

# Lexicon of the Mouth

Poetics and Politics of Voice  
and the Oral Imaginary

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# INTRODUCTION: MOVEMENT

Is not the voice always already intervening, as a sounded body that searches for its place, one that projects forward to incite response? An intervention with great resonance, and one lodged within the power dynamics of particular structures—linguistic, familial, pedagogic, governmental, etc. A voice that is subsequently often overheard, underrepresented, and interrupted.

Around these vocal conditions the mouth operates, *performs*, as that architecture or vessel or stage—*the mouth has many descriptions . . .*—that gives form to voice, and that is informed by the push and pull of an oral drive. Yet the voice is but one type of production generated by the mouth; parallel to voicing, it also continually fills with breath and food, to respire and ingest; it lingers over the taste of another (the central axis of a primary memory), to also move with sudden hiccups or stutters, kisses, and murmurs, and to mediate innumerable exchanges. The mouth, in other words, is an extremely active cavity whose movements lead us from the depths of the body to the surface of the skin, from the materiality of things to the pressures of linguistic grammars—from breath to matter, and to the spoken and the sounded. Subsequently, I would highlight the mouth as an essential means by which the body is always already put into relation.

The mouth is thus wrapped up in the voice, and the voice in the mouth, so much so that to theorize the performativity of the spoken is to confront the tongue, the teeth, the lips, and the throat; it is to feel the mouth as a fleshy, wet lining around each syllable, as well as a texturing orifice that marks the voice with specificity, not only in terms of accent or dialect, but also by the depth of expression so central to the body.

As Mladen Dolar states, the voice is projected from the body to circulate *out there*—“a bodily missile which has detached itself from its source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal.”<sup>1</sup> The expressiveness of this projection can be seen and heard as an amplification of not only words, but also the exchange between an inside and an outside, one that intersects there in the mouth to force all sorts of productions. In doing so, the mouth also draws into tension the relation between language, as an abstract socializing system, and our embodied, sensual experiences. It is a meeting point, a

contact zone where language performs as a powerful agent, yet one that also spirits so many oral imaginings and poetics, where surfaces and depths continually interweave in feverish exchange.

*The mouth functions to figure and sustain the body as a subject, a subject within a network of relations.*

If voice is the very thing that forces itself outward, to carve out a space for the self amid all the intensities of surroundings, the mouth can be highlighted as the cavity that resonates with all such negotiations and brings them back *into* the body, to gather and to inflect future expression. Subsequently, the mouth is precisely what puts into question the separation of interior and exterior, as distinct and stable; as a primary conduit that brings into contact the material world with the depths of the body, the mouth continually unsettles the limits of embodiment. It performs as an extremely vital link—the essential link—to the world and those around us, to echo and vibrate with a multitude of forces that pass through its chamber, from the edible to the inedible, the symbolic to the semiotic, the proper to the improper. Even before we come to voice, the mouth has already initiated a confrontation with the forces surrounding and penetrating us, leaving their deep impressions firmly upon the tongue and hence our psychological life.

Accordingly, it is my view that the mouth requires greater attention within discourses on the performativity of the body and the politics of voice. It may figure alongside considerations of the gendered or racial body, as a performative chamber fully wed to identity and its social conditioning; it inserts within the linguistic field an extremely rich and problematic force—a poetics—by drawing language up against a multitude of somatic expenditures and dreamy expressions; and it places us into profound contact with the materiality of things and bodies, extending the experiences of taste and touch, and the limits of the flesh. The mouth affords entry onto the complicated weave of language and power, inscription and iteration, by locating speech as part of a greater assemblage where breath and spit, food and vomit, desire and angst, for instance, all stage their particular events to ultimately surround, interrupt, flavor, and support forms of agency and communion. In short, the mouth is so radically connected to both language and the body, desire and the other, as to provide an extremely pertinent education on what it means to be—and to create oneself as—a subject.

The aim of this work is to ultimately figure the mouth as an agile and animating creature, an assemblage of parts whose productions and expressions are heterogeneous, spiriting multiple personalities and multiple drives. This work is thus structured specifically to articulate this expanded territory of oral performativity and to insist upon its multiplicity. It is constructed as a lexicon so as to capture *and* let loose its central theme: the expressivity of the oral cavity.

## Voice

The voice is that primary event that circulates to wrap us in its sonorities, silences and rhythms, and intonations. It operates as an essential force that animates the other to bring him or her closer to me, while also prompting my own: it is this voice that calls me into speech; I respond, return—to turn toward or away—and repeat, in that primary citation defined by Judith Butler, not only in terms of language and the coerciveness of power, but importantly, in the wish to be desired.<sup>2</sup> I turn to the other, with a voice shaped by *this other one*: I speak in order to locate myself near you.

The mouth can be understood as the physical site of such vocal productions, longings, and powerful interactions. While the voice may come at me, and *into* me, as a projected sound, it is the other's mouth to which my body turns—I rest upon this mouth; and while the voice may also come *out* of me, it is the mouth that shapes these outpourings, which I must move and that provides a reverberant space where exchanges of deep intimacy may take shape, through words as well as by a range of oral gestures—how often a kiss overcomes the estrangement voice can produce! The voice may extend the range of the body precisely by returning us to the mouth. In this regard, is it truly possible to separate the two, the voice and the mouth?

It is my view that the mouth is unavoidable. It figures as that point of vital animation upon the body, *for* the body, and which I focus on when spoken to: I watch the lips, awaiting their nuanced movements, their sudden exuberance, to reveal so much about this one who speaks. The mouth is so clearly *around* voice—it is the voice's physical envelope that can in turn say so much; it is entirely invested in the production and sustainability of a subject—it is required.

As the space of (not only) voice's reverberations, the mouth may be said to be *ringed* by language; it lingers in the mouth, as so much grammar and vocabulary, with so much hope and fear, pressure as well as possibility. Yet the mouth is also a dwelling wherein longing finds resonance: it searches in and around language for what is missing (as Julia Kristeva poses, what is missing is the mother . . .)<sup>3</sup> and for what can be done to fill those gaps with energy or matter: with laughter and humming, licking and kissing, which might assuage such fundamental absence.

In addition, the mouth is the central entry point *into* the body, and that interior space brought forward by the voice. As Walter Ong emphasizes, it is through the voice that “interiors commune with interiors”; speech *sounds out* our interiority to deliver it to another, and deeper, into the interior private space of their hearing. Yet it is the mouth that operates as interiority's material lining.<sup>4</sup> These surfaces of the mouth fully surround our vocality, and should be followed beyond what we can see. Rather, the mouth starts there on the face and folds into the oral cavity, to tunnel down the

throat. A series of surfaces equally muscular and viscous, resounding and relational. From flexed expressions and liquid operations to vibrational and reverberant productions, and finally, to the movements of social contact, the interior announced by Ong is not buried within the self, but rather flows as a membrane across and through the body; the interior is embedded in words not only according to the soul, but also the physical linings and muscles, the depths and surfaces that function in speech, to force it out.

The mouth thus performs an absolutely dynamic conditioning to how the voice operates, how it sounds and gestures, exposes and hides, figures and disfigures. The voice is such an effective and sensual material precisely because it comes from the mouth; it rises from the chest, up into the throat to shudder the vocal cords, to appear (for surely, it appears!) in and then from out of the mouth, rippling behind the facial muscles, the nasal passage, and along the jaw. We experience the voice by feeling it *in our body*.

These physical features of voice are drawn out here not to insist upon the body as an essential site for voice—not as nostalgia for a totalizing and secure presence. Rather, they are located within this work to highlight how recognition—to be a subject—is unmistakably tied to *having a say*, which is also fully predicated on having a mouth. It is my argument that to understand the full range of the voice, as an event (and discourse) entangling itself around bodies, desires, politics, identities, and nations, it is important to recognize the mouth in all its performative verve, effective influence, and complicated drama.

In this regard, I also pose the mouth as *never always* about voice. While much of this work seeks to remind the voice of its oral chamber, I equally aim to query the mouth in and of itself, as an extremely complex bodily *thing*. (What might I call this—this thing: an organ? A site? A machine? . . .) The mouth is a certain forcefulness—a sensitive muscularity, a soft and impressionable arena open to innumerable experiences, and wielding profound influence.

Subsequently, I would put into question what Dolar further identifies as the inherent “acousmatic” nature of the voice, as a sounded event that is both mine and not mine, and that never fully synchronizes with the one who speaks. “The source of the voice can never be seen, it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, it cannot possibly match what we can see. [. . .] Every emission of the voice is by its very essence *ventriloquism*.”<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the voice is defined as a “paradoxical enigma.” While it may come from my body, it never quite belongs to me; in short, it brings me into the world according to a fundamental separation from myself. This leads Dolar to map the voice as an *object* whose essential condition is determined by a fundamental gap between what we see and what we hear, between this voice and this body. “Now the voice as the object, that paradoxical creature that we are after, is also a break”<sup>6</sup>—a break from the very fulfillment of presence it seems to also endorse.

In contrast, might the voice be thought of more as a tension—a tensed link, a flexed respiration, and equally, a struggle to *constitute* the body, rather than a disembodied sound? Not so much an object, but rather a primary production of a body? A body trying to be a subject? As Fred Moten poses, the voice is precisely what resists forces of objectification, which relegates bodies to a space of abstraction, forces that in fact erase the body by separating an understanding of desire from the material of the voice—a system that, in short, refuses to connect the voice to a subject that speaks. For Moten, in contrast, the voice is an “irruption of phonic substance that cuts and augments meaning,” an irruption in other words that is always already a *someone* intervening onto the structures of the social.<sup>7</sup>

To return to Dolar’s proposition—of the voice as “a bodily missile which has detached itself from its source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal”<sup>8</sup>—it is this “yet” which I grab hold of here, and which has driven this work. The vocal link *back* to the corporeal is precisely a ground for agency; it is the process by which the voice is understood as an articulation of personhood, however unstable, to tense the relation between the forces of objectification and the demand for subjectivity. It is the linguistics that I’m after, one defined by the irrupting orifice, phonic substance, and the assembly of oral movements that challenge separation, commodification, and the forces that may define *my voice* as an object.

As I present, it is my view that the mouth acts to mobilize an extended animate field, one that “moves with the interruptive–connective force of polyrhythmic organization”<sup>9</sup>—to link precisely the interrupting drive and imagination of this body with the connective social reach of this voice.

It is my interest to emphasize the voice as something expelled from the mouth, but which *never* leaves me behind—this is both the promise of voice and its ultimate problematic. The voice does not move away from my body, but rather it carries it forward—the voice *stretches* me; it drags me along, as a body bound to its politics and poetics, its accents and dialectics, its grammars, as well as its handicaps.<sup>10</sup>

## Subject

Is not the voice then precisely a sound so full of body, a body under pressure and in search? A body textured by the force of emotion, sexuality, longing, intellect, and language, and that vocally labors to negotiate and explore the exchanges intrinsic to being a subject? In this regard, the “disembodied voice,” the “voice object,” and the primary ventriloquism of voicing often espoused is never the whole story: it is my view that the voice is also a *full body*, always already a *voice subject*, rich with intentions and meanings; sexed and gendered, classed and raced, accented, situated, and inflected by the intensities of numerous markings and their performance (inscriptions,

erasures, recitals, . . .). I would argue that the voice is always identified (though not always identifiable); it is flexed by the body, by the subject in all its complicated vitality. Someone (or *something*) speaks to me, and it is not the voice I hear, but rather the body, the subject; not a disembodied intensity, a speech without body, but as *someone* that enters, intrudes, demands, or requests, and that also seeks. A voice, as I understand it, that does not aspire to be an object.

The voice, in this way, *promises* a subject; it excites or haunts a listener to recognize in the voice a “someone.” An *implicit* body on the way toward an explicit drama: the anticipation or expectation every voice instigates, that of a figure soon to appear—someone I may hope for, or that I might also dread, or one that I may not even understand. This has certainly been the case when examining the operations of the whisper: the unvoiced nature of whispering operates so well within narratives of haunting because it is a voice that promises the imminent arrival of someone (or something). The voice, in this regard, *announces* the subject, however illusory or unseen, fragmented or fictional.

In other words, the voice is such a meaningful sound: even when my voice trips me up, falls short, or loses direction, such slippages also *mean*, if not all the more. From this view, I learn from the voice who I am precisely as it carries me, as it sounds me, as I feel it as part of my face, in my throat and mouth, and up my nose; the voice does not leave me, as something that is external to myself; rather, voice is my sounded self, which is equally a *faciality*, a *bodily figuring*, an *expression full of depth*—it is an animate production, a gesture, and subsequently, a form of behavior.

To accentuate this further, the voice might be imaged as a cord, one that may extend outward, unfurled, or cast like a line, but which retains an extremely vital link back to the one who speaks, to the face and further, to the depths. Subsequently, it invites or requests that we feel the presence of a body. Such dynamics may also force us to tremble under the weight of an ideological system whose “voice” wields such power by always projecting the possibility of a real body that may suddenly step forward. I may be hailed by a voice, but I am arrested by a body and its grip: its mouth that may clamp down onto this flesh or “bite my head off.” The voice is thus linked to an alimentary *grain*—the body in the voice as Barthes suggests<sup>11</sup>—on the verge of fuller materialization.

Sounds operate to often impart force to matter, to excite, and to animate, and in this way can also be heard as a type of *voicing*. Is not every object a potential body with a voice? A thing whose sudden vibration calls it forth into the realm of life, to become a subject? To bring forward a certain agency onto the scene? Are not the figures of puppets, dolls, and all such machines underscoring the voice as in need of a mouth? As predicated on a reference to the buccal? Even the smallest of objects, or rudimentary of renderings, are enough to perform as a mouth, and therefore, as the projection of a voice.

The voice draws my attention to the radio object for instance, the speaker in the corner, from which a voice arises; or from the puppet, the machine, or the digital device that speaks to me—even such seemingly inanimate objects or banal materials function as a body. I turn toward *It* as the object from which the voice appears and which comes to lend animation to its surfaces and its thingness. Is this not the power of ventriloquy and radiophony, to draw us toward a thing which suddenly speaks? That thing: *the mouth*.

## Mouthing

In researching the voice, I was led to the mouth. I couldn't get around it; it always interrupted my discursive gaze, demanding attention, as well as critical consideration. I wanted the voice, in all its complexity: it was my desire, my aim. Yet I recognized that in speaking of voice, I found the mouth—I fell into it; and in following this direction, by going in, I came to recognize how voicing is most often what I may call “mouthing.” *To mouth* is that instance of oral gesturing, whether in the drama of the yawn or in the sinister potential of the whisper; an action, in other words, that circulates in and around voicing, encapsulating it—*mouthing the words* should thus be taken literally, for the mouth wraps the voice, and all such wording, in its wet and impressionable envelope, its paralinguages. The mouth is a vessel piloting numerous utterances and potent silences, so much stuff, as to condition and influence acts of *coming out* as well as *going in*; of entries and exits, and the ways in which we cross boundaries or reinforce their presence; the mouth is first and foremost a device for modulating the limits of the body. In this regard, the mouth delivers an epistemology founded on processes and experiences of ingestion and incorporation, emanation and expulsion, attachment and loss: a series of knowledge paths defined by this orifice and its generative and volatile movements.

It captures and figures the somatic, the alimentary, the resonant, and the viscous as always already surrounding language, “cutting and augmenting meaning,” flinging it all over the place. I might turn here to Samuel Beckett's short play *Not I*, a monologue delivered by a mouth only.<sup>12</sup> This mouth breaks the darkness with its agitations, restlessness, and ranting, an outpouring that veers across memories, delirium, and breathlessness—*an irrupting orifice*. This mouth cannot stop and bites down onto language in search of transformation.

Is not the body sustained through our ability to chew properly? To speak up, repeat, and recite? To swallow, respire, and speak forth? Is not the acquisition of speech based on the ability to *fit* the words in one's mouth? To push the lips this way and that, shaping breath into particular forms? To handle all sorts of materials and issues, desires and commands, by way of the oral? We may be called into language, on a symbolic level, but it is

through the movements of the mouth that we negotiate entry (as well as exit).

The linguist John Laver points to this aspect in his study of phonetics, explicitly mapping the relation of the movements of the mouth—the positioning of the tongue, modulations of loudness and pitch, respiration, etc.—with the development of personality traits. For Laver, the interweaving of anatomy and muscular skills with speech patterns opens up toward an important understanding of the voice as embedded within a greater process of *configuring* the body.<sup>13</sup> Words, in this regard, wield a physical, as well as socializing, effect onto the *constitution* of the body.<sup>14</sup> This finds extension in William Labov’s important work in sociolinguistics.<sup>15</sup> For Labov, the articulations of the voice are thoroughly interlocked with their movements through social life, and are always conditioned by our family history, and by our place within particular environments. Language and voice are thus bound to the fact of our social experiences, which come to fundamentally shape our mouths, to contour the “mother tongue” with the particularities of dialect, and to impress upon the body a map of potential routes in and around vocal pressures: for bending, flexing, silencing, or exaggerating our vocal alliances. From such perspectives, linguistics is deeply fixed to the corporeal, to form a highly charged assemblage of words *and* the matters of the body.

In addition to readings in linguistics, as well as psychoanalytic studies, I’ve also considered examples from an array of cultural fields, such as art, television, literature, and music, which have provided material for expounding the ways in which the mouth performs to generate a variety of contacts and conversations that often bypass or extend the semantic. Yet it has also been my observation that often within cultural theory the mouth is obscured by the question of the voice. This has led me to wonder if the mouth has been lost in discourses on voice, disappearing under the looming notions of vocality and the general “reign” of a linguistic (and textual) imperative (to which I am also surely bound . . .). Even work that seeks to deepen our sense for voice as phonic material, that challenge the dominating logic of the semantic, seem also to pose voice as a given, a somewhat “natural” thing always already there, rather than as lodged in someone’s throat, upon someone’s tongue—in other words, as an oral tension.<sup>16</sup> While such discursive perspectives are extremely rich and valuable, and continue to lend to my own thinking, I increasingly feel the mouth has been forgotten, as the physical cavity inside of which voicing takes place. Even within the significant work done on “the Body”—and the interrogation of the subject under the dynamics of ideology, ordering inscriptions, and the performativity of power—here I am at a loss to find the tongue and the lips, and especially, the oral cavity as an extremely dynamic site where “body” is regularly negotiating relations to language, social structures, and the field of representations.<sup>17</sup>

It is toward the mouth then that I am drawn, and that I attempt to draw out here; to interlace the voice with the mouth, and to fill the mouth with a range of issues; and in doing so, to discover in what ways mouthing surrounds the voice, to operate as a central influence. In this respect, I understand voice and mouth as forming a *strained* relation, full of poetics and politics, where the voice negotiates as well as gives way to the psychoemotional depths—the spit, spasms, and shimmers—of an oral drive. It is my view that what surrounds the voice proper—the paralinguistic, the sociolinguistic, the glossolalic, etc.—contributes a vitalizing base to the spoken by extending, problematizing, and saturating its communicative aim.

## Theater

As a central orifice, the mouth conducts numerous things and materials in and out of the body—defending and sustaining, sexing and socializing. Such diversity positions the mouth as a conduit by which we learn specifically a relation to the world, as well as develop psychological and emotional bonds. In this regard, the psychoanalytic work of Donald Meltzer provides an important reference. Meltzer understood the mouth as a “stage” upon which a number of essential performances are enacted. His notion of the “Theater of the Mouth” proposes the mouth as the pivotal site for negotiating a relation between the inside and the outside of the body (leading to the making of boundaries); for establishing the emotional dynamics of attachment and care, love and loss; and for experiencing the oral as a channel for communication and its consequences. “In his view, the mouth is the first theater in which meaning is generated through the child’s interpretation of the shape, texture, and taste of food; of the feel of mouthed objects; and of the sensory properties of words.”<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, I’ve sought to map these fundamental events through the form of a cultural study so as to highlight the processes by which such meanings and interpretations are brought forward, to condition not only experiences of childhood, but also the general field of subjectivity. In this regard, the mouth is posited as an extremely profound cavity—what René Spitz termed “the primal cavity”<sup>19</sup>—within which language is given shape, specifically drawing it through our body. Subsequently, the mouth is explored as a challenge to the power dynamics of language, and the ways in which the rational and the reasonable come to shape our verbal expressivity. The theater of the mouth is one that plays out the very drama of *subjectification*; it is fundamentally a site of conflict, and from which we may learn the skills for negotiating—through acts of singing, burping, and laughing, for instance—the script that precedes us and that captures the force of our oral drives, our oral imaginary, in its directing logic. Grabbing words in its wet cavity, biting down onto the consonantal, sounding out the resonance of the

vowel, it is by way of the mouth that we might supplement the foundational narrative of proper speech with an oral poetics.

## Fever

To consider these operations of the mouth, I've attempted to move from a certain phenomenology of its physical dimensions and toward more social and political arenas. This integrates understandings of the formation of subjectivity, as well as the field of the imaginary. In doing so, my attention has never settled upon one particular theoretical terminology, or discursive model. Instead, I've been keen to follow the mouth as a vehicle for complicating any form of singularity; the mouth, in other words, is always mashing things together, and accordingly, my analysis has aimed for this diversity, moving from depths to surfaces, bodily matters to soft wording, and from somatic to social concerns. In this sense, there is a profound way in which the mouth stages a form of production that demands a rather feverish analysis—a thinking process tuned to the actions and attributes of this *primal cavity*.

## Cavity

The mouth as a collection of surfaces—of lips and teeth, tongue and cheek, and from the roof down to the throat—is equally an open space, an *oral cavity*. It is a small cavern wherein resonances proliferate, where matter is held and ingested, and where the desires that lead us toward another materialize in movements of oral pleasure—the *gap wherein one is entered, to give space for the other*. It is this gap that affords a literal grip onto the world. While the buccal surfaces channel a plethora of tastes and textures, the oral cavity *gives* room—for breaths and couplings, words and their shaping.

A continual fluctuation thus defines the mouth, between opening and closing, reverberations that expand within the cavity and then collapse, contracted and folded across its surfaces. A rhythm of somatic orientation, production, contact . . . *choreography*. Accordingly, the voice may be understood to draw upon the mouth as an *instrument*, a resonant cavity, while from a physiological perspective the mouth is more an *operation*, a series of surfaces. The assemblage of the voice and the mouth thus dramatically brings together the texture of oral surfaces with the vocal reverberations of the cavity, the thrust of operations with the composition of instruments, to generate lyrical as well as lustful productions. The weave of surfaces and cavities, operations and instrumentation, conditioning this assemblage of the mouth and the voice, opens out onto acts of representation and expression,

from the ways in which we figure ourselves, as a vocal subject, to how such figuring is also an expressive punctuation. In this regard, speech is housed within a greater collection of oral behaviors, forcing a continual play and politics of meaning. Moten's emphasis on the "cutting and augmenting" of meaning enacted by *this body that speaks* (and that may also cry . . . or whisper) gives suggestion for a radical poetics, one that fully draws upon the surfaces and cavities of the oral—rhythms and improvisations that force themselves onto the territories of meaning.

It is just such a musicality that fills these pages. My approach has been to both capture the voice as a linguistic operation—as a method for demanding representational presence, for *speaking up*—and to draw forth the mouth as that expressive chamber surrounding and conditioning such representation.

Subsequently, I'm interested to hang onto the tension of the mouth, as a site of negotiation and mediation, contact and drives. This is elaborated in *Lexicon of the Mouth* through the study of what I call "mouth movements." These can be defined as "modalities of mouthing," or methodologies of bodily figuring, each of which contours, interrupts, conspires with, or elaborates subjectivity. In surveying the movements that shape the mouth—movements that are also choreographies, improvisations, rhythms—it has become clear that what counts as "communicative acts" are much greater than speech proper. Rather, I understand the movements of the mouth as extremely vital productions by which the spoken is deeply extended, as well as brought into question. Mouthing is always occupying the very limits of the spoken; in doing so, it both reveals the borders of the linguistic while enlivening understandings of what counts as language.

Modalities such as laughing, stuttering, whispering, singing, and burping, among others, are examined so as to track the mouth as it encounters the voice, as well as extends the body toward other materialities and socialities, imaginings and productions. I've been interested to give a cultural study of the expressions that radically inflect, if not make possible speech, and that also generate a range of bodily epistemologies—in the fold of the lips, within the breath of the sounded, or upon the surface of the tongue.

It is my intention to argue for the mouth as that very cavity inside of which such expressions find their resonance; a site of negotiation first and foremost, and from which other negotiations follow: between the imperative to speak and the functionality (or not) of the body to perform; a meeting point between depths and surfaces, interiors and exteriors, and through which each overlaps, where eating and kissing, vomiting and breathing, singing and speaking interrupt *and* support each other, especially in relation to the law of the proper.

*The mouth might be said to produce such proliferation. It is a means for modulating the structures that surround us.*

In bringing forward such questioning, I am interested in hearing the voice as a performative event that calls forth an essential animating and corporeal dynamic, while at the very same time remaining vulnerable to the intrusions of another: of silence and noise, and the interventions of the foreign; of rupture and loss, as well as love and sexuality; and the powers of discourse. That is, my argument is that the voice is never so simple, nor does it maintain any strict form of stable presence (especially in relation to “the body”). In contrast, the voice is precisely that which remains in a dynamic state, tensed between presence and absence, phonic and textual substance, and driven by the pressures and pleasures of being a body. The mouth not only shapes voice, but also fills it in; it is a cavity by which to capture additional voices, to put them on the tongue, supplying us with the potentiality to reshape, impersonate, sample, and reconstruct who we can be.

## Oral Imaginary

Throughout *Lexicon of the Mouth* I focus on examining a range of vocal and oral modalities, as a way to consider the relation of identity and the politics of speech. While it is through the force of discourses that the voice may gain traction, what of the excesses and energies, the sloppy and the inchoate wordings that hover in and around discourses? The paralinguistic flourishes that ghost wording? The subsequent drives that may fuel the mouth to speak other? The poetics of an experimental orality? I’m interested to consider how such poetics gains its primary drive through the lessons of the mouth, the chamber of contact and expression, rhythm and dreaming; its sheer elasticity and vitality, and its position between language and the body, the proper and the improper, law and lawlessness, locate the mouth as a cavity by which the poetical may gain intensity. It puts into dynamic contact the ideality of thought (that inner voice . . .) with the materiality of language; as a site of expressivity, it leads the way for an appropriation of the articulations of voice and their meanings.

I have chosen to focus on these movements surrounding and contouring the spoken so as to register such poetics as an expanded (and imaginary) material—beyond the strictly linguistic to that of worldly experience—to ultimately enrich our understanding of all the signifying modalities by which the body comes to perform. It is my view that the mouth supplies us with an opportunity, a literal site by which to witness this poetical production, *a hinging of bodily rhythmicity with the force of vocal expression*. Here I’m interested to prolong this meeting, to finally propose speech and voice as productions manifested not only in words, but also equally in the breath of the whisper, the break of the stutter, the sigh of relief: all these mouth movements and oral gestures from which we may learn of the processes that enable subjects to negotiate, enjoy, and create their individuality.

In this regard, I would propose a politics of the performative that engages the dynamics of iteration and iterability as a question of the mouth; a discourse of the paralinguistic and the buccal, which might also spirit a *parapolitics*. That is, in support of an expanded voice not only for finding a representational space, as a point of entry, and reasonable debate, but also a voice full of imaginary drive, and those animate and poetical expressions that turn our bodies toward other species, other material forms, or immaterial apparitions, as well as each other.