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AFFECTS, INDEXES AND SIGNS
will oldham and the authenticity of the voice in popular music

Abstract Usually, when we determine the authenticity of a performer in popular music then we do so either through their biography or their inherence within a tradition. The question of authenticity then becomes one of betrayal. This article argues that there might be a unique way of approaching authenticity through affects, where authenticity is impersonal rather than personal. It uses the work of Pierre Schaeffer to describe the difference between indexes and signs on the one hand, and affects on the other, to develop a concept of abstract subjectivity, which is not the same as the individual. It explains abstract subjectivity through Will Oldham's description of his performance. Finally, it compares this method of listening to popular music with Blanchot's description of literature as free indirect discourse, speaking without a first person. It is abstract subjectivity that allows popular music to resist its own commodification, which is the very opposite of authenticity.

Keywords affects; authenticity; Blanchot; Schaeffer; Oldham

There is a singer called Will Oldham (or better, "Bonnie Prince Billy," as the use of a pseudonym is as important to him as it was for Kierkegaard) whose voice has the affect of authenticity. You might be tempted to think about this affect, if you know anything at all about him, as an affectation. "Surely he is not authentic," you might say, "he's an actor, isn't he?" "He's not really from the Appalachia, he's just a millennial with a large beard," you might add contemptuously. Whether this is true, I would reply to you that you are talking about his voice as an index or sign, but not as an affect. You are responding to the question "who is that voice?" or "what does that voice mean?" rather than the affect of his voice, which has nothing at all to do with a representation of a person or an event. I can hear a voice without interpreting its value or wondering about its origin. Such a hearing would give an entirely different meaning to authenticity. In the first case, the authenticity of the index or the sign, we interpret the voice by referring it back to its cause, either as a physical effect or an intention of an individual, or as a sign we insert it within a general system of signs of cultural value. In the second, in the authenticity of the affect, the singer vanishes in the voice, and the voice is heard outside of any discourse of attribution, whether as an index or a sign. Authenticity as disappearance is quite different from its form as biography or value. This other authenticity belongs to how we hear, and how that hearing is elicited from the performance. It matters not only to the audience but also to the singer, who must hear in the same way to create.

In answering this question about whether or not Will Oldham is authentic, I am not interested in the meaning of his music, which would be something else entirely, but its creation and performance, which are intimately intertwined. Beyond issues of taste or musical judgement, his is an interesting case because anonymity is at the heart of his musical practice. He says so repeatedly when he speaks about his own music. When we usually make judgements about authenticity, we do so in terms of subjectivity. Is this person really who they say they are, are they true avatars of a tradition they say they represent? On top of this, especially in popular music, we worry about commodification and marketing, so we might exaggerate the authenticity of those performers who we think are unique. This is not the meaning of authenticity I want to defend, or at least not directly so. What defeats marketing is not authentic subjectivity, since it has wholly and utterly been co-opted by it, but anonymity, which is nothing less than a withdrawal from subjectivity.

The voice as index or sign, when it comes to writing about popular music, generally takes precedence over the voice as affect, where even the affect itself is thought of as a sign or index.[1] There is no doubt that affects are constantly captured by signs and referred to indexes, because they are attracted to and seized by them. To immediately identify affects with signs and indexes is to leave unexplained how this fascination and seizure happens. It is, unfortunately, very difficult to separate affects from indexes and signs, because representations are the usual way we think about the world, and intentions how we refer to individuals. If we cannot have an idea of something, then how can we speak about it? If the idea does not have its origin in an individual, then what is its source? To speak of affects we need a theory or language of affects independent from indexes and signs. This will take us to the work of Spinoza and Foucault. For without this philosophical detour, we have no idea at all what it means to say the voice is first an affect, something that moves or fails to move us, and not a representation of something. From there we will look at Schaeffer's *Traité des objets musicaux*. This work is important, because it offers a profound phenomenology of hearing that separates music from meaning, and gives us a method of applying the theory of affects to musical listening. Schaeffer's work is still committed to a phenomenological subjectivity, but I argue, using Sartre's critique in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, that listening does not have to be attached to a subject separate from the act, but to the sonorous as such. The composer or the singer is the first listener. The origin of music is the infinite universe of noise in which every individual voice is lost. To create is to select from this universe. It is not I who sings but this other origin of the voice that sings through me, which does not bear a name. The voice sings out of a singing whose source is indefinite and indistinct. In listening to it, I am affected not just by the person who sings but this indistinguishable, almost unintelligible voice that bears no name and which their own voice embodies uniquely. To create is to bring to the light of day this other voice. It is these singers we admire, though we confuse this other voice with theirs. To be authentic is to disappear into this other voice. It is not merely a matter of doing away with authorial intention, as in Barthes's famous "death of the author" and the "intentional fallacy" of New Criticism, which has more to do with interpretation rather than creativity, but to actively seek

this self-annihilation “for the wonder of the creation of a nonhuman life” (Deleuze and Guattari 191; translation modified). This other voice of singing has much in common with what Blanchot calls the neuter, and we can compare what he has to say about literature with a different way of thinking about affects in popular music.

There is no evidence, in anything that Will Oldham has written or said, that he is interested in any of this. He has never uttered a word, as far as I know, about affects, Schaeffer or Blanchot. Why should he? He is a musician. What he has said is that anonymity is at the heart of his musical practice, so when we talk about his authenticity, or lack of it, then I think we ought to have the courtesy to measure him by this standard. This article is not traditional musicology. It does not offer a new interpretation of his music through some biographical insight, or demonstrate its origin in a genre or a tradition It takes Will Oldham’s practice seriously, and suggests, through what some might think is a long and tortuous philosophical detour, that there is another way of talking about authenticity in popular music, and a unique way of thinking about how it resists what constantly avails it, which is its own marketing and commodification.

A Theory of Affects

We start with Spinoza because he saved affects from the tyranny of representation. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes between an affect (*affectus*) and the idea of affections (*affectio*), which is sometimes lost in the translation, but which proves to be very important. An affection is the representation of a body through the effect of another body. Spinoza uses the example of the sun (Spinoza 53–54 2p35s).[2] I see the sun in the sky. It appears to me as the size of a coin. Affection is the lowest level of knowledge for Spinoza. It is always inadequate because it is the contact of bodies on bodies (how the sun seems to the gnat will be very different from me). I understand the world through its effects on me, but I do not grasp the real causes of these effects. That will require the second and third level of knowledge, common notions, and intuition. Affects should not be confused with affections, because an affect is a very peculiar idea for Spinoza. It is an idea that has no representation. It is not a representation at all, not even a confused one. I do not just perceive the sun, it also affects me. The warmth of the sun fills me with joy, or sadness if it burns me. The way a song moves me is not the same as the meaning of the song, where this meaning is confused or not. This affect is not the same as the affection. That you can have ideas without representations is one of the most surprising conclusions of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Love as an affect is not the same as the representation of something loved. This does not mean there is no relation between them. I would not love if I did not have the idea of thing or person whom I loved, but this is not the same as saying the affect love is the same as the idea of some thing or some person loved. Love does not represent anything at all, in the same way hope or sadness does not. We find this hard to accept, because we tend to take representation as paramount. The only way to relate to the world is through representations. Everything is only on the way to

representation or a failure of representation. Affects have no intrinsic reality. This would be true if representation were the only reality, but the reality of affects might be different.

We see the same difference between the knowledge and affect in Foucault.[3] If Spinoza tells us that an affect is not a representation, then Foucault teaches us that affects are practices and practices are not the same as knowledge. When it comes to practices, there is always a relation between forces: one which is active, and the other passive. So, there is loving, and being loved; judging and being judged; governing and being governed. A practice is the encounter between two forces: the power to affect, and the power to be affected. Just as Spinoza makes the difference between affects and affections, Foucault distinguishes between power and knowledge. Power always attracts knowledge, but this does not mean that power and knowledge are the same. Knowledge concerns the actualisation of virtual relations of power in institutions. These actualisations are always after the practices themselves. Knowledge is always the attempt to fix and stratify relations of power so they repeat invariantly through the techniques of power and human sciences (Foucault calls them *dispositifs*, which is variously translated as "device," "apparatus," "construction," "machinery," and so on). Because power and knowledge are not the same, the virtual relations of power, the power to affect and the power to be affected, are always escaping their stratification. Foucault's history is the history of these failures. History would always and everywhere be the same if there was not this "outside" constantly escaping its capture through *dispositifs*.

Power escapes knowledge, or affects do, because they do not belong to the same order. In his book on Foucault, which bears the same name, Deleuze makes use of Blanchot's phrase "speaking is not seeing" (parler, ce n'est pas voir) (Deleuze, *Foucault* 61).[4] Knowledge belongs to the visible, and, thereby, what can be said. Power, on the contrary, can neither be seen nor said, or not directly so. It is speaking that has no visible form, since as soon as you speak of it then it no longer exists. I can see the judge and the accused, but I cannot see the judging that miraculously transforms the accused into the criminal. Judging is actualised in the function of the courtroom and the substance of the judge and the accused, which is what I see, but the power of judging is not a visible thing. It is neither a function nor a substance. If the purpose of the *dispositif* is to make power visible and stateable by bringing them into conjunction, then we should not confuse it with what it makes stable. The accoutrements of power are not the same as power. Practices are not visibilities because they are invisible and need to be brought to the light of day through what is said about them. They belong to a completely different order. They are neither visible nor invisible, but provoke affects in the world by affecting others (I am judging, or being judged, loving or being loved, saddening or being sad), and whose virtuality overflows what can be seen and said from all sides.

Generally, musicology is about knowledge. It does not concern itself with a practice except as a form of knowledge. Can we not describe the singing voice in the way that Blanchot writes about speaking, so we might say that singing too is a kind of speaking, and not a form of visibility? There must be affects before a representation;

practices before knowledge. A voice must have the power to affect me so I have the desire to understand it. It is only through this power that we are capable of forming a concept or would be interested in a life. The voice is first an affect before it is interpreted as a sign or value. Overall that is not how we think about singing, at least not musicologically, and that should not surprise us. It is easier to speak of music in terms of sign and value, because that is what can be seen and said. This is what we know. We translate the voice into information, as though what was being communicated were more important than the affect of singing on us. We ask "who is singing?" and "what is this song about?" We make value judgements: "Is this song any good?" and "is it better or worse than other kinds of song?" We make hierarchies and typologies. We make distinctions between classical and popular music, and claim there is "true" as opposed to "false" music. Singing will be captured by all of this in time, until it becomes dead and inert, but before all of this it is an affect. It is the sound of the human voice that affects you who listen. Musicology will accept this, but it will say that it is merely subjective or incidental. We cannot say anything about it. It is much easier to speak about the life of the singer or what the song means, so let us just jump over the experience of listening as opposed to its representation.

The primacy of representation forgets that without the affect there would be no creativity to music, and therefore no change or transformation. The voice is the life of the song. Secondly, it confuses the affect with the individual. The individual is the effect of representation, and not exterior to it. Affects are anonymous, and only subsequently given proper names, which themselves are not to be confused with actual individuals. Singing precedes the singer, and the singer, as a position one might occupy, is the effect of singing as a practice, and not the other way around. Is there a way of thinking of music that is adequate to the anonymity of its creation? I believe there is in Pierre Schaeffer's *Traité des objets musicaux*.

There's a lot more going into the ear than meets the eye

What is the difference between music and noise? The universe of noise is an infinite and immense brouhaha. There is no end to the kinds of noise that can be produced, but not every noise is musical, and not every voice a song. The creation of music requires a selection from the infinite possibilities of noise. Without listening, such a choice would not be possible. Listening, as the selection of possibilities, is at the heart of the creativity of music. All music is a relation. It is a relation between the musical object and the listener, and this is as important in the original act of creation (the composer and the singer first listen) as it is for the subsequent audience. Listening is the condition of music, and not music of listening, as though listening were merely the effect of music or its outcome. Yet what kind of listening is required to make the selection to transform noise into music, or the voice into song?

In his book *Traité des objets musicaux*, Pierre Schaeffer describes four kinds of listening, which are difficult to translate into English: *écouter*, *ouïr*, *entendre*, *comprendre* (we could translate them as "listening," "perceiving," "hearing" and

"understanding") (114–17).[5] He constructs a diagram (see Fig. 1) to explain the difference between them, where they are organised vertically by the difference between subjective and objective acts, and horizontally by the difference between concrete and abstract objects of perception.

(4) *Comprehending* Meaning conveyed by signs	(1) *Listening* Events or causes, where sound is an index	**Objective**
(3) *Hearing* Selected sound object by means of selective perception	(2) *Perceiving* Raw sounds object by means of raw perception	**Subjective**
Abstract	**Concrete**	

Fig. 1. **'Table of the Functions of Listening'**

We hear a car outside of our window. We can attend to the causes of the sound (sector 1), which is the car itself ("What is it? Who is it? What is happening?). Our focus is not so much on the sound, which we bypass, but the cause of the sound. This cause or event can become the object of an even more specialised focus. We can analyse it by measuring its amplitude and how it effects the human ear. This too circumvents the perception of the sound, for we are not concerned with the perception but its physical description. It would be obvious that this description would not be the same as the experience of the perception of the sound of the car, for it exists outside of the situation of perceiving (sector 2). I do not perceive sound waves and then reconstruct from them the perception. I first perceive the sound of the car outside of the window, and this phenomenon, if we attend to the experience of perceiving, is not at all like the objective analysis of sound waves produced by a machine.

Still less, if we were to think about music, is its sonority reducible to physical signals. I perceive a violin playing first. I do not hear wavelengths, frequencies, and speed of sound waves in hertz and decibels. We can also treat the sound as a meaning or a value (sector 4). I am not just perceiving a violin playing, but the famous opening chord of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. If I know musical theory, I would comprehend this chord as a diminished seventh. As a musicologist, and more words and pages have been written on this chord than any other, I might describe its dissonance, and the history of dissonance and harmony in Western classical music. I might even, if I feel adventurous enough, link this dissonance to Wagner's life and the greater social and historical events surrounding it. Does this chord sound the death knell of the

Enlightenment and the Age of Reason? For Schaeffer, neither listening nor comprehending are wrong in itself because there certainly can be a science of physical signals, and we are fascinated by the lives of artists and the context of their music, but both are an avoidance of sonority, the sounding of the sound, from whose origin music is derived.

We might interpret Schaeffer's project as deflationary substitution of abstract objectivity, the scientific analysis and cultural appreciation of music, with an abstract subjectivity (sector 3). He calls this a "reduced listening" (*écouté réduite*) (270–72). First there is a perception. I hear a sound (sector 2). But I do not jump over the phenomenon of the sound by asking about its concrete origin (sector 1) or its cultural meaning or value (sector 4). Rather, I attend to the sounding of the sound. This is as equally abstract as the abstraction of meaning, but it is an abstraction of a different kind, subjective rather than objective. I am not comprehending the sound as a vehicle for meaning, or listening to it as an index of the origin of the sound, but I am acutely paying attention to the sound as sound, as it is given in its own mode of appearance. I "bracket" these other factors so that I am reduced to hearing the sound only. I perceive the creaking of a door, to use Schaeffer's example (355).[6] I can listen to it as coming from the door so my focus is the sound as an index of its origin (I can say to myself "that door needs to be oiled"). I can even think of what creaking doors signify and how they are used to mean dread and anxiety. Or I hear the creaking only, and concentrate on the sound, so I bracket the door as an index or sign. I listen to a human voice, and rather than focusing on who is speaking or what is said, I hear its tone. Perhaps the voice is low pitched, or rough, and so on.

The correlate of "reduced listening" is the "sound object" (*objet sonore*) (268–70). The "sound object" is not the real object, nor is it the cultural object, but it is equally abstract. It is not the sound as a physical object, but nor is it the notes or musical theory. It is the immanent object of the activity of hearing. How the sound appears to me when I sharpen my awareness of it through a complex and abstract process of hearing, which is as difficult and precise, and requires the same extreme rigour, as the measurement of physical signals or musicology. Hearing is not mere perceiving of brute sound. It requires an extenuated attention to transform brute sound into a "sound object," where, in terms of Schaeffer's diagram, we move from a concrete to an abstract subjectivity (the difference between sectors 2 and 3). Because it is this abstract subjectivity that determines the sound object, then there is no pre-determined limit to what sound objects could be. They could be "musical objects, phonetic objects, industrial sounds, bird songs, etc." (347).[7] It is my activity that determines the sound object, and not the sound object the act, which then selects it from the infinite brouhaha of the potential universe of sonority.

If I listen to a sound on a tape, and I do not know what the source is, then I am hearing a sound object separated from its visual context (a separation Schaeffer calls the "acousmatic" (*acousmatique*) (91–98). If you cannot see the origin of the music you are listening to then you can concentrate on the sound you are hearing. The more you listen, the more you will hear. The sound object is not the tape. It does not have any objectivity, either real or at the level of meaning or value. It is the abstract

experience of hearing where the sound is immanent to the activity of perceiving. It is only produced in this hearing. If I manipulate the tape, cut it, or modify the speed, then I will not see the sound object. It will appear only when someone listens. Just because the sound sounds only when someone listens, however, does not mean it is merely psychological, as though the sound were merely a state of mind. A "state of mind" no more explains the sound of a sound than the description of the physical signal. It confuses what is given with an explanation. I hear a sound. I do not hear "a state of mind," just as I do not hear decibels or hertz. I can describe the sound without referring to either of these explanations. It mistakes the individual with the subjective. The sound object is not the same as the state of mind that perceives it, no more than the number 3 is reducible to the mind of the mathematician who thinks it. This would be to confuse the matter or content of a perception with the activity of perception. In the reduced listening to a sound object, where I concentrate on the sound as sound, bracketing its origin or cultural value or significance, it is the sound itself which matters as the abstract content of my perception. To confuse the sound object with a state of mind would be to muddle sector 2 and sector 3, perceiving and hearing, concrete and abstract subjectivity. No doubt, without the activity of perception there would be no hearing, but this does not mean that they are the same. One is the quality of the act, the other its content.

How are we to join these two sides together, the theory of affects we described through Spinoza; Foucault and Deleuze, and Schaeffer's phenomenology of sonority? A sound object is not the same as the idea of that sound or its origin. One is an abstract, and the other is a concrete objectivity. In the first, I think of music as an idea or sign. I analyse it in terms of its cultural value. In the second, I refer music back to its origin. I understand music as coming from an individual whose life I attempt to make sense of in a greater whole. Both forms of comprehension are worthwhile, and both have their own kind of authenticity. Yet what both miss is the creativity and vitality of music, its musicality. Schaeffer was a composer and teacher. What mattered to him was the creation of music. When it comes to making music, its practice or performance, what is important is not the origin of sound or its meaning, but listening, and to listen you must first be affected and affect others. It must make a difference. Listening is a practice and it takes time to transform it into hearing.

If we go back to our theory of affects, we would say that listening is not a kind of visibility. Visibility belongs to indexes and signs, to knowledge about, and not to the practice of music. Performance, or the creation of music, also transforms authenticity. For what matters to the musician, in the act of creation, is not the origin of the music, nor its meaning, but sound as sound, the independent reality of the song from who performs it, or the system of values or signs into which the song could subsequently be inserted (the song as an example of a genre) In relation to song as index or sign, authenticity is presence. We speak of the presence of the individual or the presence of the meaning in the song in a greater whole. In singing as a practice, and the sound as an affect, authenticity would be quite different. For the aim of the singer would be to disappear into the song, and the power of the song would continually resist its appropriation by meaning. The song first moves and affects me

through hearing, before it becomes a representation through seeing, and the first listener is the performer, whose ear is open to the infinite possibilities of sonority out of which musicality is torn, and which is the true source of their creativity rather than the index or sign. For if there were only indexes and signs then there would be no transformation or change. The power of the song would be captured by knowledge, and the embers burning within it extinguished. "I believe," Schaeffer declares, in the preface to Chion's book about him,

> that music is more than music, that it is not a run of the mill, utilitarian or aesthetic object, but a spiritual undertaking, or as an old Master used to say a "beingly exercise," an activity of the whole being. (Chion 11)[8]

When we read what Will Oldham has to say about his music, then it is this authenticity he defends.

"You can just hear, sometimes, the desires of the voice itself" (schreiber and oldham)

Most of what is written on Will Oldham, or interviews with him, start with the causality of its origin and immediately jump to its comprehension. All the significance of his work is reduced to biography, or to utterances about how or when the music was created. Of course, this music was produced by him as an individual, if we were to think of it as an objective concrete event, just as the violinist's hand plucking the string produces the note from the violin. Yet is this the most important aspect of his work? Following Schaeffer's analysis, we can see that it has little at all to do with the intrinsic affect of music or song, which is the minimal condition of any music that is not immediately reducible, which would be the opposite extreme, to a commodity. In his interviews with journalists, again and again one hears his irritation and exasperation with the constant obsession with his life, as though if one could find some secret about it, then all the meaning of this music would suddenly reveal itself. We are forgetting that if this did happen we would cease hearing his songs, bypassing them completely by treating them either as only indexes or signs.

There is no doubt that popular music suffers from this "ordinary listening" (*écoute banale*), to use Schaeffer's expression, more so than any other forms, because of its commodification, but what is interesting about Will Oldham's practice is his constant attempts to undermine it. There is an authenticity of listening and comprehending, and I think there is where most people accuse him of faking it, but there is also a completely different authenticity of perceiving and hearing, which is what he aspires to for himself and his audience, a subjective authenticity as opposed to an objective one, and an abstract one at that. "It's not me," he says in an interview in *Salon*, "in that I'm not relaying my life as much as I'm answering this abstract state of emotion that's expressed through musicality" (Machen).

In a collection of interviews with Alan Licht – *Will Oldham on Bonnie "Prince Billy"* – he returns repeatedly to his relation between himself and the song he is singing, and the song's relation to the audience. He resists the idea that his songs are an expression of personal life, even though his lyrics are in the first person, and the voice is intensely intimate. Rather than the song being an index of his life, he claims he is occupying a persona or a voice, which is not him. "Songs," he says, "are made to exist in and of themselves" (Oldham and Licht 6). Again, from the perspective of indexes and signs, this would seem to be fraudulent and insincere. He is just pretending to be someone else, when he is singing about himself. This would imply that the song does not have its own reality, since what would make the song a song would either be a real event in the world or an external sign or value. In attempting to gain access to the truth of the song, you have in fact discarded it in your wake. There is a reality of the song, which is inside the song, and where the emotions and events belong to the song, and not besides it. Even the performance of a song on the stage is a kind of disappearance, even though a large part of the audience might resist, confusing the performer with the song, and the artist with the voice. All this is reinforced by the music industry that swirls around the making of music, which to sell records will reduce music to biography and authorship. What matters to him is how the song sounds and how that sounds affects you, and not who sang it or when it was sung. In this way, Will Oldham says, a song is more like a "thing," a "sound object," than a confession, and as a "thing" it is as external to the performer as it is to the audience. "It's not about the intentions of any individual," he says, "it's about how forces work together to make this thing" (96).

It is with this pre-eminence of the song as a sound object where we might better appreciate Will Oldham's use of the pseudonym "Bonnie Prince Billy." Again, unsympathetically we could respond to it as an affectation on his part, and yet another sign of his insincerity, but he makes it clear that the use of a pseudonym is at the heart of his musical practice, and in fact without its adoption he probably would not have continued as a musician. As Will Oldham says, the invention of "Bonnie Prince Billy" was to show that "there *is* no individual responsible for things," even though when we talk about the music we still confuse this fiction with the person (136).

The abstract subjectivity correlative to the sound object should not be confused with an individual or person. Consciousness, or in Schaeffer's diagram, perceiving, is first open to an anonymous field of possibilities. The construction of an identity, usually in the response to a question of authority, is a second- or third-order act, and if it belongs anywhere does so at the level of meaning and value. As Will Oldham says, speaking about Leonard Cohen, "the 'I' is a signifier and not a self-reflexive thing" (79). There are a thousand "I"s in his song and none of them should be confused with him. The "I," therefore, is much closer to a meaning or a value (sector 4) than anything that takes place in concrete subjectivity. This is not clear in Schaeffer's diagram, perhaps, and it is possible that we might think that the act of perceiving requires a "me" that is perceiving, but the addition of such an ego would either be an index (the "who" that responds to the question "who is singing?" as the

causal origin of the song), or the "I" as signifier, which has its source in this indexicality.[9]

We take it for granted that consciousness requires an "I" that accompanies an act of consciousness, and this is certainly the case for Husserl, who is Schaeffer's inspiration, but this is not necessarily the case. *De jure*, it is possible for an "I think" to accompany any perception, since I can always reflect upon any act. I am perceiving a sound, but I can also reflect upon the fact that I am perceiving a sound. This does not mean *de facto* that every act of perceiving a sound requires a reflective act, or that such a reflective act is primary and constitutive, and without it there would be no perception. On the contrary, we might argue, as Sartre does in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, that the unreflected act, which requires no "me" or "I," is first, and the ego is second. Subjectivity, as the identity of the individual, is produced rather than constitutive (Sartre 34–36).

In a sense, this is already contained in the difference between abstract and concrete subjectivity in Schaeffer's diagram. For if abstract subjectivity were the individual then there would be little to distinguish between them. The abstract and the concrete self would be the same person. In this case the individual who bears the name "Will Oldham." The consciousness that says "I am perceiving" is not the same as the consciousness that perceives. It is only after the event, when I remember it, that I think the act of perceiving was only possible because there was a self-identical "I" preceding it, and giving to experience its synthetic unity. In experience, in the actual act of perceiving itself, the "I" is often absent. We should not say "I perceive the sound," but "there is a perceiving of a sound." This does not mean that a reflective act of consciousness is not always possible, where the act of perceiving becomes in turn an object of consciousness and is referred to an "I," but this "I" is transcendent and not immanent to the act of perceiving, whether we think of this "I" as a natural object, concrete subjectivity, or as a value or a sign, abstract objectivity. Abstract immanent subjectivity would then be anonymous. "Transcendental consciousness," Sartre writes, "is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines itself to exist at every instant, without us being able to conceive of anything *before* it" (46). It is from this impersonal spontaneity that we can define a different kind of authenticity from its personal form, and another kind of sincerity, which would be its ethical correlate.

"**I'm in words, made of words, others' words"** (beckett 390

How we understand authenticity will we be different if we think of it in terms of concrete or abstract subjectivity, and the value we place upon it. In the first case, we think of authenticity in relation to the person who is the origin of the act. There will be certain cultural signs by and through which we determine whether or not that person is authentic. In the second case, authenticity is something quite different indeed. It is a disappearance of the I. It is not a removal measured against the cultural value of objectivity but an exposure to the outside, which, to a certain extent, is measureless, or, in comparison to the language of concrete subjectivity or abstract

objectivity, would be a babbling language having no specific origin. If we return to Blanchot's phrase "Speaking is not seeing," speaking here is not meant as personal expression, as though the first statement of language were "I speak," but as the exposure to a language that is impersonal. To write is to expose oneself to a language not owned by anyone. It is the opposite of a personal expression. When he explains Kafka's statement that to write is to shift from the "I" to the "he," he adds that it is not sufficient simply to replace one personal pronoun by another, but this substitution opens the writer to a language without any personal pronoun, and from no subject position at all. "The writer," he writes, "belongs to a language which no one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no centre, and which reveals nothing" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 25).

In comparison to Schaeffer's diagram, where of course it has no precise place, but which is the possibility of all musicality, this non-language would be sonority. All music comes out of the sonorous as a subtraction or reduction of possibilities, but also approaches it as its limit. The sonorous, as the condition of creativity, is neither subjective nor objective, because it is indeterminate. When Schaeffer maps the difference between the sonorous and the musical on top of the diagram of the four different sectors, he treats the general qualities of the sonorous to be the same as the act of hearing, but the sonorous as such is the condition of the act of hearing and is not the same as the act of hearing, which is subjective. The act of hearing emerges from the sonorous and falls back into it (Schaeffer 320). We hear in relation to the indefinite possibilities of the sonorous, whose source is no one at all, and then we select. Abstract sonority is the origin or source, if we can speak of origin here, since it would be anarchic, of abstract subjectivity, and not the other way around, because hearing is first a response.

When Blanchot says that the writer belongs to language no one speaks, he does not just mean that the narrator's voice is a fiction, but free indirect discourse is the condition of their language. Speaking speaks to speaking, where speaking is not tied to a personal pronoun. It is not sufficient simply to replace the first-person pronoun with a third-person singular one, but to recognise that this substitution carries the narrative outside of the subject position. In a later essay, "The Narrative Voice," Blanchot describes this process in greater detail, through a kind of conceptual and genealogical analysis of the modern novel, which is perhaps one of the clearest statements of the meaning of free indirect discourse in his work, and which he calls the neuter (*The Infinite Conversation* 379–87). The narrative voice mimics the personal pronoun, yet is the voice no one speaks. The illusion that someone is speaking is so profound that we are liable to confuse it with the life of the author. In the epic, the narrator's voice sweeps above the events it retells. The voice is magisterial and transcendent, but as the modern novel grows out of this epic tradition it increasingly takes part in the story. It not only tells us about these everyday events but also occupies the characters' mind and actions. We see the world from their point of view. There are two sides to this ideal of narrative voice. The objective one, which retells the story, and the subjective one, which is individual and personal and tells the story from the viewpoint of the characters. The aim of the realist novel, whose

epitome is Flaubert, is for the narrator to disappear in the unfolding of the story itself such that you think it is the characters who are telling it. It is to be the very opposite of the epic, where the narrator's voice is present outside of the story telling the audience how to interpret the events that are being told. Of course, the ideal of the perfect realist novel is impossible, because without the narrator there would be no narrative, and the realist novel is just as much an effect of words as the epic. Such explains the irony of a writer like Mann, whose narrator constantly intervenes in the narrative. This is not to give the reader a moral message, as in the epic, but to demonstrate the impossibility of a purely objective narration. It is to let the reader in on the joke. This is a story after all, and not life.

If the modern novel creates the illusion of the narrative voice, it is Kafka, for Blanchot, who reveals the source of this mirage in the impersonality of writing. The essential difference between him and a writer like Flaubert, whom he admired, is the subjectivity of the narrator. It is the distance between the narrator and the events being narrated that gives to the narrator's voice the illusion of subjectivity, even if that subjectivity has displaced the characters'. It is this distance that becomes strange in Kafka's work, as though the narrator were swallowed up into it. This distance, rather than centring the work, decentres it, as though it were written from nowhere; "It speaks," rather than "I speak" or even "he speaks." This is because the distance, which is made possible by writing, is the condition of the presumed subjectivity of the narrator, but is not identical to it. Out of this distance, the effect of the narrator is produced. Kafka's writing has a troubling effect upon us as readers because it interrupts the identification of the narrator with a personal pronoun, and then the subsequent attachment of this pronoun to the life of the author. I know that Kafka wrote these books, but the narrative voice of these books is not the same as the Kafka who walked the streets of Prague, however much I might be tempted, and there have been many biographical readings of his work, to confuse them. The narrative voice speaks before anyone speaks. It makes possible that anyone speaks, but it itself is not anyone. If Kafka speaks of a revolution of narration in his writing, when he shifted from the "I" to the "he," then this "he" is not any discernible subject at all. It is the infinite murmur of language before it is tied down to the subject of enunciation or statement. To write, for Kafka at least, is to open yourself to this exterior space, and to transcribe it. Flaubert pretends he is the origin of this other voice, but it is this other voice that makes his writing possible.

Blanchot talks about this other origin of the work, which is not the voice of the writer, as the "outside" or the "neuter," and here we encounter a great difficulty. That is not because these words are difficult in themselves, but they attack our ordinary ways of understanding literature or any other kind of art. We think of literature as communication. The novel has a meaning. Its intention is to communicate that meaning to us. We think of the song in the same way. We think of the meaning existing in the mind of the singer who sings it, so will tend to read music biographically, or we might think of it existing in the song itself, and there is a whole armoury of interpretative techniques to decode it, whose limit is the "death of the author." Yet this would be to think of the song as a dead, inert object after it has been

stripped of its vitality that was the condition of its creation. How the singer stands before the song as something created is quite different from how they relate to it as something that has become a commodity in circulation. For the singer to create something they cannot simply imagine that they are communicating an idea alone, even if they are to vanish in that idea, for if that were the sole purpose of singing then there would be no music at all. For a singer to create, they must have a completely different relation to music, which would not be as a system of signs that would express the interiority of their mind, or the exteriority of the thing, but as an exposure to the indeterminate possibilities of sonority before it has coalesced into musicality. Such a sonority exists potentially before it is sung by an individual. We stand to this sonority as something outside of us, and it sings through us rather than we sing it. It is an expression of our power to be affected before it is representation.

We write too often about popular music as though it were only a personal statement. We take authenticity to mean only to be true to oneself, or true to a genre. If we feel ourselves duped, then we doubt the sincerity of the performer. Yet this is to make music an index or a sign over and above creativity. Every creative act demands the disappearance of the artist, and this is as true of popular music as it is of any other kind of creativity. It requires a completely different kind of authenticity, which is entirely at odds with our obsession with personalities and values. We hear this other authenticity through how music affects us, which is neither an index nor a sign. If we hear it, then we say of the singer "they are sincere." It is as though, through the thousands of words we write about music, we forget the passion of existence from which it must first begin, such that we would even begin to form concepts or judgements of it.

Notes

1 An example of such an approach would be Middleton's book on popular music and the voice. It is a work influenced by the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and Žižek and so interprets the meaning of the voice as a sign. Iyer offers a subtle and positive description of Middleton's method in his review article. Elliott also talks about the voice in popular music in his recent and exceptional book. He too speaks of it as either an index, biographically, or as sign, its cultural and symbolic significance. Perhaps, because he is particularly interested in the voice of old age, he does not totally neglect its affect, which he calls the "vocal act." It is, however, only one item in a series, and he gives no precedence to it. He explains the voice through his case studies either in terms of indexes or signs. There is a significance of the affect distinct from that of the index or sign, and affects are anonymous and pre-representational.

2 See also, for the importance of affects in Spinoza's work, Deleuze, "Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics.'"

3 For the interpretation of Foucault's work as the history of practices and affects, see Veyne. See also Deleuze, *Foucault*.

4 The origin of this phrase is the subtitle of a collection of Blanchot's essays on Levinas (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*). Deleuze makes no mention of this context. For this reason, he confuses "speaking" with what can be said. What Blanchot means by speaking belongs to the outside, or what he calls the neuter, which can be neither seen nor said. This outside, as Deleuze himself explains, is related to power and the affects that constitute it, and not regimes of visibility or statability (Deleuze, *Foucault* 87).

5 It is a surprise that such a classic of musicology has never been translated. There is an excellent guide to this work, which thankfully includes an index, by Chion. You can find a translation of this guide in Dack and North. All translations of this work are my own.

6 He is referring to an actual composition by Pierre Henry, *Variations pour une porte et un soupir*.

7 Les objets musicaux, les objets phonétiques, les sons industriels; les chants d'oiseaux, etc.

> Que la musique est plus que la musique, que ce n'est pas un objet usuel, utilitaire ou esthétique, mais une démarche spirituelle, ou comme disait un vieux Maître, un "exercice êtrique une performance de l'être entier.

I am guessing that the old Master is Gurdjieff.

8 When it comes to speech and utterance in linguistics it is a given that the subject position is first (for an example of this, see Benveniste). There are three ways that we might question this dominant paradigm. First, that speakers are situated in a social context of which they are not conscious, and which determines what they say and hear. Second, that language is not first communicational or informational but fixed in a socio-political field that determines its force. The I is first neither subject of the statement nor the subject of enunciation but a response to an "order word" that produces the subject differently each time to flight as well as capture. Third, that indirect discourse is not secondary to direct discourse but the first determination of language. Our voices are lost in a vast sea of voices whose origin we do not know. Speaking replies to speaking. See "Postulates of Linguistics" in Deleuze and Guattari 75–111. For an excellent summary of these issues, see Grisham.

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