itself as a testing ground for working through the ethical complexities at hand. When I initially devised the concept for these projects, I imagined them as a narrowly reactive intervention into what I saw as the unnecessarily restrictive proscriptions of representational ethics, which limited our creative engagement with digital voice. At some point along the way, however, something shifted, and I have come to realize: that I am no longer simply working *against* an old ethical imaginary, but also, quite possibly, working *to create* a new one—one which I could never have anticipated or even articulated, but which I can't help but feel has begun to emerge from my practice nonetheless. It is in this sense that I have come to see my work here as an exercise in *composing ethics*, as much as an exercise in composing media—and, by extension, as an inevitable work in progress. Ultimately, by engaging my own "bodily perceptions" (Wysocki 110) in the material complexities of digital voice—and by opening that encounter to others as shareable "aesthetic experiences" (107)—I am interested in how I might begin to lay the groundwork for an ongoing, generative *ethics-in-the-making*, which begins from and returns to the material itself.

6.3   ETHICAL EFFECTS AND OPENINGS

Of course, in considering the potential ethical effects of these projects, it is difficult to speak with any clarity to the "bodily perceptions" or "aesthetic experiences" of an outside audience. Rather, I can only speak to *my own* perceptions of and experiences with these projects—and, to a much lesser extent, to the outward responses of some of the projects' key participants. In many ways, we might say that aesthetic experiences are powerful precisely for their potential to *move* and *affect* us beyond the abstraction of the language that we can bring to them. Thus, I would like to acknowledge that my attempt to "speak to" my embodied, affective encounters with digital voice in this section is, in some sense, to do them an enormous injustice—or, at the very least, to fail to fully express or exhaust the deeply felt (and unfelt)[166] effects that they have most certainly had on me, as an artist and a collaborator, in this process.[167] Despite these limitations, however, I would like to take this opportunity to listen more closely to these effects, as I have encountered them over the course of this exploratory compositional process, and to reflect upon the possible ethical openings they suggest.

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[166] I am alluding here to Brian Massumi's distinction between "affect" and "emotion" (derived from Spinoza) wherein "affect"—which he also refers to as "intensity"—is fundamentally *pre*personal and thus not necessarily "felt" in the way that we might imagine it to be. Emotion, for Massumi, is, by contrast, "subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. […] It is intensity owned and recognized" (28). In this sense, while we can only "speak to" what is actually felt or experienced, and thus "owned and recognized" as emotion, we should not forget that there is so much more happening at the level of bodily perception that is inaccessible to our cognitive and linguistic sense of the "felt."

[167] Not to mention that fact that I am most definitely *writing* and not actually "speaking" in the first place—to return to my discussion about metaphorical slippage in Chapter Two.

6.3.1   Disruption and Distance in *Coerced Confessions*

As I discussed in Chapter Four, when I first developed the concept for the *Coerced Confessions* series, I imagined my work as a kind of ethical enactment of the dangers of digital deception—a playful acting-out of our deepest fears that our voices might, once committed to media, be made to speak against our will in troubling and terrifying ways. (Think back to Ursula and the *Little Mermaid* allegory from Chapter One.) In screening these videos for outside audiences, I have often been asked to discuss what I had hoped to accomplish with the project, and, to this day, I am not sure I can come up with a satisfying response. In the end, I always come back to the idea that I simply wanted to see (and hear) *what would happen if?* And, in many ways, what actually "happened" when I carried out the experiment of the *Coerced Confessions* project was exactly what I had expected: I succeeded in "coercing" a false confession from the body of an unwitting actor using only the tools of digital editing software and a bit of ingenuity. If it is true, as I have maintained throughout this dissertation, that the experimental method I have practiced here is definitively *not* a scientific method of posing and proving a given hypothesis, then the questions might reasonably arise: If all I set out to do was to demonstrate or enact something we all already know—namely, that digital voice is a highly manipulable material—then why undertake an experiment like this in the first place? What can such an experiment accomplish but to confirm our fears or reinforce our suspicions, both of technology and of one another? And where could we possibly find the affirmative ethical value in a project like this one?

I pose these questions, at least in part, in the spirit of the devil's advocate. As I have noted in Chapter Four, I believe that this project has the potential to spark promising critical conversation around our prevailing ethical proscriptions against interfering with the voices of others. Notably, while the project certainly performs the material manipulability of digital voice,

it also performs the fundamentally social *limits* of this potential—the extent to which, in its allegiance to language, the intonation (and thus intention[168]) of the voice always *speaks itself* beyond our aspirations for control. My decision to present this project in the manner that I have—as a series of juxtaposed performances in paired two-channel videos—is designed to bring about a moment of realization, in which the audience might apprehend the relationship between the two performances (with some gentle help from the title of the series) and then reflect upon precisely these ethical complexities. And, to this same end, my decision to draw on the politically charged, ethically loaded speech genre of the "coerced confession" was part of a calculated effort to incite in the audience a knee-jerk response of moral outrage—a response which might then become complicated or even assuaged by reflection on the ethical distance between an *actual* coerced confession and the playful (if problematic) approximation that I have carried out in this project. At the same time, however, I am also interested in considering how this project might encourage forms of engagement that move beyond this analytical *a-ha!* moment of solving the puzzle behind the videos' construction—and beyond the equally cerebral reflection on the ethics of editing, which I imagine to follow. Indeed, if we consider this project in the context of Wysocki's ethical aesthetics, then perhaps we might imagine its effects in more immediate, more visceral terms—disrupting not only the way we *think* about the voice, as an abstract concept, but also the way we inhabit our relationship to the voices we have come to call "our own."

Certainly, for the actors participating in the project, the experience of watching these videos—of witnessing themselves "confess" against their will to these infamous crimes and

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[168] Recall that, for Bakhtin, intonation is expressive of speakerly intention. As his collaborator, Valentin Volosinov has suggested, intonation expresses a "*double social orientation*" toward both the listener and the topic or "hero" at hand, suggesting the speaker's original attitudes and intentions in ways that stretch beyond the language itself (105).

indiscretions—must have been a profoundly uncanny one. Indeed, in informal comments following their initial exposure to the videos, the actors expressed a wide array of emotions, ranging from amusement to awe to alarm (often in the same sentence)[169]—but always with an undercurrent of surprise. Despite being informed of the project's methods and intentions prior to their participation (they knew everything except the precise confession they would be "coerced" to perform), it is noteworthy that the actors still expressed a certain degree of shock at seeing their "coerced confession" unfold in front of them. On one hand, we might read this surprise as a rational, critical response to the project's conceptual intervention: a realization of just how readily their voices could open themselves to such radical forms of appropriation, manipulation, and re-performance—and not simply in theory, but in practice. On the other hand, this surprise might be rooted in something more immediate, more surface-level: the jarring perceptual experience of witnessing one's voice and one's body sounding and moving and acting in ways that are fundamentally foreign —not simply at the level of language, but at a more visceral level of gesture, tone, and inflection.

As the artist behind the *Coerced Confessions* project, I obviously had a very different point of entry into the project—one that left me feeling, at times, not unlike a puppetmaster pulling the strings behind the scenes. Notably, unlike the actors, I had full access to all of the inside information that made the project tick, including detailed knowledge of the source texts from which the scripts had been composed and into which the recorded performances would be reverse engineered—knowledge which was deliberately withheld from the actors themselves until after the editing was completed. Furthermore, I also had the added benefit of first-hand,

[169] For example, actor Ken Bolden, who unwittingly reenacted Bill Clinton's Monica Lewinsky confession in the infamous "Map Room Speech," wrote in an informal email responding to his initial viewing, "This is totally cool, disturbing and scary!! […] Amazing. Love it. The ramifications are really mind boggling."

experiential access to the apparent "magic" behind project's method—which is, of course, not magic at all, but simply a meticulous process of scripting, editing, and rearrangement. Given this position, then, it would be reasonable to assume that my response to the videos might be significantly more distant and measured. In the end, however, as I began to watch the "coerced confessions" emerge from the actors' bodies in the editing process, I can remember feeling a similar sense of shock wash over me. And it wasn't the simple fact that my plan had worked, which shocked me; the method was so tight that there was no reason to believe that it shouldn't. Instead, it was something in my embodied encounter with the jarring, disjointed, sputtering voice-bodies produced by the method, which affected me the most.

On a basic level, the radical nature of the "reverse remix" method that I invented for this project produces a disruptive digital performance of *a voice performing itself*[170]—not simply beyond its individual speakers' intentions, but beyond our deeply habituated sensory conventions of intentional speech. As I have argued, it is incredibly difficult, in everyday speech contexts, to attune oneself to the sound of a voice without hearing first and foremost the language that it carries. As Don Ihde explains it, "In ordinary speech the sounding of words remains in the background […] as the context and setting in which *what* is *said* emerges as foreground" (157). This is not to say that we are still somehow being *affected* by the sound of that voice—again, as Brian Massumi puts it, "the skin is faster than the word" (86). However, I wonder if we might not be so well trained, by our dominant sensory "regime" (Wysocki 107), to listen to the voice as rational communication, that we may need to find ways of disrupting this "natural" flow of

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[170] Again, I am implicitly mobilizing Brandon LaBelle's distinction between works, which "perform the voice"—"plunder[ing] language to reinvent the voice"—versus those that simply "[use] the voice in performance, as in traditional theater or spoken-word poetry" (134).

communication (which is, of course, anything but natural) through such disorienting aesthetic experiences, in order to begin to reattune ourselves to the voice's vibratory effects.

In many ways, Adriana Cavarero's proposal for an embodied "politics of Saying" (200) might be read as an attempt to reorient ethics away from the universality and abstraction of language and toward precisely the kind of visceral "bodily perceptions" (110) that Wysocki is after—in this case, perceptions grounded in the sensory immediacy and lived particularity of the voice-in-relation. If this is the case, then, perhaps our challenge is to determine precisely *how* we are to move beyond the universalizing distraction of the "*what* is *said*" (Ihde 157) in order to more fully immerse ourselves, as sensing bodies, in "the relational uniqueness of a vocal emission" (14), which is, for Cavarero, our route to ethical personhood. It strikes me that the *Coerced Confessions* project, as a disruptive vocal performance, might provide one potential opening to this project, enabling us to begin to *hear ourselves hearing* or *feel ourselves listening* to the voices of others in ways that we might not otherwise have access.

That being said, the other key intervention that this project makes is to muddy these very boundaries between self and other, by disrupting the customary relationships between voice, body, and intentional speech. In my theoretical reflection on the project in Chapter Four, I posed the question: *Who—or what—is it that is being coerced*? Approached from another angle, we might just as easily ask: *Who—or what—is it that is* acting *or* performing*?* In traditional, live theatrical works, we might be trained to experience a vocal performance as the work of an individual actor, who owns, trains, produces, and controls the voice that emits from his or her body. In this project, however, what we experience is something quite different: a multilayered, distributed performance, which draws together the capacities of the actors, the artist/editor, the technology, and the voice itself, into a complex material assemblage; a performance, which

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cannot be broken down and attributed to the agency of individual "actors," in any sense of the term; a performance, perhaps, which enacts the material relationality of voice, as it actually functions in our contemporary technoculture.

Returning to Cavarero's proposal, then, perhaps what we find in the *Coerced Confessions* project is an aesthetic experience that complicates, without contradicting or cancelling out, the possibility for such a relational ethics of voicing. On one hand, in offering a palpable perceptual experience of the voice, as it is deployed, dispersed, and diffracted across complex constellations of material actants, this project goes great lengths to unsettle the neat one-to-one, face-to-face, human-to-human model of ethical relations that Cavarero proposes. On the other hand, amidst the mess of tangled bodies and capacities and effects that this project performs, one key element of Cavarero's model remains: the unmistakable identifiability of the actors' voices. Crucially, despite the fact that the actors' speech-as-language has been transmitted, transduced, and then distorted beyond recognition in the course of this distributed digital performance, in watching that performance, it seems that we still can't help but experience their speech-as-voice, in its "corporeal roots" (206) and "unrepeatable uniqueness" (190), as produced by the body of a particular someone. Perhaps what emerges here, then, is a possibility for the deeply felt relational ethics that Cavarero is after, but one that begins to imagine the voice not as a strictly human exchange, but rather as a perceptual opening to experience our ethical relations with the broader material world. In other words, rather than renouncing the role of personhood in ethical relations altogether—which, I admit, makes me as nervous as it makes Cavarero—perhaps we might

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imagine the voice as an opening to an ethics of *personhood-plus*.[171] I would like to examine this

possibility further in my discussion of my second media project in the section that follows.

6.3.2   Intimacy and Intensity[172] in *Our Time is Up*

In discussing my work on *Our Time is Up* in Chapter Five, I wrote at length about the practical,

technical decisions involved in my effort to reimagine the recorded voices of the late Josiah

Patton and Juanita Bowman as "actors"—and collaborators—in a fictional audio drama. Using

Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut's concept of "matching" in the posthumous duet (29), I

described my efforts to negotiate a shared sonic environment, in which the three voices—

Josiah's, Juanita's, and my own—could converse as if mutually cohabiting the imagined time

and space of the drama. Then, drawing on Bakhtin's sociological theories of language, I worked

to extend the "matching" concept to account for the dilemma of appropriated *speech,* which

arose from the context of the dramatic narrative genre. The initial concept for this project

emerged out of a theoretical abstraction: my fascination with the possibility for collaboration

with the dead. At first, I will admit, I saw Stanyek and Piekut's notion of "intermundane

collaboration" (32) as incredibly provocative but perhaps a little over the top for my taste. And,

as such, at first, I expected I would simply apply this theoretical framework to my project, at a

certain level of remove, in order to justify my ethical intervention—at least to my audience, if

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[171] In this dissertation, I have approached the voice as what we might call a "born-human" phenomenon, limiting my inquiry to the sonic vibrations emitted from the human vocal chords and articulated by the tongue and mouth. However, as synthesized speech and vocal interfaces become increasingly common, perhaps we must also to attend to the paradoxical question of "nonhuman voice"—or voice that originates in the machine—and its ethical ramifications. I see this as a fruitful area for future research and practice.
[172] I am drawing here from Norie Neumark's notion of digital voice as participating in "an aesthetics of intimacy and intensity" (95).

not also to myself. What I did not expect, however, was to actually *experience* this uncanny collaboration at the level of embodied, perceptual practice—to feel myself forming complex attachments and relationships across the threshold of death.

In preparing for this project, I listened to dozens of voices of the dead, which I sourced from online oral history collections, downloaded to my hard drive, and assembled into a randomized playlist to keep me company on a solo cross-country drive. And, as I moved across the landscape, alone, over those four long days, I did feel strangely *accompanied* (I can think of no other suitable word), as if each voice were somehow a warm body, sitting next to me like a string of hitchhikers, telling me stories. Of course, the voices *did* tell stories, and those stories were most certainly part of the connection that I felt—even when the stories themselves were a little tedious, and at times they were. But the voices also sang songs and spoke of distant wars in languages I could not understand. And others only wailed faintly and indistinctly from beneath the static of decades of tape decay. Yet, still, I felt a certain closeness, a certain intimacy—not the deep, slow kind that develops over years of committed friendship, but the intense, fleeting kind that comes with the isolation and forced proximity of sharing ride across the sprawling Montana Rockies. Of course, from an ontological perspective, this notion of "presence" is deeply problematic, and, in fact, I have dedicated a significant portion of this dissertation to arguing against such metaphysical attachments. At the same time, however, there is a sense in which we cannot help but feel some presence of a person in the recorded voices of another. And, if we are working to imagine an ethics by way of aesthetic experience, then I have to believe that this sensation counts for something.

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, media artist and theorist Norie Nuemark has suggested that we might account for this feeling as an "authenticity effect" (95). Rather than

denying or dismissing our affective encounters with vocal "presence" as nothing more than a problematic "call to (or from) essentialism," Neumark argues that we might instead embrace them, as an expression of the performativity of digital voice itself. In other words, when taken up by digital arts and media, voice has the uniquely performative potential to enact what Neumark calls "an aesthetics of intimacy and intensity," to the extent that it can actually reach out and "call the other into an intimate relationship—it can performatively effect [*sic*] intimacy" (95). Importantly, and in direct conversation with Cavarero, Neumark locates this performative potential not in the content of intimate speech, but, instead, in the vibrational effectivity of the voice itself. Here, the performativity of speech is not about "do[ing] things with words" (qtd. in Neumark 96), as J. L. Austin has suggested, but rather, about "Doing Things With Voices"— and, as I have argued, by extension, allowing voices to do things with *us*.

Considered in this context, it makes sense that my experience of these voices of the dead—particularly in the heightened sensory isolation of a long, lonely drive—might have had such a powerful effect on me. And it also makes sense that I might have had difficulty explaining or accounting for my precise motivations for selecting one particular voice—the voice of Clella Juanita Bowman ("Juanita")—from among all of the others, to work with on this project. Indeed, in my reflection in Chapter Five, I noted the practical features that made Juanita's interview stand out as a strong candidate for the project—the relatively (*relatively*) good audio quality, for example, and her tendency to theatrically reenact the speech of others. But, if I'm honest with myself, there were certainly other voices among those that I listened to along the road with cleaner sound and sufficient present-tense speech to make them viable candidates. Ultimately, what drew me to Juanita's voice was not a matter of such technical concerns. Nor was it the stories she told, which were often (as the interviewer notes in her online record) long, rambling,

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repetitious monologues.[173] Rather, it was something in the energy and intensity with which spoke those stories, something inexplicable in her voice itself that made me want to listen and to get to know her better.

And, over the course of the project, I *did* listen to Juanita—likely as no one has listened to her in decades, if ever, and certainly not since her death almost fifteen years back. Despite the open accessibility of her interview through the online archive, I have to wonder how many people have taken the time to listen to Juanita at all, let alone to listen to all seven scratchy hours of her prolific life story, with all of its wonderful wanderings and digressions and redundancies. Perhaps a history scholar writing on West Coast women's role in wartime factory labor, but even then, such a task would presumably require a different kind of listening—more selective; more attentive to facts and meanings; less engrossed in the sound of every breath, every cough, every subtle shift in timbre and intonation. Indeed, over the weeks and months I spent with Juanita in producing this project, I believe I listened to her in a way that I have never listened to anyone, ever. And, for someone I have never met, someone I never *will* meet, someone who died quietly when I was a still a teenager in a suburb hundreds of miles away, I can't help but feel—however strange it sounds—as if I came to know her all the same.

Certainly, in this sense, my relationship with Juanita stands in stark contrast to my relationship with Josiah, the other key actor in this project—at least as a point of entry. Significantly, unlike Juanita, I *did* know Josiah, quite intimately, during his lifetime. As I have mentioned, I knew him as Grandpa. And I loved him for the lively, living, breathing, laughing, sobbing, sensitive, stubborn, proud, vulnerable human being that he was. My decision to use my

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[173] This is not to say that these stories are not rich and fascinating and worth listening to, in full. I would encourage anyone who might have the inclination to visit Juanita's record on the VOAHA website and listen to her interview.

grandfather's voice for this project was driven by dual desires: First, it was motivated by my desire to challenge myself to more radically and deliberately depart from any preconceived ideas about the *person* and the *story* behind a given voice, as a *"Voice of the Past,"*[174] in order to reimagine that voice's many possible futures—a task which, as I have noted, I found incredibly difficult in my early experiments with posthumous voices in *Converse: Conversations Between My Grandparents*.[175] And, second, it was motivated by my desire to keep myself in check, from an ethical standpoint, in the knowledge that anything I did with a dead person's recorded voice in this project, I would have to be comfortable doing with the voice of someone I loved. But while I might have started this project with the premise that I knew Josiah Patton, in the end, I think I was surprised to find that I had come to know him differently.

In casting the role of the therapist in the audio drama, at first, I seriously considered seeking out a professional voice actor to play the part (or at least someone with more theatrical experience than I had garnered over three summers of children's drama camp). But, in the end, I bit the bullet and took the role myself, hoping that I could pull it off, if not gracefully then at least relatively inconspicuously. On a practical level, I simply did not have the resources to pay someone else to do the work, and I had already pressed my luck far enough requesting favors for the *Coerced Confessions* project. But, more than that, as I pieced together the exchange between the characters, I began to realize: That, somewhere along the line, I had actually started to *feel* like Jake and Helen's therapist. Indeed, as I immersed myself in the painstaking listening and re-listening and editing and re-voicing that went into composing this drama, I found that I was increasingly *not* sitting alone in my desk at home or at my regular post in my favorite coffee

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[174] Again, I am implicitly referring here to oral historian Paul Thompson's seminal book *The Voice of the Past,* which arguably set the stage for the explosion of the 'voice' metaphor in the field of oral history.
[175] See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of this project.

shop, but in a high-backed chair across a low-lying coffee table, looking past a box of tissues into the eyes of two proud and weary people—people who were, perhaps like all of us, desperate to be heard, to be understood, to be loved.

Of course, to suggest that I *saw* these things is perhaps inaccurate, but I certainly felt them. At times, it was painful. At other times, it was painfully funny. But either way, as I sat and listened—to the weighty heaves of Jake's sobs or to the sad notes of resignation behind Helen's all-too-curt responses—I began to feel them as if they were my own. And, in the process, I began to feel a sense of my own responsibility to them, my investment in their process: my desire to comfort or to heal, my impulse to reach out and put my hand on a slumped shoulder that wasn't there—or, admittedly, at times, to reach out and smack some sense into the both of them. And then I would wake up to the sudden realization: That I was, in fact, sitting alone in my apartment or (worse) in the middle of a busy café, wincing awkwardly or laughing under my breath or fighting back the tears that I felt, inexplicably, for two people who I knew weren't *present*, in any sense of the term, but who I had somehow come to experience as if they were. Indeed, this was, without a doubt, the most surprising—and most *satisfying*—outcome of my experience with this project: Not the extent to which I was able to change these voices into something new, but the extent to which, in doing so, *these voices changed me.*

Of course, from a certain standpoint, this is all a work of fiction, and "Jake" and "Helen" are only characters that Josiah, Juanita, and I have worked together (if you buy my argument for collaboration) to conjure or invent. But even if that is true—and I'm not convinced that it's so simple—does it really matter? Does it make my experience with their voices any less real? Does it leave me any less changed? If what we are seeking here is, in fact, an "ethics of effects" (Stanyek and Piekut 34), one which is grounded in the material relationality of the voice, then

perhaps it isn't important from whence these voices come, or whether the bodies they conjure—the "embodiment that the voice brings forth in the making" (Neumark 114)—are present or absent, living or dead. Ultimately, if what we are after here is a fundamentally visceral, perceptual "politics of Saying" (Cavarero 200), then shouldn't our *experience* of that saying simply be enough?

As I have noted, from where I stand, I can speak only to my own experience of the project—and, even then, only to the extent that it is possible to channel my feelings and sensations into words. For this reason, I will not attempt to guess at the potential experience of an outside audience encountering this project. Nor will I pretend that the actors in this project inhabit a state where "experience" is even a question. Obviously, they do not, and that fact is, in many ways, precisely the point. However, I do want to acknowledge the possibility, even the likelihood, that an audience's experience with these voices might *not* produce the same effect/affect that I have experienced—or, at the very least, not to the same degree. However powerful an aesthetic encounter that this project might offer, it is ultimately incapable of replicating or reproducing for the audience my own bodily encounter with these voices, as artist, as editor, as therapist.

Indeed, one important difference, which sets my experience with this project apart from that of a potential audience, relates to the question of temporality. A typical listener encountering this project from the outside, in whatever context they encounter it, is unlikely to spend more time with these voices than the total running time of the audio drama itself, from start to finish—and, given the present economy of attention in which we live, likely far less than that. Perhaps the most eager audience will return for a second listen, but, for the most part, the experience the project invites is one that is brief, delimited, and singular. In comparison to the hours and weeks

and months that I spent with "Jake" and "Helen"—and, by extension Josiah and Juanita—well, there *is* no comparison. This is not to say that an audience might not come to experience some form of intense, fleeting intimacy with these voices, similar to that which I experienced with my initial posthumous playlist on that cross-country drive. However, there seems to me to be a palpable difference between the kind of bond that develops over short, singular encounters between speakers and listeners and the kind that grows out of more substantial investments of time, of energy, of collective labor.

Of course, the connection between ethics and perception does not boil down to a simple question of *duration*: listen to someone for long enough and you'll feel your connection to them. In fact, Cavarero's proposal explicitly seeks to move away from the politics of identity and territory, which are established over time as static objects, in favor of a more contingent politics of the "absolute local," which emerges fluidly in the momentary relationships created between voicing beings (210). As I have suggested, however, the problem might lie in the way that Cavarero defines this category of voicing beings, as "live," living, and indisputably human speakers. Thus, if we are seeking to open this category to account for our complex interrelationships—with technologies, with nonhuman materialities, and with the dead—then perhaps what we need to do is train our senses to experience those interrelationships in the first place. And importantly, as Wysocki argues, "our senses are trained through *repetition*" (104, emphasis mine). If this is the case, then perhaps there is something not only in the time I spent listening to Josiah and Juanita's voices, but also in the *way* in which that listening unfolded— namely, as the highly repetitious practice of listening and re-listening, which the compositional process required. Similar to the aesthetics of disruption that I described in the *Coerced Confessions* project, perhaps there is a way in which this repetition enabled me to listen to these

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voices beyond the depth of the words and meanings they conveyed to more closely attune myself to the surface-level vibrational intensity of the voices themselves. Unlike *Coerced Confessions*, however, what I experienced in this attunement was not a distancing from the people behind the voices or from the voice itself, but rather a paradoxical *closeness* and *intimacy* with these *non*-people or *past*-people, through the visceral technological transductions of the voice itself.

Which brings us to another key distinction between my own experience with the voices in this project and that of the audience: The "reciprocal invocation" (Cavarero 208) to both listen *and* respond. That is to say, while an audience is invited to experience the "intimacy and intensity" (Neumark 95) of these voices of the dead as passive listeners, the project does not, in any explicit way, prompt them to enter into the conversation. Of course, one might reasonably argue that, under Cavarero's model, such a reply would be trivial, since there would ultimately be no conscious, living being on the other end to receive one's voice. At the same time, however, if we take seriously Wysocki's argument that we must "learn to be bodies that somehow perceive not alone but socially" (107), then I have to believe that this act of reciprocal sociality—this act of response—*does* matter and, in fact, matters deeply, in every sense of the term. While my experience of listening to Josiah and Juanita's voices was, in itself, quite powerful, the thing that sets it apart, most markedly, from any experience of listening to archival voices of the dead was the sense of mutual reciprocation that our shared endeavor brought forth. In other words, built into my collaboration with Josiah and Juanita, there was a tacit requirement that I not only listen but also speak back—figuratively, as I worked to edit and rearrange the voices in response to the possibilities and limitations they presented, but also *literally* and *materially*, as I anticipated, scripted, and performed my own vocal responses to the characters that emerged. In the end, I believe it was this auto-affective sensation—of feeling myself listen and then feeling myself

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respond in kind—which truly anchored my relationship to the voices in this project and out of which the most exciting ethical opening has emerged.

My experience composing this posthumous audio drama is, of course, an example of a particularly "intensified" or "heightened" (109 Wysocki) aesthetic encounter with digital voice. I do not mean to present it as a direct analogue for the kind of work that we, as compositionists (in both the narrowest and broadest senses of the term),[176] should be seeking to carry out on a broader scale. And I certainly don't intend it as a replicable model for a new, experimental classroom genre. However, if it is indeed the case, as Wysocki argues, that "*[a]ny* text we compose engages us aesthetically" (110, emphasis mine), then perhaps we would do well to attend to these questions of perceptual experience, bodily encounter, and relational ethics in all of our work with digital voices, and even with the core materials of our practice, more generally. Most discussions of ethics and aesthetics (including those that Wysocki outlines in her essay) tend to focus exclusively on the bodily experience of an outside audience. However, as my work here suggests, perhaps we must also consider *ourselves*—as writers, artists, and composers—as a valid and valuable audience for the ethical attunements that emerge from our practice. Even when we are not entirely sure of the palpable "outcomes" that our work might produce (and I hope that, at times, we aren't), perhaps we must remind ourselves: That the work is worth pursuing nonetheless, that there is ethical value in the making itself.

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[176] I am alluding here both to the specific disciplinary use of the term to identify scholars of composition and rhetoric, on one hand, and to Bruno Latour's broader political/ethical mobilization of the term in "An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto."

6.4   ON "LIVING WELL TOGETHER"

At the end of her essay, Wysocki poses the question: "What can we do, perceptually, to live well together?" ("Unfitting Beauties" 109). This, I believe, is the crux of the matter at hand. But, as my work here suggests, perhaps we must also step back and ask ourselves: Precisely who—or what—constitutes this *we*? As we have seen in the work of Adriana Cavarero, the voice emerges as a promising perceptual inroad to establishing this ethical "we," through a relationally embodied "politics of Saying" (200). At the same time, however, the kind of voice that Cavarero imagines is one that is invariably "live," living, and human—and thus, as I have argued, potentially out of touch with the many complex ways in which we actually encounter voice in our day to day lives. Throughout this dissertation, I have worked to move past such idealized frameworks, which tie the voice to the time and place of the live speaking body, proposing instead a more flexible, distributed model of *digital vocality* and using my practice as a platform for exploring its ethical potential. Ultimately, I am interested in how the voice—precisely in its complex material entanglements with humans and machines, with selves and others, with "the living, dead, and not-yet-born" (Stanyek and Piekut 34)—might provide us with a powerful opportunity to both anchor and expand that "we" to account for a fuller range of our ethical relations.

If it is true, as Stanyek and Piekut suggest, that "[p]ersonhood is always collaborative," that it "cut[s] across clear distinctions of materiality/discourse, technology/organicity, and bounded lifetimes/eternal deaths" (18), then perhaps the challenge we face—as writers, artists, and composers of all kinds—is to find ways of making that collaboration *felt*, as a visceral, perceptual way of being-in-the-world, and then to find ways of incorporating that feeling into our habituated sensory lives. In the course of my own aesthetic practice in two media projects that I

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produced for this dissertation, I have explored the compositional potential of *digital voice*, in particular, as a possible point of entry to this pursuit. And, while I may have ultimately raised more questions than I have answered, I am heartened by the ethical openings that I have discovered in the process. In the end, however, it is important to remind ourselves that voice is just *one* of the many possible materials with which we might undertake this work: to perform, to enact, "to compose a common world" (Latour "An Attempt" 484).

"What can we do, perceptually, to live well together?" (Wysocki 109). This is a question that is, or should be, at the heart of our work in the world. But it is *not* a question that we are likely to answer by standing back and looking at the world from a distance, by dissecting it into its component parts and simply leaving them to rot. Rather, it is a question that calls us to pick up those "ruins" and to work to "reassemble [them] piece by piece" (Latour 476). It is a question that calls us to surrender our incessant drive for meaning, mastery, and control. And, most importantly, it is a question that calls us to slow down, to lean in, to attune ourselves to our interconnectedness with others and with the felt—and even the not-yet-felt—material world. In the words of Bruno Latour, "It is time to compose—in all the meanings of the word, including to compose with, that is to compromise, to care…" (487). This is where I end. And where I begin.

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