

1. MOUTH PORES

1.1 MOUTH AGAPE

No abyss is as familiar as one's mouth; the *unheimlich* mouth. An internalized abyss which we presume to control, but which always exceeds such tidy precepts. The mouth is the meeting place of the sacred and the profane; sacred texts are salivated by the mouth's viscosity; the Word is born in a cavity that tears, chews, licks, spits. The mouth negotiates numerous ways into and out of itself; it is the conduit for air, voice, food, fluids. The collision of these disparate elements constitutes the noise of the mouth, purity is rendered impossible in such a contaminated corporeality. The strength of the rational is contingent on language's ability to evince itself from its mode of production. Language, in its very moment of inscription and emission, is awash amidst the slides of the slippery body. In other words, the mouth is not only an articulating engine that cites, that voices language, but also an organ that is present as site.

When Hayley Newman precedes a lecture she has to give on her work by having a dentist anaesthetize her, she performs a somatic intervention on the circuitry of communication. With the *Lock-jaw Lecture Series*, she disarticulates herself and her subsequent lecture, her talk becomes the performance of an attempt to talk.²

² Hayley Newman, *Performancemania*, London: Matt's Gallery, 2001, 62. The piece is part of a larger series titled *Connotations—Performance Images* which share the particularity that the "dates, locations, photographers and contexts for the performance cited in the text panels are fictional" (p. 39). As such the fabricated texts are integral to the work:

Lock-jaw Lecture Series

1997–1998

Lectures given at Chelsea College of Art, Middlesex University, Sheffield & Hallam University and Dartington College of Art.

Photo: Jonny Byars

Over the period of a year I was invited to give a series of lectures on my work. Before each lecture I visited a local dentist and had my mouth anaesthetised. With my mouth made immobile, I gave my feeblest apologies to the students and staff before attempting to talk on my work.

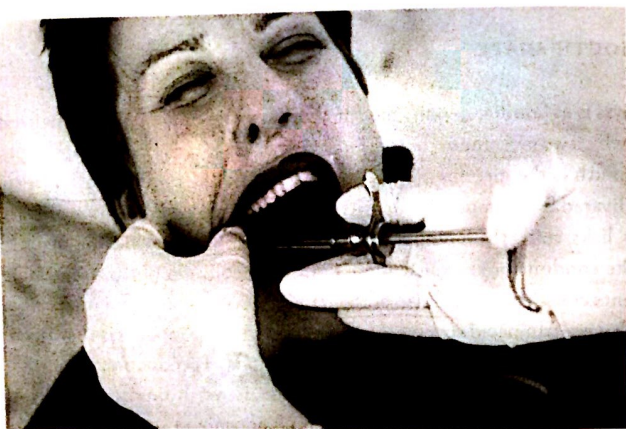


fig. 15

fig. 15 Hayley Newman, *Lockjaw Lecture Series*, from "Connotations – Performance Images 1994–1998", 1998. Courtesy of the Artist and Matt's Gallery, London. Photo: Casey Orr.

To incapacitate the mouth in its role as a vehicle of language lowers the mouth and thereby places the sonic to the fore. When the mouth is in such a state (one might say, a state of *statelessness*) it is refracted inwards, it becomes a cavity resonating ad infinitum. A sonic fully irrigated by materiality.

The voices Whitehead's numerous bodies emit and the voices Barthes listens to are the sort which "escapes science because no science [...] can exhaust the voice, [...] there is always a remainder, a supplement, a lapse, an unsaid which designates itself: the voice."³ When fully somatized, the voice is unassimilable and unnamable. The inevitable entwining of the sacred and the profane generates the noise of the mouth and the viscosity of screams. As Allen S. Weiss postulates: "The scream is the desublimation of speech into the body, in opposition to the sublimation of the body into meaningful speech."⁴ The scream epitomizes the somatic voice, its drama is that it unfurls the body onto the soundscape, it exteriorizes the viscera:

She let herself go in the pleasure of rolling her bass tones above our heads; to better roar, she removed her dentures and opened her pink windpipe wide, [...] she lets the noise out *RRRaRRRaRRRa*. [...] I have never heard a noise so beautiful, so terrifying, I encourage her with whispers, go, go, louder, kill us, kill all, more, more [...] *AaarrAaarr Aarr*, the noises rip apart the weak air, old mouth hollow flesh, loud-mouth, it scares off death, *RrraRa*, [...] she fills herself up with her own screams, her head hangs between her front limbs, she rocks her belly with screams.⁵

³ Roland Barthes, "La musique, la voix, la langue" in *L'obvie et l'obtus: Essais critiques III*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982, 247. Translation mine. Original: un lieu qui échappe à toute science, car il n'est aucune science [...] qui épuise la voix [...] il y aura toujours un reste, un supplément, un lapsus, un non dit qui se désigne lui-même: la voix.

⁴ Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 25.

⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Dedans*, Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1969, 67–8. Translation and emphasis mine, other version can be found in *Inside*, trans. Carol Bakko, New York: Schocken, 1986, 43. Original: [E]lle se livre au plaisir de faire rouler sa voix de basse au-dessus de nos têtes; pour bien hurler, elle a oté son dentier afin d'ouvrir son gosier rose, largement. [...] elle laisse sortir le bruit. *RRRaRRRaRRRa*. [...] Je n'ai jamais entendu un bruit si beau, si terrifiant, je lui chuchote des encouragements, vas, vas, plus fort, *AaarrAaarr Aarr*, les bruits déchirent l'air faible, gueule crève-nous, crève tout, encore, encore. [...] *AaarrAaarr Aarr*, les bruits déchirent l'air faible, gueule crève-nous, crève tout, encore, encore. [...] elle se remplit de ses propres cris sa tête pend entre ses pattes de devant, et elle se berce le ventre de cris.

Cixous suggests that the scream has the power to foil death, in a later passage from her first novel, *Inside*, she continues to develop the scream's relationship to mortality and eternity:

But are you familiar with screaming? Screams, screams break everything, why doesn't she scream, just whispers here, I would have screamed so loud, my lungs would dilate, enormous, blooming, corollas full of noise, I would have screamed a scream so long, sharp, unbearable, that everything would have changed, I would have won or lost, one must try, God exists or he doesn't, if He does he cannot not respond to a scream like mine, even if he's busy, even if time is a mere drop in his eternity, time exists, he heard me before my scream, he hears, I scream, it's simple, I am all scream, I await his answer, as long as he doesn't respond I scream, I scream in front, in back, I scream for five thousand seven hundred and some years [...] my scream is me, I scream I am, prove to me that you are, I am proving to you that I am, the first one who shuts up loses, I screeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...⁶

The scream is the I in its barest conception, I am all scream, naked, prior to subjecthood, unframed by quotation marks (ref. Judith Butler, ch. 1 p. 53). Let us recall the case of Artaud, where we are immersed less in the realm of expression than of survival at its degree zero. His correspondence with Jacques Rivière is not just an epistolary exchange, but a dance, a correspondance, a pas de deux, a series of stutter-steps, an entwining between the rational and its antinomy, between two modes of writing: one subscribing to the rules of

⁶ Cixous, 87-8. Emphasis and translation mine, other version can be found in *Inside*, trans. Carol Bakko, New York: Schocken, 1986, 56-7. Original:

Mais les cris, vous connaissez? Les cris, les cris cassent tout, pourquoi ne crie-t-elle pas, ici ça chuchote, moi j'aurais crié si fort, mes poumons dilates, énormes, épanouis, corolles pleines de bruit, j'aurais crié d'un cri si long, pointu, insupportable, que tout aurait changé, j'aurais gagné ou perdu, il faut tenter, ou Dieu existe ou il n'existe pas, s'il existe il ne peut pas ne pas répondre à un cri comme le mien, même s'il est occupé, même si le temps n'est qu'une goutte dans son éternité, le temps existe, il m'a entendu avant que je crie, il entend, je crie, c'est simple, je suis tout cri, j'attends qu'il réponde, tant que tu ne réponds pas je crie, je crie en avant, en arrière, je crie il y a cinq mille sept cents et quelques ans, [...] mon cri est moi, je crie je suis, prouve-moi que tu es, moi je te prouve que je suis, le premier qui se tait a perdu, c'est normal, je criiiiiiiii...

communication, the other effusive and diarrhetic. The latter is all scream; the scream in a futile attempt to make itself understood. Futile because the scream is always already beyond understanding, it circumvents this path in benefit of a somatic manifest. Significantly the only component of Artaud's submissions to Rivière that was included in the correspondence is a poem titled *Cri* (Scream). The correspondence can be read as a dialogue on articulation, disarticulation and inarticulation. It stages a historic encounter between one of the doyens of French literature and a brute force, one that stands "outside of thought."⁷ In his letters, Artaud argues for inarticulacy; this insistent articulation of the inarticulate reminds us that, with Artaud, we are embedded in paradox. Rivière remarks on Artaud's paradoxical lucidity; there is a particularity with Artaud which places him both in the wolf's mouth and as the wolf's mouth.⁸ This speaks to a relationship with language which is one of (desired) mastery alongside (inevitable) trepidation. The latter always tempering the former. This double edge is also one which operates at the level of the body. The emitter, that is the body that utters, is not only a signifying machine, it is also one that malfunctions, that stutters, that floats outside of thought. The intent of these formulations is not to mystify (admittedly, a potential here) but to resist any move which subsumes excess and noise into a system or dictionary. We are mapping a series of faults and fissures. Running cracks proliferate and sketch a median akin to the one depicted by Beckett in *The Unnamable*:

[T]hey'll have said who I am, and I'll have heard, without an ear I'll have heard, and I'll have said it, without a mouth I'll have said it, I'll have said it inside me, then in the same breath outside me, perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces

⁷ Antonin Artaud, "To Jacques Rivière [letter of May 15, 1924]" in *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976, 44.

⁸ One finds this articulated throughout Jacques Rivière's letter of March 25, 1924 (in Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 38-41); e.g. *One thing strikes me: the contrast between the extraordinary precision of your self-diagnosis and the vagueness, or at least the formlessness, of your creative efforts* (p.38).

and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either [...]⁹

The position we are in is both ubiquitous and positionless; in other words, lost, lost in a liminal state. Beckett mentions the tympanum, but let us shift from hearing to expulsing and consider the laryngeal area, the glottis in particular. The glottis, that slit-like in-between which enables the vocal chords to modulate and resonate, is an opening deep inside the opening of the mouth. It is thus a double mouth, an interior one; it is perhaps from this second mouth, the one behind and below the first that is activated when Beckett writes: *without a mouth I'll have said it. An unmouth, yet still one, one which precedes (or even foregoes) speech in favor of the scream's informe outbreaks.* Weiss follows the exposition cited earlier by foregrounding how the scream actualizes the forces of eros and thanatos and their concomitant hand in finitude's eternal recurrence: "The scream is the expulsion of an unbearable, impossible internal polarization between life's force and death's negation, simultaneously signifying and simulating creation and destruction."¹⁰

Power relations, which can be characterized as a continual rehearsal of the play between eros and thanatos in the quotidian, are rendered unbearable not only by iniquities, but by that other scream from the second mouth, the buried scream, always present however unheard, like the coruscant atemporal chordal clusters in Ligeti, and their cirrocumulus-like hovering. Or like the potential energy of the scream on display in Martin Kersels' zany pseudo-scientific installation where the submerged speaker is blasting a scream endeavoring to heat up the water but the water ends up squelching the sound. The failure of the contraption is synonymous with its success on another register, the futility of the attempt speaks precisely to the argument of the indigestibility of the scream (and by the extension, of the somatic voice) in rational discourse.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable" in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. New York: Grove, 1991, 383.
¹⁰ Allen S. Weiss, *Phantasmic Radio*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 24.

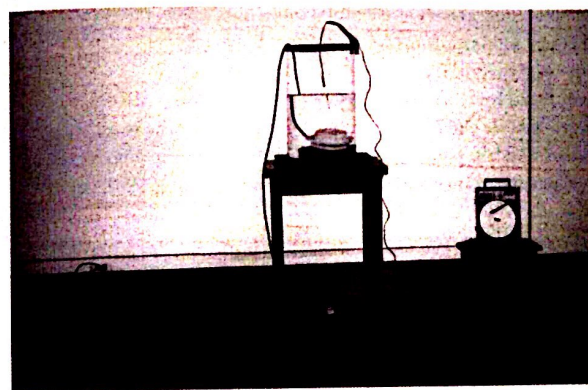


fig. 16

fig. 16 Martin Kersels, *Attempt to raise the temperature of a container of water by yelling at it*, 1995. Courtesy of Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

la voce somatica — il gesto è indigestibile
 all'interno del discorso razionale

1.2 FROZEN SPEECH

Mouth agape, but gap cannot be seen because mouth is full, filled to overflowing, stuffed with towel, attempt to dry mouth out, to muffle speech, to suffocate breath, to starve out. This Piper, at the particular instant of *Catalysis IV*, is mute and muted. She is dehydrated, on a bus, catalyzing, precipitating, like a chemistry experiment whose query rewinds and fast forwards Rosa Parks all over us. Dressed conservatively, the only demarcation is her buccal protuberance. She reverses George Brecht's *Three Aqueous Events*: "ice, water, steam."¹⁷ She's steam, water, ice. Dry ice. Mad ice.¹⁸ She towels dry her liquid state, or at least keeps it contained. Like the intemperate, even inclement, Artaud we shall investigate in the next section, Adrian Piper's "a wave which hesitates between gas and water."¹⁹ She is hesitant water. And she is torrential. We drown dry. Imagine Piper as vapor, as outer layer, as median between.

A turn of the century picture of a medium producing ectoplasm strikingly resembles the Piper performing *Catalysis IV*. Fred Moten reads Piper as a parergon, "a foreign guest,"²⁰ this is certainly the case with the *Untitled Performance in Max's Kansas City* (discussed in pp. 60–63) and central to Moten's argument. With *Catalysis IV*, the foreign element presents itself in a similar fashion, but here the interiority of her action in the social space is focused squarely on the mouth. Furthermore her mutism is exteriorized, it is a silent discharge which presents a visual cue for somatized silence. Such tactic of presentation reverberates with Moten's striking statement: *sound gives us back the visibility that ocularcentrism had repressed*.²¹ Here Moten

speaks to the recurrent insurgent role of the *phonic in the visual realm*. Sound, in this mode, is not only what can or cannot be heard, but also a marker of material's irreducibility. The statement is reminiscent of the one by Quignard analyzed in Chapter 1: *The introduction of silence introduces the invisible in the visible* (p. 45), but the difference being that in one instance sound is the activating agent and in the other it is silence. A fine distinction between the two is perhaps unnecessary to stake out for the moment. What is retained from those two formulations is the potentiality of sound/silence to erupt, albeit surreptitiously, upon the brightly lit surface of the visual realm. What is tangential, but of import, is the fact that technologically, especially in the digital realm, sound is mediated by imaging technologies. Sound is, more often than not, found as an image on a computer screen. Thus, it is less paradoxically than he thinks that sound artist Christian Marclay can state, "it may seem like a contradiction, but I'm interested in sound, not just for how it sounds, but also for how it looks."²² Marclay is not speaking of the computer screen, nor are Quignard and Moten referring to the electronic modes of production utilized in sound art, my point being that on these disparate registers the interlacing between the audio and visual realms is simultaneously conflictual and complementary. Furthermore, if this is ultimately a synesthetic phenomenological move, it is also a politicized tactical one (at least for Moten).

Valère Novarina articulates the tenacity involved in the politics of denoting the irreducibility of material as follows: "To speak is not to communicate [...] to speak is not to express oneself [...] to speak is first to open the mouth and attack the world with it, to speak is to know how to bite."²³ The paradigm of communication is replaced, or preceded, by the basic performative act of opening one's mouth and apprehending (instead of comprehending). The conversion of *tongue as muscle* to *tongue as idiom* that is par for the course is momentarily arrested, we are faced by the salivating organ and its surrounding set of jaws. There is a photographic series that aptly combines the somatic

¹⁷ George Brecht, *Three Aqueous Events* (1961) is a Fluxus performance score cited in numerous places, for instance in Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, 285.
¹⁸ Here I am also making an allusion to the title of the book by Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, New York: Dell, 1968.
¹⁹ Antonin Artaud in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 89.
²⁰ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 249.
²¹ Moten, 235. Italicized in the original. Moten's statement is entwined in a critique of Michael Fried by way of Piper.

²² Christian Marclay in Rahma Khazam, "Jumpcut Jockey", *The Wire*, No. 195, May 2000, 28.
²³ Valère Novarina, *Devant la parole*, Paris, P.O.L., 1999, 16. Translation mine. Original: *Parler n'est pas communiquer, parler n'est pas s'exprimer, parler c'est d'abord ouvrir la bouche et attaquer le monde avec, savoir mordre*.

bent of Novarina and the role of sound in the visual realm. In the *myein* series, Ann Hamilton placed a pinhole camera inside her mouth and used her lips as a shutter.²⁴ These portraits acquire a sonorous shade, at least at the level of potential, at the *unsound* level. The resolution of the mouth-eye is not comparable to the eye, but this viewing gains an element of proximity, a degree of intimacy as evoked by the irregular framing produced by the shadowy carnality of the enclosure. Recalling Novarina's incitation to attack and bite, they also evoke a certain animality, a certain *tasting* is performed by the photographs.

These images confirm the premise advanced throughout this section, that the mouth is a privileged setting and staging whereby the outside and the foreign infiltrates the inside, the interior circuitry of the body, as well as the constitution of the self. Where the foreign and the intimate commingle. Where the relational is thereby amplified. These images open the door to the supposition that the mouth might not be "something which we are the proprietors of (our individual parcel, our identity, the prison of the I), but an interior opening, a spoken passage. The interior is not the site of what is mine, nor of the self, but a passage, a breach through which a foreign breath seizes us."²⁵ One reading of Novarina's statement could be that the foreign cannot seize us, because there is no us to speak of in this moment, after all,

²⁴ Ann Hamilton, "Artist Portfolio", (ai) performance for the planet, fall 2000, 64–73. (While the portfolio presents the series under the title *myein*, they are in fact part of an ongoing series titled *Face to Face*). From the introductory text: The word *myein* is an Ancient Greek verb meaning to close the eyes or mouth. Across time, *myein* has come to stand for that thing which has not been, or cannot be, explained (65). Etymologically, *myein* is related to mysticism. If the mouth can be made to visualize, it begs the question of the inverse, i.e. a hearing or sounding by the eyes. There are a couple of instances that I am aware of, the first suggests it, Christian Marclay, *Glasses* (1991), a sculptural piece where the lenses of a pair of glasses have been replaced by the ear and mouth pieces of a telephone (Christian Marclay, Christian Marclay, Los Angeles: UCLA Hammer Museum, 2003, 113.). The other is an audio piece of mine entitled *Ja* (2003) based entirely on recordings made of Aleksandr P. Thibodeau as he manipulated his eyeballs and whistled out of his enlarged tear duct. The piece was made specifically for presentation at pitch black concerts.

²⁵ Valère Novarina, *Devant la parole*, Paris: P.O.L., 1999, 14–15. In this passage, Novarina's subject is speech, I have taken the liberty of metonymically replacing it with the mouth. Translation mine. Original: *non quelque chose dont nous serions propriétaire (notre parcelle individuelle, notre identité, la prison du moi), mais une ouverture intérieure, un passage parlé. L'intérieur est le lieu non du mien, non du moi, mais d'un passage, d'une brèche par où nous saisit un souffle étranger.*



fig. 19

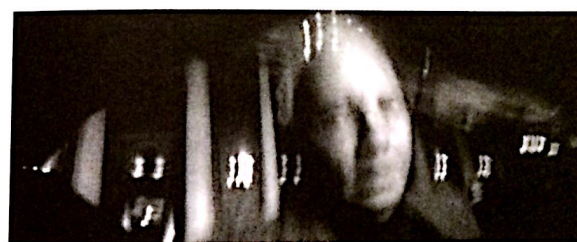


fig. 20



fig. 21

fig. 19 Ann Hamilton, *face to face* – 8, 2001.

fig. 20 Ann Hamilton, *face to face* – 16, 2001.

fig. 21 Ann Hamilton, *face to face* – 26, 2001.

Images courtesy Ann Hamilton Studio.

he is describing an interior without interiority. The foreign element which navigates in that passage from aperture to viscera could actuate a *mise en abîme* of interiority, one that would parallel Valéry when he wrote that "we are human only on the surface, below lies an inexplicable substance", one that resists representation.²⁶ In other words, a moment where the self and its nonself meet in this passage predicated on incongruence; this conduit swallows the outside at the same time that it spills itself out.

With *myein*, the mouth obscura acts as the body's interior swallowing light and image, the mouth opens itself to its interior abyss, to the abyss it holds in. But, thanks to the tongue, the mouth can also protrude, it can physically leave the prison of the *I* Novarina speaks of, and that is precisely the project of Chinese artist Cang Xin. In his *Communication Series* he eschews handshakes in favor of the tongue as primary mode of introduction. He communicates with places and objects (animate and inanimate) through his extended tongue. The tongue is recruited to not only taste but to touch, touch the outside. And the outside is endless, some that have been tongued by Xin so far: a postcard, a flame, a flag, the Great Wall of China, a box of detergent Tide, a statue, sandals, the Coliseum in Rome.

This greeting method is a somatized *Hello*, one which collapses distance not only physically but by bypassing language, by favoring *tongue as muscle* over *tongue as idiom*. In one version, Cang Xin is buried in earth, only his head protruding, like Winnie in the second half of *Happy Days*, and from this vantage point he tongues another's tongue. Tellingly, Beckett's short prose text *The Image* begins "The tongue gets clogged with mud only one remedy then pull it in and suck it swallow the mud or spit question to know whether it is nourishing."²⁷ It begins there, and we end with it here.

²⁶ Paul Valéry in Jean Starobinski, *Le Corps, miroir du Monde: Voyage dans le musée imaginaire de Nicolas Bouvier*, Genève: Éditions Zoe, 2000, 123. Translation mine. Original and fuller quote: *L'homme n'est l'homme qu'à sa surface. Lève la peau, dissèque: ici commencent les machines. Puis tu te perds dans une substance inexplicable, étrangère à tout ce que tu sais et qui est pourtant l'essentielle.*

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, "The Image" in *The Complete Short Prose 1929–1989*, trans. Edith Fournier, New York: Grove, 1995, 165.

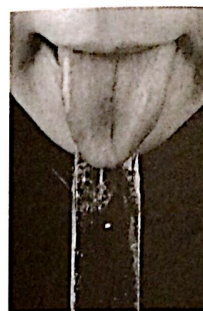


fig. 22



fig. 23

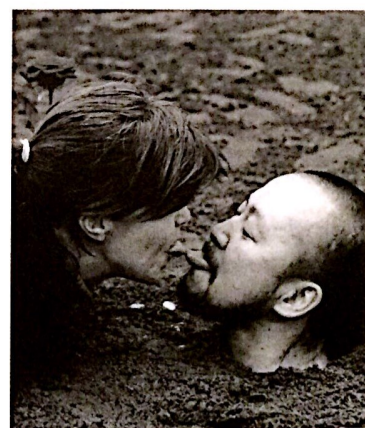


fig. 24

fig. 22 Cang Xin, *Communication_Series_No.3*, performance, 2000, Haikou.
fig. 23 Cang Xin, *Communication_Series_No.5*, performance, 2000, London.
fig. 24 Cang Xin, *Communication_Series_No.7*, performance, 2001, Oslo.
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