

Voicing the Text

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American Drama and the Production of Voice

By

Petra Ragnerstam

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INTRODUCTION

WHY VOICE?

A good many people, I imagine, harbour a similar desire to be freed from the obligation to begin [...].¹

—Foucault, “The Discourse on Language”

Putting one’s house in order, patting oneself on the back, submitting one’s account, is something highly agreeable. But describing the collapse of one’s house, having pains in the back, paying one’s account, is indeed a depressing affair, and that was how Friedrich Nietzsche saw things a century later.

—Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*

Perhaps there is so much writing on the voice now because there has been a break, a separation from that innocence.

—Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*

The phenomenon I explore in this book is voice. My general fascination with voice is grounded in many queries. Why is voice so important to us? What is it about voice that makes us think of everything from that which is produced by human physical activity in the voice box to what goes on in a text and even to general democratic principles? How does the concept of voice encompass such disparate practices as vocal sound, identity production, and the execution of power? And can the same term really refer to such disparate practices and operate on such disparate planes?

In this general introduction, we first have to consider what defines voice. What is its function in relation to the subject and in relation to embodiment and power? It is clear that voice is closely connected to the body. It not only refers to a sound made primarily by our voice box, but also it is closely connected to language through speech. Thus, a close link exists between voice, body, and language, which is important. However, the question which remains is how to theorize their relation to each other.

In what way is voice connected to language? Many critics argue that there is a crucial difference between voice and speech. For instance, in *The Voice in Cinema*, Michel Chion argues that the two are quite disparate:

voice is material, whereas speech is linguistic. In his theory, voice is the vehicle for speech, but I would argue it is rather difficult to conceptualize speech without voice and voice without speech. Even the written word is often regarded as “a record of the movements of the speech organs, and correspond[s] to the movement of the instrumentalist when he reads notes from the printed score” (Turner 2000, 5). Therefore, I assert that the line between voice and speech is not easily demarcated because voice is so closely connected to our idea of humanity. For example, we do not talk of animals as having “voices” in the same sense as humans—they only make sounds. And what makes our bodily sounds different from those of animals is our voice’s connection to speech, and subsequently, to language.

Given that the boundary between voice and speech is fuzzy and difficult to demarcate, the question is if it is necessary or even fruitful to draw such sharp distinctions. The most important idea to keep in mind is that voice, in a crucial way, is connected to physicality and embodiment. However, its meaning is almost always extended to notions about speech, language, and ideas about humanity and subjectivity. In this study, I aim to find a way “to consider it as an object, without either becoming lost in the fascination it inspires or reducing it to being merely the vehicle of language and expression,” as Chion puts it (Chion 1999, 1).

What I find personally interesting about voice is precisely this conundrum. It seems to be placed somewhere between body and language. Voice becomes a sign of both language, by its strong connection to speech, and the body, by being generated and produced by our bodily organs. Voice is a site for agency expressing the subject’s thoughts and experiences, but voice is also the site where language as discourse produces and controls us. This is why voice is central to my project.

In many theories, voice is clearly connected to the idea of a subject creating an utterance. What characterizes voice is its origin in a subject and in a body. As such, voice is fairly unproblematic in that voice and language are produced in harmony by an embodied subject. Our voice becomes a sign of subjectivity. What is uttered acquires its meaning because it is uttered by someone: a physical body and subject. A voice without a body or a subject is no voice. This construct also works the other way around. The subject gains its subjectivity from its voice because one is not a subject if one has no voice. The voice is a sign of cognition, interiority, and of identity—that is, of subjectivity.

In contrast, in poststructuralist theories of language, language is defined precisely as having no origin in a subject, but rather, language is arbitrary and constituted by a radical absence—the absence of sender,

receiver, and context. Language is what theorists would call a textual practice, meaning that voice no longer works in harmony with language in an embodied subject. Because voice is unconditionally connected to language via speech and to the subject via the body, tension arises between the theories presented. Voice can be regarded as a bodily practice, but also as a linguistic practice. Interestingly, the two positions are not compatible, and hardly even negotiable, as we shall see.

The tension that forms the basis of my project is voice as a spoken utterance (grounded in the speaking subject) versus voice as language (different and deferred). It is this tension that I analyse in the transition from drama to performance and from text to embodiment. This transition is a form of translation and a form of transposition, or metamorphosis of voice. The tension is also interesting because it is closely connected to power—and to our ideas of what voice can or should do.

Voice and power

Another issue central to this project is that of voice and power. Voice is closely connected to concepts of power, and I would argue the reason for this is precisely the triangulation of language, body, and subject. The strong connection between language, body, and subjectivity through voice is what makes voice such a powerful weapon.

Voice is tied to the body by the production of vocal sounds, and it is connected to the subject in that the speaking body is a sign of an autonomous, thinking individual. However, having a body is not enough to have voice in a political sense. Voicing one's ideas is not the same as making vocal sounds. Voicing one's ideas implies making bodily sounds that generate certain effects: communication, understanding, agency, and action. This is carried out through language, and for voice to function as an individual's political weapon, the triangulation of body, subject, and language must be in place.

But language, as I have argued, is not an individual matter. Language is produced outside the subject in processes of differentiation which generate meaning. Meaning is stabilized by ideological and discursive processes rather than by its origin in a body and in an individual. This means that our voices must follow patterns and structures of meaning that are already present (the "already-said," in Foucauldian terms) to be understood.

People who produce vocal sounds that fall outside these structures of meaning are consequently not subjects. And if they are not subjects, they cannot have voice. Such a definition of voice excludes people who are

deprived of subjectivity—historically, and in the present. Feminists, Marxists, and postcolonialists all point to subjecthood as a concept which is not a given, but rather, something connected to power. Women, the working class, and colonized peoples are seen as (and constructed as) objects rather than subjects. They cannot have voice because they are not subjects in the first place.

This means that to have voice, one must speak in a political sense, which in turn, means that one must be within the discourses of power in order to speak. Otherwise, one's speech will come to nothing. What is said will not be acknowledged as speech, and one will have no voice. There must be someone who listens, and no one is listening if they are not already communicating within the discourses of power and speaking the right language. This is how voice and power are interconnected.

This radical critique of the subject as the origin of language also means questioning the political viability of voice and subjectivity as grounds for (political) action, and this is a tricky field. Feminism, Marxism, and postcolonialism are traditionally strong advocates of voice. However, this is not surprising considering that they deal not only with power, but also with oppressed groups and their rights in the world. A harsh critique of voice, embodiment, and subjectivity would assert that these groups' foundation for political action is fundamentally questioned. Therefore, theorists within these fields are not ready to launch a comprehensive critique of voice. Feminists fighting phallogocentrism, for instance, are not ready to give up the humanist and individualist ideology of voice because voice is seen as a fundamental democratic principle and a viable way to gain power and control. As Nancy Hartsock argues in "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories," it's typical that just when we have finally gained the status of subjecthood—it's time to give it up.

Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes "problematic?" (Hartsock quoted in Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 233)

Poststructuralism's textual turn implies the critique of an ideology fundamental to our concept of the world, ourselves, and our ideas of agency and political action. Can this textual turn also have political force, or does a radical critique of voice undo our political imperatives? What I deal with in my analysis of voice is a clash between the poststructuralist critique of logocentrism and a feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial critique

of power. In simple terms, it can be seen as a clash between writing and embodiment, and my project is an investigation of this clash.

My interest in voice as an instrument of power lies in the presumed failsafe link between subject, body, and language. If voice renders power because of such a failsafe link, what happens to this power when the link is destabilized? We are faced with two theoretically opposite versions of what voice is and what it can do: voice as an individual, bodily phenomenon, where voice can function as the vehicle for the subject's thoughts and experiences, as opposed to voice as a textual phenomenon, cut off from the speaking subject, where voice has seemingly lost that political power. The effect of this results in a problematization of voice and power, and of the possibility of seeing the individual voice as a vehicle for power.

Voice in text

The clash between subjectivity and writing concerning voice is best demonstrated by literary theory. Within literary theory, we can observe two lines of reasoning. Firstly, we have literary theorists wanting texts to be an expression of voice. And secondly, we have literary theorists wanting to reveal that voice is a purely textual phenomenon. Both deal with the anxiety (or a promise, depending on viewpoint) that voice is not what we think it is.

Given that literature is traditionally seen as an expression of the essence of humanity, subjectivity, and individuality, some literary critics display an incessant preoccupation with voice. Literary theory, which only deals with written material, nevertheless continues to discuss voice in text. This is the case despite voice being so clearly connected to body and embodiment, sound and orality, and despite text being obviously "bodiless," and therefore, physically "silent." Literary theorists circumvent this obvious lack (of embodiment) by presuming a physical speaking situation with a speaking bodily subject, which is in fact, not there.

The textual turn in literary theory works to question the seemingly failsafe link between body, subject, language, and power. In Derrida's theory of deconstruction, for instance, one could argue that Derrida, in his critique of logocentrism, analyses and questions the ontological status of voice by investigating its connection to language. He does this by investigating subjectivity, origin, and presence, all of which are crucial to our understanding of voice. This is a way to foreground the written, rather than the spoken, in an attempt to problematize the failsafe connection

between subject, voice, body, and language. In such theories, voice as we have conceived it, no longer exists.

Drama enacts the clash between textuality and embodiment by its structural reconfiguration of text into performance, and it is here where voice undergoes a veritable transformation. However, drama's connection to body and embodiment is problematic, if not even illusory. Drama-as-writing does not go away. Drama-as-writing constantly intervenes in drama-as-performance. In drama, there is a deferral of voice created by its status as writing. It is drama as both written text and performance that captures the clash of philosophies and theories described above. Because the intricate relation between writing and embodiment characterizes drama, it can be said to play out the problem concerning voice and presence. Nevertheless, full presence is difficult to realize even in a performance, and this problematization of presence in drama, in turn, implies a comprehensive critique of the subject, as we shall see.

I have chosen to study American drama for two reasons: firstly, because the plays are often political, dealing with the questions of power, and secondly, because of their focus on the individual and his or her undertakings in relation to that power. Thus, what I analyse is if and how it is possible to posit voice as a site for individual agency expressed by characters in the play or if voice is a textual construct that problematizes its strong connection to subjectivity, individuality, and agency. In exploring these questions, I analyse several plays from different time periods that problematize voice in relation to text and performance, and to language and embodiment. We will find that what seems to be a clear-cut relation is actually quite intricate and problematic. It is not simply the case that the embodiment of voice in an actual actor—in an actual body and with an actual voice—brings stability to the text-as-différance. Rather, the relation between text and performance becomes a simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of voice.

Embodiment in performance and film

Having outlined the main threads of this book, I still need to untangle a major knot in this project. This knot concerns what I mean by “performance.” Generally speaking, I use the term *performance* to discuss the translation of text to various corporeal forms, although I am aware of their differences. Thus, in using this term, I refer to both theatre and film, although corporeality materializes itself quite differently in the two. However, in my actual readings of the dramatic productions, I have had to limit my study to embodiment in film. This is because it is practically

impossible for me to find any live stage productions of the plays I have chosen to analyse. Furthermore, had there been any stage productions open to attend, I would have had to travel around the world to see them. I am aware that the choice of film as medium when discussing embodiment is problematic; theatre and film operate in quite different ways when it comes to the performance and embodiment of voice. However, having stated this, interesting aspects of voice emerge when discussing film which highlight the problems outlined above. Some of the films that I have chosen for this study also bring out problems directly involving theatre, as you will see.

Although I will not discuss the difference between voice in theatre and in film at length, I would like to discuss a couple points before starting my investigation. Thus, I begin with the two main areas I feel point to their differences in the production of voice: corporeality and individuality.

Schematically, one could argue that theatre is more corporeal than film in that we are presented with real, live actors with real, live bodies and voices on the physical stage. Their corporeality is palpable, so to speak. In this sense, it would be more “accurate” to speak about performance and embodiment in theatre than in film. In terms of voice, this means that the voices produced come directly from the actors’ speaking bodies. No technical aids or instruments that distort, alleviate, or alter the voices are produced. Thus, the corporeality of the actors on stage limits and enables the production of voice.

In contrast, cinema cannot boast of “real” corporeality in the production of voice. In cinema, the only way we can speak of corporeality and voice is as a form of iconicity. We cannot talk of physical bodies or corporeal actors, but rather filmed actors whose bodies represent corporeality. In this, cinema faces many problems when it comes to the production of voice. Nonetheless, film is dependent on the same set of ideas or ideologies about voice and embodiment as theatre, which creates interesting problems for filmmakers. Therefore, the kind of embodiment that characterizes theatre has to be re-imagined in the production of film. As we will see, this is a continuous problem when filming voice.

Although there are problems in the production of voice in film concerning corporeality, there are also advantages in its use of iconic voices. These advantages concern an aspect of corporeality that differentiates film and theatre—individuality. And to understand the ways in which film manages to produce individuality through a sense of intimacy, we again have to turn to the stage and compare it to the film’s frame. The stage is important for the production of voice in the theatre. The whole setting of a theatre, for example, how the audience is placed in

relation to the actors, can be argued to produce distance. The actors have to position themselves in certain ways in order to secure audibility. This means that some methods of producing intimacy and individuality by producing a wide register of voice are unavailable to theatre actors. In the theatre, the voices produced must be loud and clear to reach the spatial distance to the audience. Therefore, vocal effects that generate a sense of closeness, individuality, and realism (such as whispering, asides, and mumbling) are impossible, or at least difficult, to master in the theatre. As a result, theatre follows certain conventions of voice that stretch our suspension of disbelief when it comes to voice. This space structure stages voice in a way that makes it less realistic (in a purely representational sense) despite that it is more corporeal.

In cinema, the stage is traded for the frame. Thus, we get a completely different setup for the production of voice. Gone is the stage, which tends to limit the scope and register of voice. Also, the camera is more intimate in that it can move unobtrusively and create both closeness and distance, in turn, creating a wider range of possibilities for the production of voice. Voice in film appears to be more “realistic” because of the nuances that are possible to procure with technical aids such as the microphone and camera angle.

Naturally, other aspects that clearly differentiate theatre from cinema when it comes to the production of voice also exist; aspects that I will not examine in depth here. In his influential book, *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion conducted comprehensive analyses of voice in cinema and makes interesting comparisons to theatre. For a more thorough investigation of their relation, his book is worth reading. As argued before, my focus will undeniably be cinema. Although I am aware of the limits that such a scope brings; nonetheless, I hope that this focus renders interesting discussions, and the lack of stage productions opens up for other scholars to continue this line of research.

Disposition

The structure of this book is guided by the concept of voice, wherein each chapter raises a dilemma that challenges our concept of voice in various ways. These dilemmas are theoretically different and call for different readings of the plays in question. I have allowed myself to rather freely choose such theoretical quandaries based on the plays, their construction of voice, and how voice is translated into film. What we get in each chapter is a problematization of a specific aspect of the play in question that has an impact on, and consequences for, our concepts of voice. In this

problematization, I have chosen to investigate such disparate dilemmas as the disembodied voice, thought, irony, and dialogue.

More precisely, this book is structured as follows: the first chapter, “The Dramatic Voice: Text and Performance,” is a theoretical chapter outlining the main theoretical threads that will be the foundation of the forthcoming readings of the actual dramas. This chapter investigates theories of writing as well as theories of embodiment in relation to voice. However, its main focus lies in the theoretical conundrums concerning the translation between the two media. In many ways, it can be argued that this chapter sets up the questions that will guide the readings of the dramas, but without giving any answers. I have envisioned this project to be so that the readings themselves will become like answers in practice. All the chapters that follow are separate readings of various dramas whose common denominator is the questions raised in the theoretical chapter. No direct comparative element guides those chapters, but rather, it is up to the reader to make the connections. Following the theoretical chapter is a reading of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* called “The Incorporeal Voice: The Thorny Case of *The Crucible*.” This chapter focuses on the problems of translating what are commonly called *stage directions* in drama. By stage direction I mean “a direction inserted in a written or printed play where it is thought necessary to indicate the appropriate action” (Oxford English Dictionary). What role do these textual segments play in the production of the text and how can they be translated into film? What happens when the clearly textual part of a play is put into a performance that needs bodies, subjectivity, and sound?

Chapter 3 consists of a reading of Eugene O’Neill’s play, *Strange Interlude*, and is titled “Voice Representing Thought: Translating *Strange Interlude*.” As the title indicates, this chapter investigates the preconceived idea that what we speak has its origin in what we think, meaning that thought and speech are intricately interconnected. The project of translating thought into embodiment is troublesome to say the least, and in the process of such translation, many preconceived notions about voice and the subject become destabilized.

Chapter 4, “Irony, Satire and the Conundrum of Speaking: *The Women*” deals with irony precisely because irony and satire, in many ways, highlight the concerns surrounding voice and its connection to the subject. In the play, *The Women*, by Clare Boothe, we meet a group of women whose speech is clearly ironized. My main take on irony and voice in *The Women* is that voice functions as a form of ironic expression because the women do not mean what they say. What they say means something else, something about themselves which they do not have

control over. Thus, irony points to the instability of language itself, and it thrives on this instability—both in relation to intention and origin of speech, and in relation to the arbitrary nature of the sign.

The final chapter is an analysis of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, called "The Collapse of the Democratic Speech Space: *Glengarry Glen Ross* and the Processes of Reification." This chapter investigates voice in the context of postmodernity, where the concept of reification is at the centre. Voice is highly valued for its ability to communicate, and voice is nothing if it is not heard. Communication and understanding seem to be the goal of having a voice. Therefore, the question is whether or not the notion of communication is another ideological fix that cannot be upheld, at least not in postmodernity, where reification has invaded not only the subject, but also voice and communication.

The conclusion, "Negotiating Voice: The End," is not really a conclusion in the proper sense. I regard this chapter as an attempt to redeem the harsh, critical approach to voice characteristic of the other chapters by trying to negotiate other ways of perceiving voice in drama. In this new approach, I make short, interpretative attempts at understanding voice in certain dramas that possibly find a way to make voice uphold its promise to empower subjects—in particular, marginalized and oppressed subjects. I do this by studying the two dramas: *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* by Ntozake Shange and *Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DRAMATIC VOICE: TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

[...] in giving his name, God also appealed to translation, not only between the tongues that had suddenly become multiple and confused, but first *of his name*, of the name he had proclaimed, given, and which should be translated as confusion to be understood, hence to let it be understood that it is difficult to translate and so to understand.

—Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel”

What is obvious is in a certain sense made incomprehensible, but this is only in order that it may then be made all the easier to comprehend.

—Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*

It seems fairly uncontroversial to say that voice is central to the dramatic production. But the question is, what is the relation between writing and performance when talking about voice? To understand the relation between the two, it is important to understand the actual transition. In this chapter, I will use translation theory to understand this transition. Furthermore, I will connect these theories of translation to theories of writing as well as theories of embodiment and corporeality to further unravel the relation between text and performance when discussing voice.

Translation is not only a concept describing the transition from an original text to a translated copy, but also it theorizes the relation between the two in intricate ways.

Translation, origin, and the subject

Traditional theories of translation set up a rather straightforward relation between translation and origin whereby the translation is seen as a copy of the original, albeit a copy with literary merits in its own right. In such theories, the focus is always on the original text because it is the original text which needs to be reconstructed in the translation. In this theoretical

setup, a translation is always a failure, in that it is always secondary and derivative.

It is this view of translation that Walter Benjamin tries to revisualize in “The Task of the Translator.” Benjamin’s reconstruction is not an attempt to make translation possible in the traditional sense (as in avoiding failure), but rather, it is a way to theorize failure and the impossibility of translation as such, so as to envision a new relation between the original and translation. As Paul de Man explains in “Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator,’” “the question then becomes why this failure with regard to an original text, to an original poet, is for Benjamin exemplary” (de Man 1986, 80). In his reconstruction of Benjamin’s text, de Man argues that “the translator has to give up in relation to the task of refinding what was there in the original” (de Man 1986, 80). This is a way to re-theorize both translation as a practical operation and the translator with his or her task. As we shall see, the translation of voice highlights these problems given that voice is a key to the construction of origin in theories of translation.

One of the foundations of traditional literary theory is that a literary text is a form of communication where an author communicates intentional content to its reader. As Derrida explains in “Signature Event Context,”

meaning, the content of the semantic message, is thus transmitted, *communicated*, by different *means*, by technically more powerful mediations, over a much greater distance, but within a milieu that is fundamentally continuous and equal to itself, within a homogenous element across which the unity and integrity of meaning is not affected in an essential way. Here, all affection is accidental. (Derrida 1982, 311 emphasis in original)

With this view of language, the semantic content of a message constitutes the communication. The ways to communicate are many, but they are always secondary to the content, which always stays intact. The content prevails despite the variety of communication means. This is due to one guarantor—the producer of the communication content—that is, the subject uttering an utterance. Thus, voice and subjectivity interact in ways where one functions as a guarantor for the other, reciprocally. The meaning of what is uttered is guaranteed by the idea of an autonomous thinking subject whose intention is communicated (voiced), and the construction of such a subject is made from the meaning of what is uttered (voiced). Meaning, in this sense, becomes extralinguistic in that it remains unaltered no matter what the language, linguistic form, communication strategy, or representational technique. The stability given to the idea of

content is dependent on its foundation in an autonomous subject whose intention guarantees the stability of what is said. In the case of a literary text, that producer or utterer would be the author. In this classical theoretical setup, the task of the translator is to get at the semantic content and translate it without alteration (or at least as little alteration as possible), thus keeping the author's voice (and intention) intact. This idea of communication presupposes what Derrida calls the "simplicity of origin," "continuity between varieties," and "homogeneity" (Derrida 1982, 311), an idea which will be questioned and probed throughout this chapter.

This communication model points to concepts which are fundamental to translation and which are my focus: communication, meaning, origin and voice. In many ways, voice is the guarantee that the others function. Voice guarantees that there is a situation of communication (what Derrida in "Signature Event Context" calls a "context") and that the words spoken have meaning. This is guaranteed by the existence of a speaking subject whose existence is presumed from what has been said. The subject (through voice) functions as the origin of what is uttered, which situates the entire utterance. In the communicative act, there is logic grounded in the subject which argues that "If men write it is (1) because they have something to communicate; (2) because what they have to communicate is their 'thought,' their 'ideas,' their representations" (Derrida 1982, 312). When this structure is applied to literature, the utterance or communicative content refers to the literary text (or in this case, the play). The sender, whose voice is transmitted through the artwork, is the author, and the receiver is the reader who reads and understands the utterance, in this case, via the form of a literary text. The idea of voice is left intact thanks to this communicative model.

Benjamin, however, argues that translation has nothing to do with the communication of meaning or the communication of semantic content. Thus, a translator's main task is not to reconstruct the meaning or content supposedly communicated in the original by the author. This task, on the contrary, is the "hallmark of bad translations" (Benjamin 1999, 70). It is a complete misunderstanding of the task of the translator, according to Benjamin. Rather, Benjamin argues that translation is marked by language, by form. The very starting point in Benjamin's text is to question translation as a way of transmitting the meaning or content of a literary text: "For what does a literary work 'say'? What does it communicate? It 'tells' very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information" (Benjamin, 1999, 70). Benjamin's axiom that translation has nothing to do with communication therefore breaks some fundamental tenets of not only translation, but also

of literary theory. This is where Benjamin is highly radical. His definition of translation as “form” without intentional meaning “transplants the original into a more definite linguistic realm” (Benjamin 1999, 75). Benjamin’s theory of translation contains an embryo of a poststructuralist understanding of language in its insistence on form. His theory of translation thus evokes a non-innocent view of language because translation in no way centres on meaning as an extra-linguistic category. In this view, translation is a reminder that all we have is language, and no “outside” to rely on for meaning.

Intersemiotic translation

So far, we have discussed translation in terms of the translation of texts. The question that must be raised when discussing drama is if a difference can be found between the translation of a text to another text and the translation of a text into a performance.

Roman Jakobson speaks of three forms of translation: interlingual translation (“which interprets linguistic signs by means of some other language”), intralingual translation (“which interprets linguistic signs by means of other signs of the same language”) and intersemiotic translation (“which interprets linguistic signs by means of systems of non-linguistic signs”) (Derrida 1985,173). Jakobson’s differentiation between the three kinds of translation is interesting because of the implications inherent in such a separation, and Derrida also discusses this in “Des Tours de Babel.” The logic guiding Jakobson’s argument, according to Derrida, is the idea that “proper,” interlingual translation needs little explication. Derrida grounds this argument on that the other two kinds of translation (intralingual and intersemiotic translation) need translating to be understood. In Jakobson’s text, intralingual translation is also called “rewording,” and intersemiotic translation is called “transmutation.” However, proper translation needs no translation because Jakobson assumes that this relation is natural and uncomplicated.

He supposes that it [interlingual translation] is not necessary to translate; everyone understands what that means because everyone had experienced it, everyone is expected to know what is a language, the relation of one language to another and especially identity or difference in fact of language. (Derrida 1985, 174)

Implied in this argument is the assumption that language as such is well-defined, contained, and stable, and the transition between two languages is, therefore, uncomplicated. It would seem that the other two kinds of

translation, in some sense, are less natural and uncomplicated; hence, Jakobson's need to translate them. However, as shown in the previous section, such a notion is something that Derrida (with Benjamin and de Man) questions. Consequently, Derrida would argue that the commonsensical belief that interlingual translation needs no translation is naive. Rather, the two other forms of translation, and their need for translation, point to a set of problems inherent in all forms of translation. Furthermore, Derrida argues that this points to an ambiguity inherent in language itself. Interestingly, the form of translation that I deal with here is precisely not interlingual (proper) translation, but rather, intralingual and intersemiotic translation.

What I want to make clear is the connection between translation, as it is laid out above, and voice in drama, which is my focus for this book. It is not about translation in Jakobson's "proper" sense, but rather, what we have is *intralingual translation*—translation within the same language. In this way, translation in drama and performance shows Derrida's point that all forms of linguistic interaction are a form of translation, even within the same language. The reason for this is that language is not a stable entity; it needs constant translation to be understood. This is made clear in the translation from text to performance in drama—a transition which is in no sense stable, constant, or reliable even if the language is the same. Secondly, the translation of voice in drama is also a form of *intersemiotic translation* in that it also involves different forms of signs. In the transition from text to performance, the body of the actor is part of the translation itself in the form of gestures, movement, visual appearance, physiognomy, vocal tone, pitch, dialect, et cetera. However, the two forms of translation are not as separate or distinct as Jakobson makes it seem.

One significant aspect when discussing voice in the translation of drama is the function of embodiment. Embodiment is central to dramatic translation in that, in the transition, voice is given an actual body. If we compare textual voices to the voices produced in a performance, the latter is (or is seemingly) more material, more corporeal, and perhaps more "truly" vocal. The issue then becomes understanding the ways in which embodiment affects the translation, and as a result, also affects the production of meaning, the stability of signification, the origin of the utterances produced, and the solidity of subjectivity. The question is if embodiment brings stability to voice and hence also to writing, language, and the production of meaning due to its connection to materiality.

The dichotomy of mind and body is crucial to this discussion of embodiment because in classical philosophy, the body is placed firmly in the sphere of materiality, as opposed to metaphysics. Placing the body in

this context immediately places it in a complex history with complex philosophical implications and political effects. However, without attempting to make an extensive philosophical exposition on the relation between mind and body, metaphysics and materiality, it can generally (and in sweeping terms) be said that the body as materiality is firmly placed on the downside (or perhaps the dark side) of the world, mainly because of philosophy's resolve to uphold the metaphysical and the transcendental. The connection between body and materiality has, therefore, been a way to undervalue the importance of the body in the construction of the subject. This understanding is by no means politically innocent, but has had consequences in historical constructions of gender, race, and class. This is why most political theories that have engaged in this dichotomized construct have tried to resolve or find a way out of the mind-body construction.² However, the body as a theoretical and philosophical construct has also enjoyed continual appreciation. The historical and philosophical disqualification of the body has given it value precisely for its oppositionality. Many feminist theorists, for instance, in an attempt to reconstruct the concept of woman, have endorsed materiality and the body. The body is then valued because its materiality positions it outside ideological, hegemonic formations. As such, the body is seen as something we as subjects have a direct and authentic relation to. In such theories, the body becomes a positive definition used to redefine subjectivity, individuality, and identity.³

What becomes clear when discussing voice in general and voice in drama more specifically is that body and materiality play a major role. However, to understand (or at least strive to understand) the ways in which voice plays on materiality and embodiment in drama, it is important to recognize poststructuralist theories of language given that such theories have formed a comprehensive critique of voice (and hence of embodiment, presence, and subjectivity). Richard Aczel puts this critique of voice quite succinctly, even if he is unfairly dismissive of those theories:

Voice, conceived as origin, as pure self-presence, has, for some thirty years, figured as the bugbear of a whole species of literary and critical theory. From Jacques Derrida's anxieties about "the privilege of the phone" in *Speech and Phenomena* and the subsequent project of "grammatology" to subvert the hegemony of speech over writing, through Roland Barthes's apodeictic "writing is the destruction of every voice," to Andrew Gibson's criticism in *Towards a Poststructuralist Theory of Narrative* of the hankering after "presence as source and origin" that informs the concept of narrative voice, voice has been the stand-up infidel of poststructuralism's crusade against the "metaphysics of presence" that has apparently dominated Western thought since Plato. (Aczel 2001, 598)

What Derrida turns against is a view of voice as a guarantor of human presence:

Derrida equates the “epoch of the phone” with the “epoch of being in the form of presence, that is, of ideality” and identifies “an unfailing complicity between idealization and speech (*voix*)” in so far as the “signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention . . . is in absolute proximity to me.” (Aczel 2001, 598–599)

As discussed previously in this chapter, poststructuralist theories of language as “writing” dismantle the subject as the originator of language, and instead, pose a view of language as “*différance*, the combined operation of both differing and deferring, which ‘at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay’” (Derrida quoted in Aczel 2001, 599). Contrary to traditional literary criticism, the poststructuralists claim that meaning is generated only in negative terms; for example, a sign gets its meaning only in relation to other signs, and a text gets its meaning only in relation to other texts. Thus, meaning is not something that is produced inside the subject. Such a comprehensive critique comes to matter in specific ways when discussing voice in drama.

Voice as text

Voice holds a special position in Western philosophy and Western culture. It is a concept which has explained and organized such vastly metaphysical ideas as origin, presence, subjectivity, individuality, identity, meaning, and communication. As such a concept, voice has also been central for analysing texts.⁴ Literary theory has managed to sidestep the inherent silence of the text with the idea of voice. By arguing that voice exists in texts, the idea of human presence is retained—even when it is blatantly absent. According to Andrew Gibson, in literary theory, voice has “long ago worked free of any material reference,” which means that literary critics “have more or less tacitly continued to associate it with human presences, a humanistic construction of experience or familiar humanist values” (Gibson 2001a, 640).

Narratology, which aims to systematize the ways in which a narrative operates as a text, uses voice as one of its central concepts in ways that display its usefulness. Gerard Genette designates a whole chapter in *Narrative Discourse* to voice and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan does the same in *Narrative Fiction* (as do most introductions to narration following in the footsteps of Gerard Genette’s classic text). In their textual universe, voice

is used to explain who tells the story by means of different levels of narration. As Gibson puts it, voice is the “‘fixed point’ or center within narrative theory” (Gibson 2001a, 641).

Also, Searle and Austin’s theories on speech acts are central to this insistence on voice in text and is frequently used in the study of novels, short stories, drama, and poetry. All their theories are based on the presence of a speaking subject who is responsible for the utterances produced. As we shall see, also this communication model, in many ways, clashes with poststructuralist theories of literature-as-writing.

What does it then mean to say that voices speak in texts? Is it even possible to say that a reader can hear those voices in the texts? In a special issue of *New Literary History*, Monika Fludernik, Andrew Gibson, Richard Aczel, Manfred Jahn, and Brian Richardson debate this question in depth. On a fundamental level, all critics acknowledge that it is indeed irrational to claim such a thing. In his article, Andrew Gibson argues,

Literary art is the tomb of speech. It may pervasively mimic speech, may serve as a memorial to, record of, or testimony to speech or words spoken. That does not crucially change matter. To Roland Barthes’s famous question as to who speaks in the text, the answer, it would seem, is no one, ever. (Gibson 2001a, 640)

One “hears” nothing when reading because no one is actually speaking. In his article, Richard Aczel attempts to salvage voice from poststructuralism’s deconstruction of it by arguing for a “reader-oriented understanding of voice,” which he sees as “a fruitful response to the critical anxieties of deconstruction concerning voice” (Aczel 2001, 598). In his recuperation of voice, Aczel sees voice as a “historically situated event” of hearing, produced by a reader’s dialogue with “quoted speech styles” (Aczel 2001, 605). In his reformulation of voice, it becomes pressingly clear that such a voice is a far cry from what traditionally designates voice.

All critics seem to agree that there can be no voice in texts, but rather, voice is, in Fludernik’s terms, an interpretative move where a textual signifier is reconstructed into voice to make the speaking subject guarantee the meaning of the text by means of a coherent, speaking subject. Voice is then a meaning–effect created by the reader and quite different from the embodied voice attributed to a human presence. Voice is then, by necessity, something else: “Insofar as the term ‘voice’ is used to designate any feature of literary narrative, when its status is neither linguistic nor technical, that status is at once metaphorical” (Gibson 2001a, 640). This means that despite this idea of a reconstruction of the textual signifier into voice, texts cannot produce voice; they cannot speak, for practical, as well

as theoretical reasons. Texts are silent—the black marks on the page remain voiceless marks of signification.

Why then, do literary critics continue to insist on voice in literary texts? Especially when texts cannot guarantee a human or a speaking subject given that text, as writing, is characterized precisely by the absence of such groundings. A clear anxiety concerning the origin of linguistic utterances can be found in much literary theory and language philosophy, and voice seems to be a construction masking, or alleviating, this anxiety. Rather than being a descriptive term, voice is a concept that produces a seemingly failsafe (and naturalized) connection between language, subjectivity, and meaning. As Gibson puts it, “There is apparently no disputing the audibility of mediation as a guarantee of full presence” (Gibson 2001a, 642).

The way that voice upholds the idea of presence and keeps difference at bay is by way of the practice of attribution, that is, by attributing each utterance to a speaking subject. In textual analysis, the practice of attributing each textual segment to a subject is central. The utterances produced in a text become controlled and regulated by the construction of a subject uttering them, even if that “voice” and that subjective presence is metaphorical at best. Such a metaphorical voice nonetheless vouches for a stable theory of language based on an uncomplicated communication model.

Narratology is the literary method which has most systematically grappled with the idea of attribution. It does this by structurally classifying the narrative text (the words on the page) into different voices. By sustaining the idea of voice in this otherwise technical approach to literature (what Gibson calls the “narratological ‘technology of narrative’”), it reinstates “‘life in literature’ in ‘ghostly’ form,” (Gibson 2001a, 643). And this “life in literature” is indeed characterized by “a particular valuation of reason, the conscious will, the self-identity of consciousness, the certitude and unity of inner existence,” that is, by a valuation of human presence. This human presence, in turn, “has held the specters of difference and non-presence at bay” (Gibson 2001a, 642).

The way in which the narratologist goes about attribution is to divide the text into narrative levels, with each level having its own narrative voice. The most accessible voices in a text are the voices within the diegesis, that is, the voices of the characters. However, the most fundamental voice in a text, according to narratology, is not the ones who are speaking within the story (the characters), but the one *telling the story*. This voice establishes “the way in which the narrating itself is implicated in the narrative” (Genette quoted in Fludernik 2001a, 619). Who this teller

is continues to be a major debate in literary theory. The idea of the author has long dominated literary criticism and is still a viable construct in literary theory. However, after poststructuralism and Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author," the author has been seriously dismantled. Nevertheless, narratologists argue for a teller inherent in the text. Thus, within narratology today, the narrator is construed as the textual speaker of the story. The author is retained (in some narrative theory) in reconstructed form as the implied author—and thus functions as a guarantor of the work as a whole (its gist and core meaning). However, the main point is that each utterance (word, sentence, section) needs a distinct origin to whom it can be attributed. For most narratologists, the narrator and the construction of distinct narrative levels (extradiegetic, intradiegetic, hypodiegetic narrative levels) fulfils this need. Moreover, the narrator retains his or her "humanity" by being ascribed a voice.

It is interesting to see that narratologists in their categorization of voice in narration, produce a gradation of voice in the name of mimesis. Fludernik claims that Genette "fails to take into account the mimetic illusion generated by the 'voice' factor" (Fludernik, 2001a, 623), and hence, fails to analyse how voice is to uphold the idea of mimesis. In her theory, she sees the practice of attribution as

a strategy of narrativization. It serves a mimetic interest since the attribution of linguistic material to characters or narrators is subtended by a mimetic concept of the narrative text: the text is supposed to represent a fictional world, and—to the extent that such a world is being evoked—the reader will start to clothe the *dramatis personae* with bodies, minds, opinions, linguistic idiosyncracies—with speech in all its physiological and ideational qualities. (Fludernik 2001b, 708)

Thus, attribution becomes a way to construct voice, presence, and subjectivity out of words on the page.

The literary form that most upholds mimesis in regard to voice is the mimetic text that foregrounds the voices of the characters. "Showing" in the classical literary sense, means "hearing" those voices "unmediated," producing an "illusion of immediacy" (Fludernik 2001, 623). This illusion is what generates the strongest impression of voice in a text.

From the perspective of voice, the narrator is more problematic in that he represents the very act of narrating itself, exposing the metalevel of the narrative. This means that the narrator fictionalizes, and thus distances, the voices in the story. However, despite this inconvenience, the narrator is nonetheless made to fit the constructions of voice by narratologists. An intradiegetic, homodiegetic narrator can be argued to have a voice in that

the narrator is given presence, subjectivity, and identity in the text in accordance with the characters' voices.

An extradiegetic, heterodiegetic, and overt narrator is more problematic. Such a narrator can be argued to have a voice of some sort, but with no proper body or presence, which makes it difficult to accommodate such a voice even in the most metaphorical sense of the word.

The most problematic narrative form in terms of the application of voice would be an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic, covert, or absent narrator (the same kind of mimetic narration described above). Although such narration foregrounds the voices of the characters, narratologists are more concerned with the central idea of a voice "telling" the story. That the characters' voices are present or foregrounded in this kind of narration is a given; however, the debate concerning whether or not the narrator (as the "teller" of the story) is covert or absent in mimetic texts continues:

Genette *on principle* denies the possibility of a text without a speaker (or narrator), a stance that can be rejected on the basis of redefinitions of the term narrator. In texts that do not display linguistic markers signalling the presence of a speaker (*I*, deictic elements, expressive markers, stylistic foregrounding), the presence of a narrator is merely implicit, "covert." Here, according to my own proposals, the insistence on the presence of a speaker constitutes an interpretative move, in which the reader concludes from the presence of a narrative discourse that somebody must be narrating the story and that therefore there must be a hidden narrator (or narrative voice) in the text. (Fludernik 2001a, 622 emphasis in original)

Even when a text is purely mimetic, where diegetic narration is altogether missing, the idea of the narrator is retained on the grounds that somebody must be telling the story. This means that even when the narrator is absent, he is construed as covert.

In *Literary History*, Fludernik and Aczel both discuss the role of the narrator and what they call the "reflector mode." The question they raise is whether or not there is such a thing as a "pure" reflector mode where the narrator is presumed absent, or whether, a narrator must be presumed in all narrative forms. In his article, Aczel claims that the narrator is present in all form of narration, at least in the form of stylization, diction, and rhetoric. Fludernik, on the other hand, argues that the minimal requirement for naming something "voice" is the existence of expressive markers in the text. This means that she questions the existence of a narrative voice in literary forms that lack such expressive markers. She argues that the insistence that somebody must be telling the story relies on a communicative model that is quite unfitting to a literary narrative and

where the ultimate teller of the story always ends up being the author: “Nothing demonstrates as clearly the weakness of the communicational thesis as this constraint to find a narrator’s voice behind the linguistic surface structure, to impute existence to a fact of diction” (Fludernik 2001a, 622).⁵

Contrary to literary theory’s concerned preoccupation with voice, drama theory has had a fairly unproblematic approach to voice. This is because drama theory is formed around the idea that the dramatic text incorporates the performance, wherein voice will be embodied. This approach to voice as naturally embodied is also made possible by the play’s typographic layout. Attribution in the dramatic text is a straightforward affair because each utterance is given a clear designation, that is, a name that pinpoints the utterance. In a dramatic text, you always have the name first (often capitalized, italicized, or marked in some way), and then the words spoken by the character follow. This layout generates the impression of unmediated, speaking subjects to whom the textual utterances can be attributed at all times, thus avoiding any anxiety concerning origin and presence. In this way, the dramatic text also more clearly envisions embodied communication in that each utterance is allocated a human presence (even if that presence in this dramatic expression is still disembodied). Thus, a communication model seems to be effortlessly applied to the dramatic text, downplaying any anxiety concerning origin, presence, and the unruly processes of signification.

Dramatic theory’s focus on the performative aspects of drama has prompted Keir Elam to compare dialogue in drama to real conversation rather than to literary narration such as novels. In his book, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, Elam argues that dramatic discourse is ordered and controlled, in that it is characterized by proper turn-taking, complete sentences, and a coherent narrative order. Such order and control is lacking in everyday conversation, which abounds with cut-off sentences, digressions, interventions, et cetera. Although this is an accurate observation, my analysis of drama is somewhat different. In my line of reasoning, what gives a sense of control and stabilization when it comes to voice is the ability to connect what is said to a speaking subject. Such a connection is routine in everyday conversation because of the bodily presence of the subject and a body creating an utterance. A text, on the other hand, is characterized by the lack of such bodily presence and origin, which in turn, gives the sense of a lack of such control. This difference in focus produces two different views of what produces order and control in dramatic dialogue (and in other texts) and embodied conversation, which drama spans from text through to performance. I would argue that the

seeming lack of order in everyday conversation is downplayed by the security given by the bodily presence of the speaker (which grounds the utterance in a subject), whereas the orderliness characterizing textual dialogue (taking turns, speaking in coherent complete sentences, causality, et cetera) is undermined by the uncertainty rendered by the lack of such bodily presence (making language into an unstable and uncontrollable signification process).

This focus on voice further emphasizes the idea that drama consists only of the characters' voices—that it is performative, and not narrative, in its structure. Aristotle argues that drama is not a narrative because of its component of “spectacle,” which is specific only to drama. However, as Seymour Chatman argues, spectacle is “an element of the actualization of stories, and not one of the underlying components of narrative structure” (Chatman 1990, 109).

In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Gerard Genette treats dramatic fiction as inherently different from narrative fiction, arguing that there is a “truly insurmountable opposition between dramatic representation and narrative” (Genette 1988, 41). The difference, according to Genette, lies in the fact that a drama is mimetic and narrative is diegetic, which means that narrative fiction is conveyed by “a *verbal* representation” (Genette 1988, 41), something that is missing in drama (being in itself performative). This means that, contrary to narrative fiction, drama is analysed as lacking a narrator (a narrative presence, a narrative voice). Genette argues that drama is performed and is therefore not told by anyone. Such a construction is crucial for the illusion of voice as origin and presence.

However, in more recent years, narratologists have attempted to understand drama in terms of narrative. In his article, “Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama: Aspects of a Narratology of Drama,” Manfred Jahn clearly places drama within the narrative genre, but argues that it has two expressions—written and performed—which he demonstrates with an illustrative diagram. The question he raises is if drama, in its textual expression, “admits of the narratological concepts of a narrating instance or a narrative voice” (Jahn 2001a, 660). The overriding question is whether a film or a play contains a discourse level if that level entails a “teller” of the story. What Jahn argues is that films and plays do contain a “teller.” He discusses drama in close relation to theories on mimetic narratives, where the narrator is not seen as absent, but maximally covert. The question raised is if one can, or should, presume a narrator telling the drama as in mimetic fiction even if that narrator has more of an “impersonal, covert show-er or arranger function” (Jahn 2001a, 670) than a traditional narrator.

The question raised is if we can imagine a text without voice. Monika Fludernik openly asks:

If we can say that there is no need of a narrator persona because we are only invoking a speaker persona where there is none, then the same argument might be proffered for voice (and for focalization). We do not have any *theoretical* reason for assuming that certain words are indicative of a narrator's voice, or a character's. The text is language, but it is not a tape recording. Attributions of voice are interpretative moves. (Fludernik 2001a, 635-636)

Thus, she concludes that "this may be the point at which the usefulness of the narratological concept of voice is exhausted" (Fludernik 2001a, 636). At the same time, the most sceptical writer on voice in literary texts discussed here, Andrew Gibson, asks

whether it is currently possible to think narrative *without* thinking voice. Do we know how to attend to the muteness of narrative, how *not* to hear it? To suggest that the term "voice" is always a metaphor is not *ipso facto* to diminish its power, or that of the discourses for which it is significant. (Gibson 2001a, 643 emphasis in original)

In *Coming to Terms*, Seymour Chatman attempts to find a way of talking of mimetic narration which involves the discourse level without relapsing back to an idea of voice, and with voice, human presence as the foundation of all narratives. What Chatman does is widen the idea of a narrative to include the concept of "showing": "If 'to narrate' is too fraught with vocal overtones, we might adopt 'to present' as a useful superordinate" (Chatman 1990, 113). He goes on to argue: "To 'show' a narrative, I maintain, no less than to 'tell' it, is to 'present it narratively' or to 'narrate' it" (Chatman 1990, 113). Important for Chatman's inclusion of "showing" as well as "telling" as the basis of narrative is that he takes away the conceptually fundamental idea of human presence: "This allows for the recognition of a kind of narration that is not performed by a recognizably human agency. I argue that human personality is not a sine qua non for narratorhood" (Chatman 1990, 115). Chatman's argument implies a couple of things. Firstly, that voice is not the only way to narrate. Secondly, it implies that the idea of human presence is not fundamental to narration. And thirdly, with this move, he widens the idea of narration to include other forms than traditionally supposed.

Hence, Seymour Chatman argues that drama is indeed a form of narrative "at least in the sense that it is based, like epic, on that component of narrative which we call 'story'" (Chatman 1990, 109), and that 'story'