Mieke Bal,
Critique of Voice
The Open Score of Her Face

aus:

Analysieren als Deuten
Wolf Schmid zum 60. Geburtstag

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Critique of Voice

The Open Score of Her Face

Mieke Bal

New to the phenomenon of the telephone, which is today almost a thing of the past, pushed away by Internet and e-mail, the narrator of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* exploits *amazement* as a device for literary production. Amazement is generally triggered by a mixture of emotional and epistemic alterity. One is amazed by newness, by what comes into one's field of vision for the first time. In this sense, amazement is a suitable tool for the articulation of historical and aesthetic experiences.

I will approach the concept of "voice" with such amazement. Not that this concept is new to me, on the contrary. I will treat it *as if* it were new, in an academic fiction, in order to learn from Proust to reconsider what I think I know. Looking back at my first efforts as a beginning narratologist to articulate what we then liked to call a "model" for the analysis of narrative, I am struck by the presence of Wolf Schmid's now-classic *Der Textaufbau in den Erzählungen Dostoevskijs* as a ghost in the background of my work.[1] Contemporaneously to Dolezel and in a comparable spirit, Schmid developed an approach to narrative whose key term was "text" rather than "voice."[2] This alternative concept of narrative structure is the ghost in my closet of theory-building in the structuralist era.

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1 *Schmid W.* Der Textaufbau in den Erzählungen Dostoevskijs. München, 1973; *Bal M.* Narratologie. Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes. Paris, 1977.

2 *Dolezel L.* Narrative Modes in Czech Literature. Toronto; Buffalo, 1973.

The concept of voice refers to the "narrator," the allegedly speaking "I" whose utterances constitute the story. It is the concept that, in the wake of Roland Barthes, killed the author while enabling critics to continue analyzing texts by positing a "speaker" who allegedly uttered them. At the time, I was preoccupied with the French tradition and interested in emending Gérard Genette's theory of narrative. I do not wish to disavow that legacy now. Instead, I want to give some opacity to the perhaps too transparent veil of Schmid's alternative approach, so that it helps me cast an amazed look at that key concept of voice.

The occasion in Proust's story is a telephone call. The "speaking subject," whose identity the reader has been building up by means of the revelations that gradually flesh him out, decides to call his beloved grandmother. He is amazed when he hears her voice. The epistemological productivity of amazement becomes immediately clear. By means of his amazement, Proust discovers what a voice is. This amazement thus becomes a theoretical object: it points to some of the implications of the idea of "voice."

The narrator is filled with amazement when confronted with his grandmother's voice, detached from her body, her face. As a result, the voice redefines these, precisely because technology has cancelled out perceptual routine. He is just as amazed to hear a voice without a body, coming from afar. This de-contextualized, disembodied voice seems an adequate metaphor for the voice implied in the linguistic utterances that constitute narrative texts.

What Proust's text maps is a fragmented body with isolated and separated functions. This fragmented body generates a sense of alienation. The difficulty the separate functions have in order to "work," to be effective, must be supplemented. There is a need for artifice, for a kind of prosthesis. The telephone is such a device. This possibility of technical supplementing makes a huge impression on the narrator. It also saddens him, because there lies the collapse of the effect of the real, whose artifice *appears*.

With a painful awareness of perception's unreliability, Proust's narrator says:

> […] suddenly I heard that voice which I mistakenly thought I knew so well; for always until then, every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she said on the open score of her face, in which the eyes figured

> so largely; but her voice itself I was hearing that afternoon for the first time.[3]

The voice is no longer the known voice, the object of cognition, when detached from its *visuality*. The musical score that he follows, ordinarily, on his grandmother's face is like the map of a labyrinth. The eyes, he adds, somewhat disconnectedly, take a lot of *place* in that maze; place, we may speculate, where he can temporarily dwell. But this map is now hidden, so that the voice is cut off, not only from the body but also from the temporality that body guarantees. It has neither past nor future, only a present existence of which he still has no knowledge. Ordinarily, in other words, voice, eyes, and music converge. Separating them estranges subjects from the affective bond linking them. I take this image of perception as, first, integrated, and, second, affectively framed as an allegory for the cultural field we are studying.

This incident of amazement is no isolated occurrence in the novel. Nor is it limited to the voice. Elsewhere, when he theorizes *photography* as the technological prosthesis for visual perception, Proust imagines—*images*, that is, fantasmatically and visually—the collapse of time and space that accompanies the collapse of the senses, where hearing depends on vision. Again, it is the detached image of the grandmother that triggers his inquiry. Here, it is the narrator in his role of visual agent who is deprived of his perceptual routine:

> Of myself—thanks to that privilege which does not last but which gives one, during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence—there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that automatically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph.[4]

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[3] *Proust M.* Remembrance of Things Past / Trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, T. Kilmartin. New York, 1981. Vol. 2. P. 135.

[4] *Proust M.* Remembrance of Things Past. Vol. 2. P. 141.

The photograph embodies the object of visual perception detached from the relationship that inflects perception—its subjectivity. This famous passage ends with the result of that defective act of vision, a result utterly disturbing in its negativity. It develops into a more and more hostile, almost violent, language, to shipwreck, at the end of this unsettling degradation, on a description of that mental photograph that is always "with" or "in" the narrator:

> I saw, sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, sick, vacant, letting her slightly crazed eyes wander over a book, a dejected old woman whom I did not know.[5]

The voice verbalizing what this viewer sees cannot be identified as the writer of the novel. Nor can the hostility easily be mapped on the narrator as we have come to know him, and who loves his grandmother more than anyone else. This voice is *detached* from both, as the voice through the telephone is detached from the grandmother's body. Proust here is doing what we can call "imaging theorizing": he theorizes through imaginative discourse, through art, what "voice" means, both in the reality of his created universe and, by extension, for his writing about that world.

As for the voice, my subject in the present essay, he manages to gain a fuller knowledge of it beyond and through the alienation, due, on the one hand, to the detachment, the fragmentation of the body, and, on the other, to the distance through which the body part travels, distancing itself from everything, or at least from the rest of the body. This distance is not geographical but ontological, a distance between detached perception and the routine of perception when it is embedded in affection. There, affection is what *frames* perception, in the Derridean sense of *parergon*.[6] This frame is a diffuse, but indispensable supplement without which we cannot live. The body, whose integrity and totality are bracketed by this amazement, as much as the identity we attach to it, needs such extensions. We are all cognitively and affectively handicapped. We need instruments, tools—glasses,

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5 *Proust M.* Remembrance of Things Past. Vol. 2. P. 143.

6 *Derrida J.* La vérité en peinture. Paris, 1978.

for example—to be able to go out of ourselves, towards others. Yet a single tool is never enough.

But, as usual, Proust's metaphor is not what it seems to be—which is why I take it as a *theoretical object*. In its extraordinary inversion of perspective, it implies it is not the telephone that is the technological prosthesis, but the *face.* The face, which both the ideology of individualism and police practice present as the carrier of the indelible marks of identity, is here a mere score—a design, a projected performance. It is the material support, the tool that projects a *reading* of the voice that is the voice's true performance.

This reversal of what is "normal" or "natural" and what is *techne* or artifice accomplishes three things. It entices me to suspend—but not give up—what seems "normal" or even "natural" in the equipment I have inherited from my training and from the traditions within which I work, including the concepts of voice and others we routinely work with and the methods learned and practiced. It suspends the ghostlike transparency I cast on Schmid's concept of *Textinterferenz,* so that the threads and the patterns it weaves can become visible again for me. It suspends the certainties regarding those domains the humanities have accustomed all of us to consider *separately*: art, literature, film, and the ideas and images that run through philosophy and religious studies. And, specifically for this paper, it questions the concept of voice as one borrowed from the domain of the *anthropomorphic imagination* and as deriving its apparent self-evidence from it. That imagination is the subject of a book I am currently working on, of which this questioning of voice will hopefully be a part.

Voice and Its History

The metaphor of "voice" in literary studies came into use after the 1930s, in the wake of certain technological discoveries and developments. Neither of the two earliest modern publications considered narratological—the collection of Henry James's prefaces to *The Art of the Novel* from 1907 and E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* from 1927—uses the term. James uses a

remarkably *visual* vocabulary, whereas Forster uses the term "story-teller"[7] to refer to the author of narrative literature. When he uses the term "voice," he is referring either to tone ("a tone of voice")[8], or to the literal, physical voice. For example, he writes: "the story as a repository of a voice. It is the aspect of the novelist's work which asks to be read out loud."[9] But, though he does not use the concept in the analytical sense of later narratologists and linguists, his phrasing tells of the transforming meaning of voice in a culture about to embark on a "secondary orality," as radio and sound film became common. He writes, with a tellingly enthusiast primitivism:

> What the story does do in this particular capacity […] is to transform us from readers into listeners, to whom "a" voice speaks, the voice of the *tribal* narrator, squatting in the middle of the *cave*, and saying one thing after another until the audience falls asleep among their offal and *bones*.[10]

The late Twenties and the Thirties would, I speculate, be the moment that the word "voice" became replenished with sense and relevance in a culture that saw itself as modern. It is the moment that posed the problem of voice in culture at large. Specifically, it was the moment, heavy with consequences, in the middle of the so-called modernist period, of the transition from silent to sound film.[11]

Before that transition, the idea that images could have a voice was as utopian as it was exotic. The *movement* of the image was already quite an impressive miracle, for which artists like Degas and photographers like Muybridge and Marey had prepared the public. To turn technological experiments into multimedia spectacles, pianos were put in the theater room. Sound was a luxury, decorative. It did not narrate. But one day, technology

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7 *Forster E. M.* Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings (1927). London, 1974. Pp. 22—23.

8 *Forster E. M.* Aspects of the Novel. P. 86.

9 *Forster E. M.* Aspects of the Novel. P. 27.

10 *Forster E. M.* Aspects of the Novel. P. 27 (emphasis added).

11 See *Lastra J.* Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity. New York, 2000.

facilitated the transition that we now find so natural—from silent to sound film.

This was not a single transition. The moment in all this that I am interested in here is the one when sound began to transform from ornament to supplement, and before it became an integral element of the moving image. It is the moment when sound began to be *added* to the image. The image was made first, then sound was literally put together with it. The procedure of adding sound was jokingly called *goat-glanding.* A generation later the true wonderment of the procedure, its technological spectacularity soon forgotten, was evoked nostalgically in fictional form, in the film *Singin' in the Rain* by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly (1952). This film can serve here as a second theoretical object, and contribute to an understanding of the full impact of the concept of "voice," which is not taken into account when it is used for narrative analysis.[12]

In this film, play-acting without words, the "original" or "natural" form of the moving image, is represented in all its fantastic splendor, when Debbie Reynolds acts as an acoustic prosthesis to the "mute" actress whose voice wouldn't *pass.* Whereas Reynolds ends up achieving final victory, the class-bound censorship of her counterpart's voice exceeds the hilarious humor of the set-up of doubling and splicing between body and voice. It also puts the finger on—or may emblematically stand for—what may well be called *the politics of voice*, which would link this "classism" to Forster's primitivism. In line with Schmid's narratological concept, we could speak here of *voice-interference.*

"Goat-glanding" opened the possibility of a new engagement between language and image. This new engagement turned cinema into the third art. Neither literature nor visual art nor a simple combination of the two, but a fundamentally different one where language and image were inextricably intertwined, along with other media such as music and space. From that position, cinema was able to cast doubt on the essentialism that sought to separate the media and consequently house them in separate disciplines.

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[12] The special place of this film came to my attention through *Armstrong T.* Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study. New York, 1998.

In this culture, cinema had the role of cultural model that we are only now beginning to grant it, in its break with the idea of "pure" media and its accession to the mass public, which accorded the masses the status of both consumer and *judge* of art. But this cultural situation also generated a crisis. I contend that the concept of "narrative voice" is an instrument of the *repression* in that crisis and the crisis of authorial authority that it entailed.

This cultural crisis, which knocked absolute authority out of the hands of expertise, is also the crisis of the authority of the author. Barthes and Foucault drew only philosophical consequences from the technological change, and that, quite late, when they proposed the ideas of the dispersion (Foucault) and death (Barthes) of the author.[13] The moment of crisis had, in fact, already happened several decades before. The trigger was the cinema, recently furnished with a voice.

Soon, the spoken dialogue, whether added after the fact or not, became an integral part of cinematic work. Voice became the bearer of realism, a realism that, in turn, was and is a rhetorical instrument in the service of guaranteeing authenticity as effect. Proust, writing before this naturalization of the added voice, and postmodern writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, writing after it, undermined this realistic effect. The former opposed it to the affective conditions of the possibility of communication; the latter contrasted it to the ontological conditions of matching voice and agency, on which more later.

The metaphor of voice as technological would, for example, direct attention to the production of the diegetic chronotope as the domain of the effect of the real. Far from possessing an authority that goes without saying, as the saying has it, narrative voice seen as *addition* distracts attention from the total lack of authority of, to recall the example, Debbie Reynold's character, in order to implement the diegetic fiction as the frame of viewing the work as a whole. That fiction draws the story into a chronotopological

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[13] *Foucault M.* What is an Author? // Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism / Ed. by J. V. Harari. Trans. by D. Bouchard and S. Simon. Ithaca, 1979. Pp. 141—160; *Barthes R.* The Death of the Author (1968) // Barthes R. The Rustle of Language / Trans. by R. Howard. New York, 1986. Pp. 49—55.

hole, from which, in general and with the exception of postmodern experimentation, it will not re-emerge.

In this respect, again, the literalized revelation in the raising of the curtain in *Singin' in the Rain*, with its explicitly added voice, can serve as model. The identity of the woman "who speaks" shows itself in a *mise en scène*, which is also a theoretical mise-en-abyme of the question "who speaks?" Here, the mise-en-scène "explains" why, in the history of cinema, the artificial character, the non-identity, the "added" quality of the voice, has been "forgotten" so easily, so fast, and perhaps, so desperately.

In the cinema of former days, this technology had had its own materiality: sound, music, tools and machines. But a new cognitive understanding also underlied that very materiality whose conception it had made possible because thinkable. That understanding is anchored in the sciences of the time. It concerned not the over-estimation but rather the fundamental deficit of the body, so that it was seen as being in constant need of supplementation by means of prostheses, one of which was the voice. The concept of voice, disembodied, made technical, thus makes its appearance as a tool for analysis, as if to over-compensate the anxiety triggered by a generalized sense of the body's defective state. A body part pried loose of its body.

In view of the fiction that proclaims the dis-incarnation of narration, I wish to take a position in the debate that subtends such an attitude towards voice. On the one hand, the concept of narrative voice is constructed on the presupposition of spatial distance, according to Proust's amazement with the telephone. By not matching the images in any obvious way, the voice seems to lose its body. This loss brings it into the present of reading, where it partakes of the strong perceptual and affective experience. This, in turn, re-incarnates the voice. But, on the other hand, in the very attempt to incarnate it, to give it body—for example, by marking its gender, age, and other social positions—the voice is de-individualized by the analyst who uses the term "voice."

The modernist Proust attempts desperately to save the "personality," the personal character of the voice, the mutual affection between him and his grandmother. This affection is all the more "readable" in the voice because the distance, the path, has severed the link with the "score," that is, the face. Paradoxically, then, the personification we find in the concept—its "character" so despised by scientific purists—is here staged in response to the de-personalization of technology that separates the voice from the body.

The relation between the voice and the body contains the regulation through rhythm, also in the narratological sense (what Amittai Aviram calls the "telling rhythm"[14]).This aspect of narrative keeps us aware of the rhythmic bond between voice and the *movement* of the body. It affects more than decipherable language. Importing body, music, and space as frames of affective-perceptual experience into the text, it indicates that literature cannot be severed from the other domains of culture.

Faced with these cases, where the concept of voice is artistically theorized as meaningful after all, it is necessary to "work through," put under erasure, those aspects of the metaphor of voice that distort and censure the analysis. I thus aim to put under erasure a number of those aspects and meanings that inhere in the concept and that need weeding out. After that, I will re-metaphorize it, in an attempt to reconnect what the voice initially severs.

Images of Authorship

Among the aspects of the metaphor of voice that might have informed its creation and that remain its primary motor, is, first of all, the notion of the *subject* as the owner or site of the narrative voice. This incites the analyst to privilege voice over other aspects of the fabric of the narrative text that contribute equally strongly to the production of its meaning. Most obvious of all is the example of the *image.* The text is not reducible to the ensemble of words that constitute it. The image is an element in all narratives. The narrative voice entertains a relationship with the visual fabric that permeates the text, but this is not a systematic relation of mastery.

The narrative voice does not "create" or produce all the images rendered in the text; many pre-exist the voice's description of them. "Voice" is a term invented to eliminate authorship as the prime preoccupation of literary study yet to let it in again through the back door. Wayne Booth, professor of English at the University of Chicago, published a book in 1961 called

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[14] *Aviram A. F.* Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry. Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1994.

The Rhetoric of Fiction. As the title indicates, two elements of what constitutes the field or object "literature" in the common understanding, orient it away from the author's primacy: "rhetoric" and "fiction." The one indicates that whoever "speaks" the words in the text does not speak straightforwardly in a direct, reliable, constative mode of language use, but may be caught in acts of seduction, deviation, figuration, or outright lying. Hence, the second element, which takes literature away not only from the author but also from the world within and for which she writes. "Fiction," appealing to a mode of reading still most adequately defined as "the willing suspension of disbelief," takes the substance, content, or reality of the literary work out of the hands of the author. The latter can wash her hands of everything that shocks, disturbs, annoys, or dangerously entices the reader. The latter, as the definition has it, is responsible for willingly giving up on the author's epistemic answerability.

Booth's book introduced a term—the "implied author"—that from that moment on was so widely used that it became a cliché. The term is deceptively straightforward. It suggests that the biographical author has a textual delegate behind which she can hide, a guarantee of discretion and cultural politeness morphed into a methodological *de jure* argument. But what the term really does is much more fundamental. This concept de facto operated the switch, not really from author to text as was the overt claim, but from author as speaker of the text to reader who construes an image of that person. The reading, the concept promised, would give all information, relevant and desired, about who "spoke" the narrative. Any questions beyond that about who wrote the book were indiscreet and redundant. Inscribed within the text by a "hand" she could manipulate at will, the author could be read off the page, and it fell to the reader to compose the image of the author from the data gleaned during the reading.

The "implied author" offered a bonus that the author as corpse did not, and that became too attractive to turn down. In a quite literal double sense, it *authorized* the interpretation one wished to put forward without taking responsibility for it. The phenomenological edge of the concept wore off. What was left was the authority of the constative statements that speaking of—but simultaneously *for*—the implied author afforded. Judgments based on the idiosyncrasies of individual readings could be presented with the aura of having detected what the author, willy-nilly, "meant to say." Meaning thus collapsed into intention, as it had before Booth came along.

Meanwhile, a mere seven years later and in a totally different vein, Roland Barthes had put the author to death, given birth to the reader, and conjured up a phantom author rather comparable to Booth's. Unlike Booth, who was indebted to the New Criticism's school of literary analysis, Barthes's short article owed much to three very French sources: deconstruction and especially Derrida's (non-)concept of *écriture*; modernist literature. This article affected the emergence of reception-oriented criticism, which reached France via German phenomenology. At first, Barthes assigns the power to make meaning and to gain pleasure from it to the newly activated reader. Yet, like Booth, but on different grounds, Barthes could not help conjuring up a different image of authorship. The author whose death he hyperbolically declared was the masculinist, individualist bossy one of classical narrative and its obedient theorists. Instead, between the lines of his murderous prose, he proposed a figure without identity or voice, an impersonal *scriptor*.

Neither Booth, who displaces the author into the realm of interpretation, nor Barthes, who attempts to disembody the author, eradicates this figure. It appears as if the author cannot be entirely dispensed with. For the moment, it seems preferable to just bracket "him" and look at the results of these rhetorical moves.

Once the author is bracketed and re-emerges on the reader's side of things, the first, major problem that this move leaves hanging is the question of "who speaks" the words on the page if it isn't the actual author. The first step, further away from the now rhetorically built author, was the concept of "narrator." This addition was necessary because a single narrative, by definition attributed to a single implied author, can easily have many narrators. Also, a narrative "in the first person" sometimes speaks with the voice of the younger self, then with the one of the disabused older fellow who decides to write down the life story.

In search of reliable concepts yet intent upon conceptualizing agency "beyond" the author, literary studies turned to linguistics, and the question of "who speaks" became the question of "voice." The word "voice" is naturalized, a near-catachresis, to account for the fact that a story doesn't come out of the blue, and that someone is responsible for it. As such, it seems indispensable to circumscribe the subject of the text. But when we use words like "responsible," we enter the domain of the ethical.

Related to this responsibility is yet another aspect of voice—as metaphor of textual subjectivity. This metaphor is also the starting point of a search, of the *whodunit* kind, the quest for the identity of the unknown criminal. This question indicates that words and images matter, that they *act,* as speech-act theory teaches us. Where acts are performed, someone is accountable; the entire social and legal system works on that premise. No wonder the disciplines that comprise the humanities also take for granted the importance of that fundamental question.

The question of "who speaks?" connects the two domains that make literature and art matter: the way ideas are presented to us in shapes, that is, the formalizations that produce inter-subjective access, and the political, ethical, and ideological impact of that questioning. Here, then, the question "who?" asks after the nature of the verb "to speak." This question implies two questions about meaning. The first concerns the construction of meaning. "What does this mean?" and "what does she mean (to say)?" are two different conceptions of meaning that the metaphors of authorship conflate, namely signification—the production and processing of publicly accessible meaning—and intention—that inevitable urge to identify meaning with the mind of the genius-artist who put that meaning out. The former has no bearing on authorship; the latter does. Conflating them, then, begs the question of meaning.

The second question implied in the "who" question concerns agency. "What are the consequences?" is perhaps the best way of phrasing it. This question raises two others: on the one hand, that of the effectivity measurable only in terms of reception, in other words, what does the work "do" to its readers or viewers?; and, on the other, the social relevance of the work, that is, "what does it do to the public domain in which it functions?" These two questions, I hasten to add, must be asked in the positive but also in the negative form. What meanings and critical possibilities are repressed when we use a concept of the "who?" kind, such as narrative voice? In other words, what is the metaphorical status and import of the analysis structured on the basis of "voice?" In anticipation of my conclusions, this need to ask the question "who?" negatively—which is rarely done—makes it impossible to dismiss the personification implied by the question.

A second cluster of features imported by the metaphor of voice concerns not the subject of the work but the conception of art that underlies it. The privilege mostly unreflectively accorded to narrative voice easily entails an

extreme *mimeticism*, an assumed and endorsed, albeit disavowed, seamless match between social relations and literature, a match it is literature's and art's very mission to question. The relevance of literary narrative resides, precisely, in its refusal to obey the pressure of realism as "trompe-l'œil." The question of "who speaks?" can only escape that trompe-l'oeil if its other, the question of "who doesn't speak?" is systematically carried on its back, like a parasite. The question of which character, in what social position, does *not* have access to speech, is, on the one hand, one of voice, but on the other, one that undermines the belief in and obedience to the text as "account." As Gayatri Spivak remarked in a brief but forceful analysis of the case of Friday in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* later revisited by Coetzee's *Foe,* Friday's tongue has been cut.[15] In Coetzee's postmodern version, his tongue has been cut literally, hence, physically. This mutilation can, in and of itself, serve as a theoretical object. It stages an almost naïvely literalizing perspective on Defoe's story in a rewriting that is disabused of realism.

The addictive attachment to realism is rooted in the need to protect the aspect of the metaphor of voice that most badly needs scrutiny, namely authority. Authority is both obliterated and protected—and abducted by a criticism that nevertheless derives its authority from it. As I mentioned above, the presence of authority in humanistic studies allows the authorization of interpretation to be naturalized. The concept of narrator is part of that authorizing impulse. As a phantom presence, the author continues to lurk in the wings as long as the major analytical concepts partake of the author's anthropomorphic shape. The attribution of intention that this concept of narrator facilitates is a weapon in the service of subordinating the reader. The latter, brainwashed by education to interiorize the taboo on exercising her function of *second person,* is too easily submissive to the intention that clothes the text as long as it is conceived as the unquestioned product of voice. But, I contend, "below" or "behind" the thematic of narratorial sincerity, authenticity, and competence lies an alleged and naturalized unity of cultural memory in which those features are given the status of virtues.

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[15] *Spivak G. Ch.* A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present. Cambridge, 1999. Pp. 186—187.

Responsibility, in other words, does not equal authority. Both the scriptor and the reader are responsible for their acts of meaning-making, all the more so because they cannot appeal to and hide behind authority. Nor does subjectivity equal agency; one can exist as a subject and still be deprived of agency. Conversely, agency cannot take advantage of the problematization of unity to disavow responsibility. Here lies the importance of a disbelief that undermines realism. Against the desire for authority that informs the addiction to mimeticism, and before a different kind of entanglement between reader and work becomes possible, a disentanglement of responsibilities is necessary.

Nor can voice claim *origin,* that other doxic cultural obsession. Origin implies generativity, and that perspective must be kept in its limited place. If words and images "come from" somewhere, it is from the culture that the work and its readers share, at least partially. They are picked up like graffiti and litter, from the roads we walk along through our lives. They end up in works of art and literature. Then we hasten to narrow their provenance to the single speaker we call "voice." Mikhail Bakhtin insisted long ago on cultural polyphony, and many scholars, including Schmid, have followed suit. Against this craving for and self-evident alleging of origin, I suggest that voice insists too exclusively on illocution, that aspect of speech—and by extension, of all cultural utterances—that indicates the speaker's intent. In the process it privileges the speaker, writer, or maker of images. Thus, the concept lends itself to subordinating and easily obscuring perlocution, the utterance's *effect*, and thereby disempowers the listener, reader, or viewer.

The appeal to grammar, as Paul de Man so usefully pointed out, is also problematic. But grammar is a formal structure that follows an *itinerary*. In the theoretical chronotope in which I have situated myself, the voice *projects* the story. Opening sentences of novels demonstrate this. The generative perspective also concerns rhetoric. I am alluding to the inevitable function of metonymy. In light of projection—both in the psychological sense and in the sense of light—metonymy posits a rhetorical syntax that is an integral part of any story; it is the story's principle of modal readability. Again, it was de Man who drew attention to that principle when, through grammar, he turned metonymy into a synonym of narrativity. For de Man, metonymy and grammar are facts of word order. For me, de Man's view of

metonymy adds to the critique of voice by stipulating that voice can master neither the order of words nor that of reading.[16]

I therefore wish to suspend *time*, in the sense of sequence, as narrative's defining principle, if only for its obsession with the idea of origin. Together, then, the aspects of voice discussed so far—*subjectivity, mimeticism and its grounding in authority, and origin*—have in common a tendency to restrict narrative analysis to the inscription of time as foundation of narrativity. This remains important. The concept of "voice" must remain functional, albeit "under erasure." But this temporality is located inside the chronotope that constitutes all narrative works. It is to this chronotope and its repressed spatiality that I now turn.

The Garden of Forking Paths

If I now revive the ghost of text interference and mobilize it in this direction, I would say that the text is a labyrinth where multiple paths take us in different directions. But the conceptual metaphor of the path has been the victim of the notion of voice. This repression has been facilitated by the anthropomorphic imagination that underlies it and which I, too, had too easily adopted. First of all, and most obviously, yet generating amazement in the Proustian sense, there is a *spatiality* involved in narrative unfolding. The path establishes the text as network, a status of which we have known all along. Structuralism is, of course, no stranger to the idea of network, but network here looks more like a cobweb than a railway schedule. It imprisons, endangers the reader, who may have trouble peeling off those sticky threads.

The spatial sense of path also militates against the *atomization* of meaning implied in structural semantics. In contrast, path proposes a semantic construction whose building blocks are *accumulative* meanings. The spatial metaphor indicates that the reader strolls in the text, travels through it, but at each stretch she continues with more baggage. According to this

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[16] See *Man P. de* Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust. New Haven, Conn.; London, 1979.

metaphor, the linearity of reading is complicated by a progressive but unsystematic growth of "layers" of meaning. The architectural metaphor matters here. What results is a building, solid to the extent that it cannot be excised from the culture in which it was constructed; imaginary to the extent that its construction corresponds only partially to the architect's design, or score. More important than this architectural fantasy, however, is the textual memory that is not limited to narrative but of which narrative proposes the model.

Spatiality thus conceived is quite consequential. In the vein of semiotics, I contend that the spatial sense of the path *responds*—like a "second person" who does not interiorize the interdiction of her task—to the meanings laid out by the narrative threads, half-heartedly called "voice." Each reading adds a line to the geographical map of meanings. The fluidity of the cultural presence of readings—diffuse, multiple, but irreducible to the text—is easier to comprehend according to the spatial metaphor of the path than according to the exclusive temporal logic, easily turned linear, of the voice. The time of memory contains narrative time and composes its linearity. In this sense I would even contend that temporality, after all, constitutive of narrative, is nevertheless subordinated to conceptual spatiality. This brings narrative closer to the visual domain, but on a conceptual basis.

As an aspect of this spatiality but no more than that, the notion of *mapping*, once devoid of its colonialist imaginary, can help visualize the structuring work whose execution befalls the reader. In her guise of tourist willing to follow directions but loath to fall into tourist traps, this traveling reader prefers to explore less frequented places. The metaphor of mapping contains an overview of the terrain whose details appear according to a rhythm different from that of linear sequence. The tension between those different rhythms contributes still more to the liberation of the reader from the unjustified and damaging mastery of the authoritative voice. Voices, after all, have a spatial aspect as well. They "carry" through space. Finally, the *movement* of the "narrative body" is symmetrical to that invoked for a corporeal voice.

It is possible to hunt for other alternative metaphors to displace voice. One can think of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome.[17] But this is not entirely satisfactory, for if it accepts non-linearity, its subterranean roots continue the presupposition of a common origin and romantic heritage of organicism.[18] Moreover, it deprives the narrator, but also the reader, of his power. For now, I prefer to stay with a piece of fiction as another theoretical object. Jorge Luis Borges' story *The Garden of Forking Paths* demonstrates the possibility of imagining a conceptualization of narrative that is aware of, but not trapped by, the anthropomorphic imaginary.

Borges manages to tell a gripping, suspenseful story with a beginning, middle and end that is about, and performs, the absurdity of a world in which time is not singular. The reflections on temporality increase in complexity "during" the unfolding of the story. For our inquiry into voice, it is relevant that Borges' story is told "in the first person." In his "Garden," the story takes a spatial structure that militates against the temporality of Aristotelian poetics. Thus, it offers thought about voice in its investment in narrative time.

At first, the duplication of time is simply a ploy to inspire courage in the face of a dangerous task: the person must "*imagine that he has already accomplished it, ought to impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past.*"[19] Like Proust, Borges presents ontological problems in psychological form. Soon, this duplication maps time on space, "one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future […]."[20]

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17 *Deleuze G. and F. Guattari.* Rhizome: Introduction. Paris, 1976.

18 See *Battersby Ch.* The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Pattern of Identity. Cambridge, 1998, for this critique.

19 *Borges J. L.* The Garden of Forking Paths // Borges J. L. Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings / Ed. by D. A. Yates and J. E. Irby. New York, 1983. P. 22 (emphasis in text). "El ejecutor de una empresa atroz debe imaginar que ya ha cumplido, debe imponerse un porvenir que sea irrevocable como el pasado" (*Borges J. L.* El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan // Borges J. L. El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan. Buenos Aires, 1942. P. 112).

20 *Borges J. L.* The Garden of Forking Paths. P. 23. "[…] en un sinuoso laberinto creciente que abarcara el pasado y el porvenir […]" (*Borges J. L.* El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan. P. 113—114).

Towards the end of the story, things have grown endlessly complicated, to become an "infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times."[21] One can imagine the horror of a story entirely modeled on this spatialized temporality. Like the one the Chinese writer Ts'ui Pên in the story projected, such a narrative would never end. In Borges' story, however, this temporality does not lead to unnecessary proliferation. The story is saved because convergence and divergence allow for both proliferation and collapse. As a result, after a mere ten pages, the story about an infinite story can have a satisfying, totally logical ending. In this ending, time and space do collapse, the deed is done, the perpetrator arrested, tried, and sentenced, and the enigma raised in the opening lines explained; the story has retraced its steps.

The story's complexity is "thickened" by the perfect match between the thoughts proposed and the fabula unfolding. For the narrator-hero of the story not only meditates on the philosophy of time held by his ancestor Ts'ui Pên, but even before he comes to know it—as part of the fabula's development—unwittingly performs that philosophy. Narrator's voice and hero's experience diverge. But since the story is written "in the first person," this divergence could easily pass unnoticed; it does not, however. When the hero first meets his interlocutor, the sinologist Albert, who is also his victim-to-be, he writes: "I didn't see his face for the light blinded me."[22] But barely half a page later—mark my own conflation between space and time here—he says about the same man: "He was, as I have said, very tall, sharp-featured, with gray eyes and a gray beard."[23]

The contradiction between the two sentences is foregrounded by the words "as I have said," the sole point of which is to establish contradiction. He had said nothing of the sort, just the opposite, and that is precisely the

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21 *Borges J. L.* The Garden of Forking Paths. P. 28. "[…] infinitas series de tiempo, en una red creciente y vertiginosa de tiempos divergentes, convergentes y paralelos" (*Borges J. L.* El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan. P. 122).

22 *Borges J. L.* The Garden of Forking Paths. P. 23. "No vi su rostro, porque me cegaba la luz" (*Borges J. L.* El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan. P. 115).

23 *Borges J. L.* The Garden of Forking Paths. P. 24. "Era (ya lo dije) muy alto, de rasgos afilados, de ojos grises y barba gris" (*Borges J. L.* El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan. P. 115—116).

point. Had the story not mentioned that index of contradiction, the reader could have accepted that the first moment, the hero is incapable of seeing the other man's face, but later, after entering into his house, he can. The words "as I have said" (in Spanish "ya" insists on the pastness in a way the English translation does not), however, point to the tyrannical power of the narrator, who can make up the story as he wishes, over the character, who is bound to what is possible and impossible in the universe within which he exists. As a figure wandering around in a universe where time is both multiple and collapsed with space to form an irresolvable labyrinth, he is arbitrarily blinded so that he cannot see his interlocutor. The narrator has the power to make the hero look like a deceitful, or stupid, or illogical, "seer"—to use a word that seems appropriate in this case, where past and future are the same.

But the fabula can remain as gripping and logically consistent as any satisfying narrative for at least two related reasons. In its temporal structure, it returns, full-circle, to the beginning, of which the ending is the future but also the past. This temporal structure is satisfying, even classical, yet it is also a denial of the passage of time as the basic structure of narrative. Instead, it proposes infinite spatial extension. As a consequence, the narrative satisfies because in its narrative structure the story does deliver what it promises, a garden of forking paths. The chosen narrative form, usually called narration in the first person, "forks," effectively pries open the unity of narrator, focalizer, and character. All these narrative agents are indicated through the pronoun "I," yet, in a complexity of which the example cited above is only the most programmatic instance, not entirely or consistently conflated. The divergence between them is the unmentioned, theoretical theme of the story.

Characteristic of the kind of postmodern literature that blends philosophical musings with narratives in which these are acted out, this story's fanciful imagination offers an alternative for the most problematic terminology, in which both literary studies and art history—as well as philosophy, and other humanistic disciplines, with the partial exception of film studies—couch their analyses and results. That terminology results from the anthropomorphic imagination that underlies so much of our analyses and understanding of cultural objects.

This is why I have proposed putting the concept of voice "under erasure:" to question it and, while not rejecting it prematurely, to make it liable

to produce its own alternative. I aimed to morph the anthropomorphic question "who?" into a spatial question "where?" Where does meaning come from, where does it go, and which pathways does it follow, forking or not? This question, of course, is no less metaphorical than the anthropomorphic one it partly dislodges.

But the metaphor of the path has two advantages over "voice," advantages that sum up the points of this article. First, it de-naturalizes the individual genius "behind" the work of art as the source, origin, and authority of its meanings and effects. Second, it facilitates intercourse between the disciplinary fields involved, the text-based ones of which literary studies is the primary but not only, representative and the visually oriented ones represented by film studies and art history. The former advantage pleads for a renewed interest in text interference. But that term, it now appears, would not carry the second advantage. Hence, while I wish to pay homage to Schmid's ideas, thirty years later and with post-structuralist hindsight, I also venture to offer for consideration the productive vehicle of the metaphor of the path.

In a first interdisciplinary transfer, I have attempted to work towards the claim that the spatial metaphor of *path* can serve the function of *support*—in the sense in which a canvas is the support of a painting—of the questions of meaning and effect raised by, or addressed to, narrative texts. While acknowledging agency, I have proposed detaching the function of support from this agency. For this move, I found support in Schmid's early book that, for that reason alone already, remains of great importance. To make that argument, I subjected the currently predominant metaphor of voice to a number of queries. Each of these queries probed an aspect that renders "voice" problematic, and offer, literally, a way out.