

The Cultural Imagination of the Phonographic Voice,  
1877-1940

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## Introduction

It is generally true to of any introduction that it is written *after* the text it introduces, and so the role that an introduction plays in an author's experience of their work, coming, as it does, at the end of that work, is very different from the role it might play for any subsequent reader. In a sense, the author has already *said* what is to come, whereas the reader *starts* with the introduction. Finding a productive balance, then, between setting out a road map, as it were, for the text that follows, and allowing that text to speak for itself is thus a primary requisite for any introduction, and it is finding this balance that I have struggled with in the following. Though towards the end of this introduction I *do* set out a very brief sketch of where this thesis will go, I have decided to construct the main body of this introduction around the issues that have both informed and troubled my research which, though present (in some cases "between the lines", so to speak) in the text that follows, are not always explicitly articulated *as* issues. In particular, this introduction tries to set into play some of the intellectual tools that are deployed throughout the thesis, not in the form of a rigid methodology, or as arguments in favour of one already-established methodology over another, but as intellectual strategies that, in conjunction with specific cultural products (largely literature), allow me a flexibility in how to ground what would otherwise be largely unfounded speculations about a "cultural imagination" that is rarely, if ever, directly stated as such, in the primary source materials. This introduction, then, touches upon the epistemological grounds from which we can examine historical materials in the present, the applicability, appropriateness, and

problematic nature of using psychoanalytically-informed perspectives when interrogating cultural phenomena (rather than particular human psyches), and the benefits and drawbacks of an interdisciplinary approach. I say that this introduction only “touches on” these matters because the correct place to work them through seems, to me, to be in relation to the substance of the thesis: to attempt to separate these issues from the body of the text would entail a degree of abstraction that would not be representative of the ways in which I have experienced the relationship of theory and primary materials, as I hope will become clear as the thesis develops.

A great deal has been written over the past twenty-five years or so that examines phonography as the primary technology of the music industry,<sup>i</sup> and there are excellent studies of how identity, subjectivity, and authenticity, as culturally significant phenomena, have been affected and informed by phonography.<sup>ii</sup> However, the issue that has most interested me, the way that phonography stages an encounter with the human and the machine, has been less explicitly foregrounded, though Douglas Kahn has noted that phonography makes “the boundaries between humans and machines . . . problematic”.<sup>iii</sup> I propose to investigate this problem in terms of a series of prostheses, figured as sites at which encounters between the human (the voice) and the machine (the

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<sup>i</sup> As Lee B. Brown puts it, there is a “symbiosis between popular music and phonography [that is] undeniable” (Brown, Lee B., “Phonography, Repetition and Spontaneity”, *Philosophy and Literature*, 24/1 (April, 2000), p. 112.

<sup>ii</sup> For example, Wallis, Roger and Malm, Krister, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (London: Constable, 1984). While not focussed upon phonography as such, Keil and Feld’s *Music Grooves* deals with elements of the global music industry that is grounded in phonography (Keil, Charles and Feld, Steven, *Music Grooves* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994)); see also Attali, Jacques, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press), pp. 87-132; Chanan, Michael, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effects on Music* (London, New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>iii</sup> Kahn, Douglas, “Introduction: Histories of Sound Once Removed”, in Kahn, Douglas and Whitehead, Gregory (eds.), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 6.

recording) can be uncovered. Such uncoverings contribute to a picture of the cultural imagination of the voice (though, as I hope shall become apparent, this is a polymorphous and plural imagination) which has become legible under the regime of phonography. Subjectivity(-ies), models of subjectivity, and simulations of subjectivity are thereby incorporated into a constellation of (sometimes contradictory or paradoxical) significances and meanings. Such a constellation does not arise from nowhere but has a history, and part of the present work is to also uncover aspects of that history.

There is little in the way of sustained theory written about sound or sound recording technology in the period from the invention of telephony and phonography (1877-8) up to the relatively recent past, something that is particularly striking when one compares what little there is with the huge quantity of texts on the visual technologies of photography and film. Film is treated almost exclusively as a visual and/or literary medium from its inception right up to the 1960s. In the majority of the texts which I have looked at from the same period almost nothing is explicitly or directly related to voice or to phonography, with the notable exception of Adorno's three essays on recording technology.<sup>iv</sup> However, I propose that there are partially hidden theorizations of sound

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<sup>iv</sup> "The Curves of the Needle" (1927), "The Form of the Phonograph Record" (1934) and "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), all in Adorno, Theodor W., *Essays on Music*, ed. Leppert, Richard (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 271-276, 277-282, 288-317. There is also the later "Opera and the Long-Playing Record", where Adorno, having noted his own observation that there was no "gramophone specific" music, suggests that it is with long-playing records of opera that "the gramophone record comes into its own" (Adorno, Theodor W., "Opera and the Long-Playing Record" [1969], in Adorno, Theodor W., *Essays on Music*, ed. Leppert, Richard (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 283-4). I have found only two explicit references to phonography in the collections of Benjamin's writings I have available in English, in his essay on the tenth anniversary of Kafka's death and in the "Work of Art" essay (Benjamin, Walter, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death" [1934], in Arendt, Hannah (ed.), *Illuminations*,

recording to be uncovered. For example, there is much to learn about the place of voice in relation to technology from a dialectical reading of two of Walter Benjamin's essays of the mid-1930s, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "The Storyteller"; there is also a strong sense that the foundational metaphor in Breton's surrealist practice of "pure psychic automatism" whereby the silent inner voice of the unconscious is inscribed through a sort of dictation onto a "recording instrument" (a technological model that Breton makes synonymous with the writer) is surely most closely modelled on the phonograph, even though Breton does not name the "recording device" as a phonograph.<sup>v</sup> Freud evokes the phonograph as both an ideal psychoanalytic listener<sup>vi</sup>, and as the technological prosthesis of memory.<sup>vii</sup> The punishment apparatus of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" resembles nothing more than a gigantic phonographic nightmare, inscribing words onto the silenced and trussed-up body of the "criminal". Friedrich Kittler has, of course, uncovered several works of fiction in which phonography is the key theme, and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* both feature phonography, and the imaginative effects of phonography, as major elements. More recent (mostly literary) theorists such as Friedrich Kittler, Sara Danius, Steven Connor, Andreas Huyssen, Tim Armstrong, Vincent Pecora, John Picker, Ivan Kreilkamp and others have proposed, from a variety of ideological and methodological

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trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 108-135; Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1936], in Arendt, Hannah (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-244), though Mark E. Cory notes a fragment of a radiophonic project by Benjamin in the archives of German Radio; see Cory, Mark E., "Soundplay: The Polyphonous Tradition of German Radio Art" in Kahn, Douglas and Whitehead, Gregory (eds.), *Wireless Imagination*, p. 369 n 38.

<sup>v</sup> Douglas Kahn reinforces my intuition that it is phonography that is in Breton's mind rather than photography when he mentions in passing that Breton's "recording instruments", as he refers to them in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, as models of the surrealist automatic writer, represent an internalization of "the attributes of phonography" (Kahn, "Introduction", p. 7).

<sup>vi</sup> see Kittler, Friedrich, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 89.

<sup>vii</sup> in Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004 [1930]), p. 35.

positions, readings of modernist literature – Joyce, Eliot, Proust, Mann, and others - that uncover traces of the effects of technologies on the cultural imagination of the classic period of modernism.<sup>viii</sup>

Because there is such a relatively small amount of theorization of sound, sound recording technologies, and the recorded voice, one needs to take account of what there is, wherever it is to be found; this reinforces what is in any case clear, that an interdisciplinary approach is required. Since film is a practice that had considerably more theorization in the early part of the twentieth century that was contemporaneous with its development, film studies is one of the disciplines to which I have turned for critical perspectives. Tim Armstrong has proposed that “[I]t is among those intellectuals and writers interested in film that responses to the discursive shift represented by sound are most marked, allowing us to investigate the relations between film, sound, and modernity”.<sup>ix</sup> Though I am cautious about applying theoretical insights from the world of visual technologies such as photography and cinema to sound recording technology, or of mapping theories of the image to voice, for reasons that will become obvious, I believe that it is also possible to learn much about the more general attitudes to technological mediation, the interactions and relays between recording technologies and issues such as memory, mimesis, representation and senses of the self, so long as the commonalities, such as they are, do not blind us (to use a visual figure) to the equally productive and specific differences and mismatches between sound and vision.

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<sup>viii</sup> Much of the first chapter on this thesis will be concerned with examining the notion of modernism as a historical category, and there are almost as many different modernisms as there are scholars of modernism. However, for my purposes, the years 1890 to 1940 frame the time period that this thesis restricts itself to.

<sup>ix</sup> Armstrong, Tim, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 221.

Sound recording can be seen as one of the technological developments responsible for the inauguration of new models for conceptualising the interrelationships between the body, the voice and the human subject in the historical period since its inception in 1877; in opening up an epistemological shift within these relationships the culturally mediated experience of recording technologies has contributed to the problematization of those modes of thought, identified as phono- and/or logocentric by Derrida, that have tended to marshal the human voice into power relations constitutive of a post-Enlightenment economy of the human individual. The relationship between the human body, the human voice, and language, though not simple, was nevertheless relatively unambiguous so long as the voice was, or appeared to be, located within the body, and more or less identical with consciousness. Once the voice is explicitly dissociated from the body on what we might characterise as a daily basis, through the telephone and the phonograph, these formerly self-evident relations are thrown into question. This reflects back onto the voice itself, and allows for a cultural reassessment of voice and vocality, and, through a kind of “knock-on effect”, a reassessment of the relations between the body, speech, and subjectivity.

Because there is a risk that an accounting for the cultural phenomena of modernity can be reduced to little more than technological determinism, it is dangerous to isolate phonography, or telephony, from the complexities arising from their cultural and historical locatedness. Chapter 1, and the first half of Chapter 2, examine the historical and epistemological contexts for the historical period of the present work, but also they

raise two general questions, which they only partly answer; Why is there so little in the way of theorizations of sound or the voice in the historical period of industrial modernity (starting roughly from the second half of the nineteenth century) in comparison to theorizations of visual technology? and How are writing and memory pressurized and reconfigured under the impact of technologies such as the phonograph? It is my proposal that these are best answered with recourse to a theory of modernity (in the more general, *longue durée* sense) that is grounded in the particularities of the epistemological perspectives characteristic of a specific structure of subjectivity – a structure that, in the light of Lacan’s theory of “the ego’s era”, we can recognise as being dominated by the imperatives of the ego. It is not until chapter 3 of the present work that I introduce this theory, however, hence my statement that the first two chapters only partly answer the questions they raise.

The name of Lacan – and the role of psychoanalysis more generally in the present work – raises an important methodological issue. It is probably inevitable that any discourse dealing with the human mind within an epistemological system that (generally) sees humanity as a universal - the epistemology that can posit universal suffrage, human rights, international law, etc. - and which furthermore tends to see “the human” situated *in* “the mind”, will come up with concepts that look like universalizations. Psychoanalysis has been accused of universalization, and some of the most systematic and vigorous challenges directed against psychoanalysis for being a universalizing discourse have come from post-colonial theories. These have cast doubts upon psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic approach because of its historical and cultural specificity as a discursive

system of the modern West, and for what is perceived to be its complicity, along with other human sciences, in racism, imperialism and orientalism. Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have questioned how useful such a culture specific approach can be. Frantz Fanon, himself a psychoanalyst, objected to the idea that the Oedipus complex had any currency in terms of understanding the psychic life of black Africans.<sup>x</sup> As Andreas Bertoldi discusses in “Oedipus in (South) Africa?: Psychoanalysis and the Politics of Difference” there are many writers who have seen Frantz Fanon’s doubts about the universal applicability of the Oedipus complex as grounds from which to bring the whole psychoanalytical project under interrogation, particularly on account of the fact that it has been figured as an integral part of the totalizing discourses of imperialism. As he puts it, “[T]hat there was collusion between psychiatry and the colonial apparatus is impossible to deny”, and so to interrogate such epistemological grounds for understanding the psychic life of African peoples is no bad thing, in and of itself. However, Bertoldi is careful to sound two notes of warning; that to dismiss “universals” as inherently racist is not as simple or reliable a critique as it seems on first sight, and that criticisms directed towards psychoanalysis may in fact be criticisms of psychiatry, ethnopsychiatry or psychology, disciplines into which “psychoanalysis has to a large measure simply been included - an inclusion that [Bertoldi wishes] to challenge and problematise”.<sup>xi</sup>

He notes that it is from the same cultural perspective that works with the idea of there being universal applications of psychoanalysis, at least as a speculative process, that such things as universal human rights, suffrage, health care, and so on emerge. As he

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<sup>x</sup> Bertoldi, Andreas, “Oedipus in South Africa?: Psychoanalysis and the Politics of Difference”, *American Imago* 55/1 (Spring, 1998), p. 105.

<sup>xi</sup> Bertoldi, “Oedipus”, p. 103.

articulates it, “For Sachs [South African psychoanalyst and author of *Black Hamlet: The Mind of an African Negro Revealed by Psychoanalysis*<sup>xii</sup>] 'Freudianism' was universalist and therefore conclusively a non-racist theory.”<sup>xiii</sup>

[A]lthough it will be admitted that in the colonial situation psychoanalysis does confront its own limits as an explanatory model, the post-colonial strategy of ‘*difference*’ contains a number of pitfalls. . . . far from there being a clear dividing line of opposition between positions of difference and positions of universalism, the two ‘strategies’ will be revealed as complexly interrelated and neither one *a priori* ‘politically progressive’ as is often suggested.<sup>xiv</sup>

That the universalizing claims of psychoanalysis offer the potential for a trans-human and therefore non-racist understanding of psychic life does not guarantee that this will in fact be the case, and Bertoldi notes the “dangers in such simple universalist assumptions, especially considering the ease with which such notions in the hands of more conservative and racist thinkers can be adapted to a theory of evolutionary and racial hierarchy”.<sup>xv</sup> Nevertheless, universalization and difference need not be necessarily either-or choices - they can be made to be racist, or social Darwinist, but need not be.

It is, I think, one of the strengths of Lacan’s theory of modern history that it applies psychoanalysis in such a rigorously historically and culturally grounded manner, and makes no claims for its own universal applicability; in fact such claims would characterize exactly those appropriations of psychoanalysis that Lacan is most critical of in his writing. The psychoanalytical work is always specific, dialogic, and in process.

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<sup>xii</sup> Sachs, Wulf, *Black Hamlet: The Mind of an African Negro Revealed by Psychoanalysis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937) republished as *Black Hamlet*, (Johannesburgh: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), as cited in Bertoldi, “Oedipus”.

<sup>xiii</sup> Bertoldi, “Oedipus”, p. 115.

<sup>xiv</sup> Bertoldi, “Oedipus”, p. 107.

<sup>xv</sup> Bertoldi, “Oedipus”, p. 115.

We should probably not be surprised to discover that psychoanalysis, a discipline that was named “the talking cure”, has featured in a good range of attempts to understand the voice (and of course language) in terms of its role in subject formation.<sup>xvi</sup> The psychoanalytical understanding of the voice can be productively articulated to the widespread (though not always successful) application of psychoanalytical thinking to the analysis of literary texts, and it is for these reasons that I shall be foregrounding it in the present work. In the absence of other evidence as to the effects of phonography on the cultural imagination of the voice, I shall be using literary texts as primary materials in the present work for reasons I shall explain in due course. There are other, equally pertinent reasons for situating the weight of my writing in the psychoanalytical register, however, and that is to do with the proximity of psychoanalytical thought to the writers and artists who I shall be dealing with.

Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is still one of the most widely cited works on modern technology, despite having been written some 70, or so, years ago. This is one of the most thoroughgoing attempts of its

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<sup>xvi</sup> Beginning with Freud’s own adoption of the phrase “the talking cure”, coined by his patient Bertha Pappenheim (known as Anna O.), through Jacques Lacan (the invocatory drive and voice as partial object), Didier Anzieu (the concept of the acoustic envelope), Denis Vasse (the voice as a kind of umbilicus), Michel Poizat (voice as a site of *jouissance*), Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar (the object voice), Kaja Silverman (gender, voice and psychoanalysis). See Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979 [seminar given 1964, first published 1973]); Anzieu, Didier, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Vasse, Denis, *La Voix et l’ombilique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974); Poizat, Michel, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992); Žižek, Slavoj, “‘I hear you with my eyes’: or, The Invisible Master”, in Žižek, Slavoj, and Salecl, Renata (eds.), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham, NC. and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 90-126; Dolar, Mladen, “The Object Voice”, in Žižek, Slavoj and Salecl, Renata (eds.), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 7-31; Silverman, Kaja, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

time to investigate the impact of new technologies on the cultural understanding of the artwork, foregrounding film in particular, but also directing attention to the longer-established technology of photography. Benjamin works to situate the audiences and producers of cinema, in particular, in a relationship with technology that disrupts and undermines much of the established modes of value that had accrued to the idea of the artwork. It seems apposite, then, that he should have had productive encounters with some of the Parisian surrealists, even going so far as to call for a “surrealizing” of society. The surrealists were a group of thinkers who, like Benjamin, were fascinated by the relations between humans and technologies, and also claimed to have revolutionary aims. They delighted in the irrational, and the liberatory aspects of their thinking tended to place an emphasis on individual psychic freedom, the freedom of the imagination, and an acknowledgement of the liberatory potential of chance, indeterminacy, and mechanical processes such as automatic writing.<sup>xvii</sup>

The Frankfurt School theorists and their associates, and the French surrealists under André Breton were interested in and influenced by Freud, even as both groups were also driven by liberatory ideals derived, in the main, from a Marxist understanding of society. Benjamin connects both groups, being a sort of honorary member of the Frankfurt School, and one of the few non-surrealists to take a serious interest in surrealist ideas. Living, as he did, in Paris during the rise of the surrealist movement, there are a number of points of contact between Benjamin and the surrealists, a common love of esoteric

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<sup>xvii</sup> The liberatory potential of indeterminacy and machine-like systems would be invoked from the 1940s by John Cage, and find their way into the thinking of Boulez through his integral serialism, magic squares, and exhortation to “take delirium, yes, and organise it” (cited in Hayman, Ronald, *Artaud and After* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 144; original source not credited).

thought, fascination with “the outmoded”, an ambivalent relationship with popular culture, advertising, and so on, and a non-linear, collagist outlook on modern culture. In her excellent account of this period in Parisian history, Margaret Cohen suggests that although Benjamin and Aragon knew one another, there is little evidence to suggest that Benjamin knew the leader of the surrealist movement, André Breton, personally, proposing that they were textually rather than biographically related, noting that there is no mention of Benjamin in any of Breton’s correspondence, nor any letters extant from Benjamin to Breton.<sup>xviii</sup> Although I have tried to establish something of a boundary between primary texts - by the surrealists, Benjamin, Freud, and The Frankfurt theorists – and the Lacanian perspective which I introduce in chapter 3, it is nevertheless worth noting at this point that Lacan had extremely close and productive contacts with the Parisian surrealists in the later 1930s, as well as carrying forward Freud’s own researches through his re-reading of Freud.<sup>xix</sup>

What we have, then, in the writings of Benjamin and the surrealists, are thinkers engaging with Freud, Marx and the questions about the relationships between humans and machines in the period following World War I. My proposal is that in looking at the ways that human-machine relations were conceptualised by these thinkers we may gain insights into how the phonographic voice may have figured in the cultural imagination of the time standing, as I believe it does, as a particular example of the problematic of “the human” in relation to “technology”. There is, moreover, a strong sense of quite specific

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<sup>xviii</sup> Cohen, Margaret, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 14-15.

<sup>xix</sup> See notes 717 and 747 below.

configurations of the human and the technological in the period between the wars, from which the majority of the texts which I shall be treating as primary sources are taken.

The First World War was preceded for about a century by what Richard Terdiman, identifying a cultural condition that colours much Freudian and post-Freudian theory, has called a worsening “memory crisis”.<sup>xx</sup> As well as offering a historically specific colouring to Freud and Breuer’s oft-quoted observation that “hysterics suffer mainly from remembering”,<sup>xxi</sup> the memory crisis correlates with, or results from, the pressures and stresses of modernity that form part of the subject matter of the first chapter of this thesis. Briefly, the memory crisis consists in both too little and too much memory; too little in the fact that the explosion in urbanization and the depopulation of the countryside severed people from their traditional memories and places, moving them to places that were often newly constructed and previously unpopulated; too much memory in the proliferation of documentation, bureaucracy, technologies of storage and circulation of information, and the collection, classification and display of all aspects of the human, natural and physical world under imperialist expansion.

Terdiman articulates the interconnectedness of theory and memory; memory is a condition of possibility of theory, and theory is the structuring of memory as experience. One cannot fully exist without the other, memory feeding theory its material, and theory structuring this material in order that it can become meaningful. Though there are many

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<sup>xx</sup> Terdiman, Richard, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 10-13.

<sup>xxi</sup> Freud, Sigmund, and Breuer, Josef, “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication” [1893], in Strachey, James (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud II* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 7.

epistemological contingencies for history to negotiate, what remains a constant issue is that the past is always absent, and all we have to work with is representation. Memory and theory come together over this, with historiography a way of acknowledging the discontinuity of experience and therefore of history as such; the “memory crisis” of modernity is mostly concerned with the disappearance of the idea that the past and present are continuous parts of an organic process that is Time.

Though psychoanalysis has been criticised for not always taking account of its cultural and historical situatedness, the strong element of *post hoc* constructedness in Lacan’s account of the “modern” (in a *longue durée* sense) psyche, through his application of his post-Second World War psychoanalytical ideas to the previous three hundred years, is not especially problematic: it is, in effect, what both historiography and historicism do, even if these disciplines have not always made this explicit. In addition, a great part of Lacan’s project was to in a sense uncover the unconscious of Freud, and his time, through a reading of Freud as a psychoanalytical subject; returning Freud to himself, as it were. This marks a project that is both psychoanalytical and, in a sense, historical. As I shall explain more fully in Chapter 3, Lacan’s formulation of the Symbolic order is done with reference to a sensibility that he identifies as historical. Crucially, history is not any more equivalent to the past than memory and the unconscious are equivalent to what has happened to the subject – from the psychoanalytical perspective, memory and remembering do not simply consist of accumulated data, but are creative phenomena that

construct narratives, something that Freud had identified as early as 1899 in his “Screen Memories”<sup>xxii</sup>.

Maud Ellmann intimates that a psychoanalytical approach to literature is not predicated on mastery of a text but on a relationship between the reader/analyst and the text in which “text and reader reveal the inadvertent intuitions of the other: and it is out of this exchange that psychoanalytic theory is evolving still”<sup>xxiii</sup>. The analyst, their personal predispositions, and their epistemological positioning are all part of the analytic dialogue. Something of the same order was anticipated by Benjamin in his theorization of history; history is something constructed by historians in dialogue with historical documents, is something constructed in the present, not an understanding of “how things were”, an untenable ideological position he exemplifies with reference to Ranke.<sup>xxiv</sup> Any hermeneutic project will tell us as much about ourselves, and the ideologies underlying the cultural constructedness of our hermeneutic methods, as it reveals any “truths” about the contents, intentions or motivations of the text under scrutiny. While Lacan’s theory of the ego’s era is hardly history *per se* it is nevertheless intimately bound up with the problematics of historical understanding.

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<sup>xxii</sup> Freud, Sigmund, “Screen Memories” [1899], in Strachey, James (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud III* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 303-322.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ellmann, Maud, “Introduction”, in Maud Ellmann (ed.), *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), pp. 26-27.

<sup>xxiv</sup> “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. . . . The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. . . . Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious” (Benjamin, Walter, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” [1939-40], in Arendt, Hannah (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 247).

Benjamin writes:

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.<sup>xxv</sup>

We may suppose that an awareness of this constellation, which we could liken to - even if we cannot completely identify it with - Lacan's "rewriting of history", is one, like the rewriting of the subject's own history in the ego's era, that has been generally repressed in favour of "the way it really was". The scientism of such a view is both anathema to Lacan's idea of knowledge, and anathema to Benjamin's situating of history as a factor in the present: "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins".<sup>xxvi</sup> Each generation hopes for redemption, and expects redemption of the following generations.

There is a potential disjunction, methodologically speaking, in my attempt to work with Benjamin's theory of history in such close proximity to Lacan's theory of the subject.

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<sup>xxv</sup> Benjamin, "Theses", p. 255. Interestingly, if somewhat parenthetically for the purposes of the present work, Eric Rothenbuhler and John Durham Peters deploy Benjamin's contrasting models of history to theorize the differences between digital and analogue recordings. Whereas digital recordings are essentially codes, analogue recordings can be imagined to retain a physical connectedness with the persons making the original sounds, a tactile link from the recorded trace back to the moment at which the sound was recorded. They propose that the digitally coded recordings of "CD technocrats live in 'homogeneous and empty time', in which one event relentlessly succeeds the next, while the [vinyl] audiophiles live in 'revolutionary time', in which it is possible to make immediate links between the now and the then, in which a historical moment can surge into the present" (Rothenbuhler, Eric W., and Peters, John Durham, "Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory", *The Musical Quarterly*, 81/2 (Summer, 1997), p. 254).

<sup>xxvi</sup> Benjamin, "Theses", p. 247.

Lacan sees language as a system of signs, of signifiers, whereas Benjamin sees it in terms of “nonsensuous correspondences”; as something structured according to the logic of mimesis. He writes that “language, as is evident, is not an agreed system of signs”,<sup>xxvii</sup> which amounts to a flat rejection of the very understanding of language that underwrites almost the entirety of Lacan’s work. However, we should note that language and history are *different* things, by their nature – language pre-exists the individual subject, whereas history is constructed (using language) *by* individual subjects. Thought at a structural level there is a rupture between Benjamin’s understanding of language and that of Lacan, and, as Rochlitz has argued, there is a case for seeing a structural connection between Benjamin’s theory of language and his theory of history, his theory of history is, nevertheless, *not* his theory of language. It does not necessarily follow, therefore, that what Benjamin has to say about the structure and nature of history is incompatible with Lacan’s theory of language, or indeed with Lacan’s theory of history; to insist upon this would be syllogistic. In fact, Benjamin’s understanding of history as something that is constructed rather than given, is close to Lacan’s understanding of that attribute of the subject of the Symbolic that “rewrites history”, that constructs, from the present perspective, and in response to changes in the present, the subject’s own “history”. For Rochlitz, writing on Benjamin’s concept of history, “the critic’s task is a matter . . . of intervening in history by discovering certain concealed meanings that appear highly illuminating to the critic and vital for the era. It entails conferring an immediate *political*

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Benjamin, Walter, “On the Mimetic Faculty”, p. 334. Rainer Rochlitz, furthermore, equates Benjamin’s attitude to language with his attitude to history; see Rochlitz, Rainer, *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1996), pp. 229-231.

function on the critic's activity".<sup>xxviii</sup> Despite potential methodological disjunctions, then, such a perspective brings Benjamin's and Lacan's ideas of history, if not of language, into closer affinity to one another. The concealed meanings could, for Lacan, be the very materials upon which to propose a psychoanalytical approach to history – the ego's era that disavows itself – and, as in the case of Benjamin, the spotlight that Lacan throws onto the dangerous power of the ego-Imaginary has its own political aspect. It is, perhaps, evidence of a local *Zeitgeist* that Lacan's first formulations of what would become his theory of the psychic order of the Imaginary (that is crucial to his theory of history) were formalized into a conference paper the same year (1936), and the same city (Paris), in which Benjamin completed his "Work of Art" essay.

With the invention of the phonograph in 1877 the voice, or something resembling it at least, becomes perceptible as an object - *radically* an object, existing out in the world as a thing in itself. Douglas Kahn notes that "we only begin to really hear *about* sound as a cultural entity" with the invention of the phonograph, and something similar could be said about the voice. The voice is difficult to fix, even after phonography appears to have fixed it for eternity. Lacan reduces the voice to a remainder of signification, a perspective that Michel Chion invokes when he writes

The voice is elusive. Once you've eliminated everything that is not the voice itself – the body that houses it, the words it carries, the notes it sings, the traits by which it defines a speaking person, and the timbres that colour it, what's left?<sup>xxix</sup>

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Rochlitz, *Disenchantment of Art*, p. 238 [emphasis in original].

<sup>xxix</sup> Chion, Michel, *The Voice in Cinema* trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 1.

What is left is the notion of the object voice, which, for Žižek, is a voice that is paradoxically silent. Here is the sense of the voice as something mysterious that lies outside of speech, cry or utterance as such. At the same time, voice can and has been variously imagined as a neutral medium of speech (see chapter 5 of the present work), as a manifestation of soul and/or presence (through the metaphysical notion named by Derrida as *s'entendre parler*), or empirically coterminous with utterance (Saussure). Vincent Pecora describes voice as having “become a text to be examined by the practice of writing”,<sup>xxx</sup> whereas Ivan Kreilkamp sees it as having become emptied out through its technological prosthesis in phonography.<sup>xxxii</sup> For Steven Connor, it is something that “[F]or you . . . comes from me. For me, it goes out from me. . . . I produce my voice in a way that I do not produce [my] other attributes . . . Listen, says a voice: some being is giving voice”.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In fact, it is not my intention to *define* voice because what particularly interests me is the multiplicity of conceptual forms and epistemological perspectives that voice enters into and participates with in the cultural imagination. Phonography does have *effects* on the voice, but it also acts in a more neutral way in highlighting things about the voice and vocality that would otherwise have remained unnoticed, or unremarked upon; Chion suggests that we forget the voice “[b]ecause we confuse it with speech”,<sup>xxxiii</sup> but sound recording technologies, insofar as they decontextualize the disembodied voice, confront us *with* “voice” as much as with what is said by that voice.

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<sup>xxx</sup> Pecora, Vincent, “Heart of Darkness and the Phenomenology of Voice”, *English Literary History*, 52/4 (Winter, 1985), p. 994.

<sup>xxxii</sup> I shall draw upon Kreilkamp’s ideas in Chapter 5.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Connor, Steven, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 3-4.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, p. 1.

The complexities of the cultural imagination of the voice become less complex and less interesting if voice is defined as *one* single thing.

Though I am not putting forward an anthropological approach in the present work, Clifford Geertz's statement about the materials an anthropologist must work on, "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive first to group and then to render"<sup>xxxiv</sup> resonates strongly with my own experiences in working through the material presented here. His conclusion concerning anthropological writings is also something that, from my experience with the present work, rings true:

In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot . . . They are, thus, fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made', 'something fashioned' – the original meaning of *fictio* – not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Such an understanding of hermeneutics as "fictional" seems appropriate to the conceptualizations that I have arrived at of the ways that memory, psychoanalysis, history, and cultural hermeneutics inter-relate and come into being.

In chapter 1 I shall discuss some of the issues informing the relations of modernity to modernism, and attempt to position technology, in general, in relation to these concepts. Most of the key texts I shall be examining have been characterized as "modernist", but I

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (London: Fontana Press, An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 1973), p. 10.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 15.

shall argue that they are more productively understood when not seen in dichotomous, oppositional terms in relation to phenomena such as technology and mass culture; unlike in some twentieth-century accounts, modernism should be seen not as antithetical but integral to technology, mass culture and modernity. In chapter 2 I propose some ideas as to why there is so relatively little in the way of theorizations of sound and sound recording technology in the modern period. I propose that the most powerful effect of phonography is on the human voice and that because music was technologically unable to realise what Douglas Kahn has called the “ideational mission” and “conceptual implications” of the phonograph within phonography itself, the effect on the voice is traced in the nearest available technology of voice, which is writing and literature. I signalled at the start of this Introduction that I proposed to treat phonography as an example of a site of encounter between humans and machines. Such encounters (as I discuss in chapter 1) can be traced as strong themes in the phenomenon of modernity. As a trope through which to investigate the encounter of the human and the machine I have already suggested the model of the prosthesis, and the second half of chapter 2 is concerned with readings of three literary texts that foreground phonography, examining them with a view to uncovering elements of a cultural imagination of the phonographic voice as it stands as a prosthesis of writing and of memory.

There is a sense in which these first two chapters pose some of the problems of the recorded voice that begin to be answered in chapter 3, which is an outline of Lacan’s theory of the ego’s era. Lacan’s theory supports an understanding of the relative neglect of the aural in relation to the visual in the modern period in terms of a series of

disavowals as to the nature of the recorded voice. The implications I draw from this theory contribute to readings of two fundamental pieces of the modernist cannon that, I propose, exemplify further modellings of phonography as a prosthesis. Chapter 4 focuses on the scientific attributes and claims of phonography in the context of Lacan's critique of science and empirical method, looking in detail at Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and the points of contact surrealism had with scientific approaches to knowledge, as sites at which phonography can be read as a prosthesis of listening. I propose in this chapter that despite claims to a revolutionary agenda, much of the thinking behind surrealist automatism is psychoanalytically conservative, rehearsing and endorsing the ego-perspective of the ego's era. In chapter 5 I suggest that a different psychoanalytical structure can be traced in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which I propose as a primary text from which to think of phonography as a prosthesis of speech. I suggest that there are several aspects of Eliot's poem that articulate more of an engagement with what Lacan would term the Symbolic order, challenging some of the conservatism of the ego's era which is seen by Lacan as being dominated by the Imaginary. It is important to note, and I shall reiterate this in the text that follows, that for heuristic reasons I have sometimes discussed the Imaginary and the Symbolic in relation to the literary texts as though they were separate poles. Though it may seem that I arrive at a point where Breton's text is figured as of the Imaginary and Eliot's of the Symbolic - Breton's conservative and Eliot's radical, the *Manifesto of Surrealism* paradoxically (bearing in mind its avowedly revolutionary agenda) acquiescent to the *status quo* and *The Waste Land*, despite its canonic status, challenging the norms of the ego's era - this is a simplification in order to point up aspects of these texts that resonate with the notion of

phonography as prosthetic of listening and speaking, respectively. The interrelatedness, indeed, the inseparability of all three of the Lacanian psychic orders (the third of them is the Real, discussed in chapter 3) should always be borne in mind.

Finally, in chapter 6 I try, by way of conclusion, to arrive at a position that characterizes the cultural imagination of the voice under phonography, though as will become clear, there is no single cultural imagination of the voice that can be unambiguously or securely arrived at, unless it is to say that the voice has been imagined to be many things in many contexts. In some respects, there are manifestations of this cultural imagination that are indelibly marked by the dominant epistemologies of the time, in particular the associations of writing and disembodiment with death, the phonocentric metaphysics critiqued by Derrida, and with what Lacan has called the ego's era. At the same time, it is possible to find points where dominant epistemologies are stretched, or challenged outright; the notion that the voice under phonography is murdered rather than immortalized (the one being a condition of possibility of the other). Though it may seem paradoxical that phonography kills the voice *and* preserves it, such a dialectical condition underlies the etymology of that most dialectical of terms, *Aufhebung*. As Wieland Hoban writes in another introduction (his "Translator's Introduction" to Adorno's collected drafts and notes for the never completed *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*), *Aufhebung* "unites the two meanings of the word *aufheben*, namely 'to cancel or negate' and 'to preserve'".<sup>xxxvi</sup> preservation and destruction, like Freud's personifications of the life and death drives (as Eros and Thanatos), seem to lie close to the heart of much of

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> Hoban, Wieland, "Translator's Introduction", in Adorno, Theodor W., *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction: Notes, a Draft and Two Schemata*, ed. Lonitz, Henri, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. xviii.

Western culture, particularly in the period of *longue durée* modernity, and so we should perhaps not be so surprised to find them co-existing at this site of the encounter of voice and technology. Voice can become something other in its disembodiment than it is in its embodiment, but at the same it time it can be understood as something always already disembodied; the belief in the identity and continuity of voice with its recording may ground a sense of self-presence, and yet it may also be a site of disavowal, a disavowal that the voice under phonography – or the voice *as such* - is emptied of presence rather than the bearer of presence. This, then, is a sketch map of the circulations followed and the connectivities traced by the phonographic voice, but this thesis begins with an examination of some of the historical contexts within which the voice was first technologically disembodied and preserved.