An Antidote to Metaphysics: Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Philosophy

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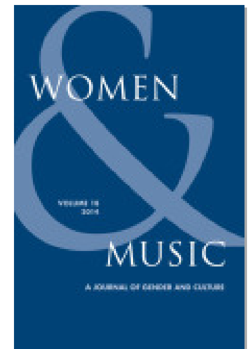

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THEORIZING GENDER, CULTURE, AND MUSIC

An Antidote to Metaphysics

Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Philosophy

Ryan Dohoney

I am convinced that the best antidote to metaphysics is singing.

Adriana Cavarero with Elisabetta Bertolino, "Beyond Ontology and Sexual Difference: An Interview with the Italian Feminist Philosopher Adriana Cavarero"

The body of the voice/the voice of the body.

Meredith Monk, "Notes on the Voice"

Adriana Cavarero has been one of Italy's foremost feminist philosophers since the 1980s. Her work has ranged widely from early investigations of dialectics and politics in Plato to her reflections on contemporary violence and ethics. Through it all, Cavarero is concerned with something that has in some quarters of postmodern philosophy and musicology become unpopular—a conception of selfhood founded on a unique embodied existent. Since the early 2000s Cavarero has turned toward voice as the means of elaborating her antimetaphysical project. With her turn toward the sonic and the vocal she has gradually come to the attention of music scholars.[1] Cavarero encourages us to rethink philosophical problems

1. Members of the philosophy study groups of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory discussed Cavarero's vocal philosophy at their 2010 meeting, marking something of an arrival for Cavarero in the broader musicological community. For musicological engagement with Cavarero, see Annamaria Cecconi and Mary Ann Smart, "Theorizing Music, Gender, and Culture," *Women & Music* 9 (2005): 99–110; Emily Wilbourne, "Lo Schiavetto (1612): Travestied Sound, Ethnic Performance, and the Eloquence of the Body," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63, no. 1 (2010): 1–44; and Nina Eidsheim, "Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of the Performativity of Vocal Timbre," *Revista Transcultural de Música/Transcultural Music Review* 13 (2009), available online at http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans13/art06.htm.

shared by many theories of voice: the question of sexual difference and its audibility, the peculiar affects in hearing and desiring voices, the mediation of voices, and the modes of relation and communication they make possible. Cavarero engages each of these questions in an important body of work founded in feminist thought that demonstrates the importance of vocality to any consideration of ethics, subjectivity, and human difference.

What follows is a polyphonic weave of historical and theoretical reflections with the voice of Cavarero as the cantus firmus. I offer an introduction, critique, and extension of the work of a philosopher whose concern with matters of voice and vocal expression deserves recognition and response from musicologists.[2] It was in the pages of this journal that Mary Ann Smart and Annamaria Cecconi first brought Cavarero's philosophy of vocal expression—*For More than One Voice* (hereafter *FMTOV*)—into an ongoing conversation within musicology about voices, philosophy, and gender.[3] Indeed, with its provocative emphasis on sexual difference, politics, the corporeal basis of vocal enunciation, and an ethics of relation and mutual vulnerability, Cavarero's philosophy is a welcome addition to the musicological toolkit—especially as scholars intensify a turn toward issues of presence, mediation, and performance.[4]

Even as some musicologists have begun to take notice of Cavarero's work, none have noted how she herself arrived at vocal expression as a topic of philosophical reflection. Indeed, her reputation is based on and her most important work has been done in the Italian tradition of sexual difference feminism. She has typically avoided musical matters. Yet I argue that her vocal turn is of a piece with her earlier work. The model of vocal expression she develops in *FMTOV* combines a philosophical basis in Hannah Arendt's conception of action, a theoretical grounding in the thought of sexual difference, and her own practical participation in the feminist philosophical collective Diotima.[5] Cavarero's pragmatic, feminist, and political genealogy for her vocal philosophy is in stark contrast to conceptions of voice based on psychoanalysis, performativity, or linguistic anthropology.[6] This is not to suggest that such approaches are not valuable or that she herself is entirely distinct from those traditions but to note that Cavarero's

2. Scholars in theater studies have also taken an interest in Cavarero's work. See Floyd Kennedy, "The Challenge of Theorizing the Voice in Performance," *Modern Drama* 52, no. 4 (2009): 405–25; and Liz Mills, "When the Voice Itself Is Image," *Modern Drama* 52, no. 4 (2009): 389–404.

3. Cecconi and Smart, "Theorizing Music," a review of Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), originally published in Italian as *A più voci: Per una filosofia dell'espressione vocale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003).

4. Opera scholars have been among the first to develop these themes. See, for example, Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 505–36; Michelle Duncan, "The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 283–306; and Karen Henson, "Introduction: Divo Worship," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19, no. 1 (2007): 1–9.

5. On Cavarero's relationship to the Diotima group and the thought of sexual difference, see Adriana Cavarero, "The Need for a Sexed Thought," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 181–85. For a discussion of the Diotima group and Cavarero's eventual departure from it, see Lucia Re, "Diotima's Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism," in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice*, ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 50–74.

6. Duncan ("The Operatic Scandal") discusses these varied approaches, as does Carolyn Abbate in *Unsung Voices* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). Variations on the psychoanalytic approach are represented by Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 267–77; Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006). Performative speech act theory has affected many. See, for example, Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). For approaches from linguistic anthropology, see Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); and Tyler Bickford, "Music of Poetry and Poetry of Song: Expressivity and Grammar in Vocal Performance," *Ethnomusicology* 51, no. 3 (2007): 439–76.

conception of vocality brings to our attention uncommon interlocutors for musicology, namely, the work of Arendt and Italian feminism.[7]

As I argue, Cavarero's intellectual underpinnings must be taken into account if we are to recognize the full force and utility of her vocal philosophy to recent practices of musicology. My efforts to articulate the relationship of *FMTOV* to Cavarero's earlier thought are necessary, as she does not always make those links apparent. The first section of this essay is devoted to this task and draws out the importance of Cavarero's concepts of sexual difference, natality, and embodied uniqueness to her vocal philosophy. From there I focus on her reevaluation of Aristotle's concept of language as *phone semantike*—signifying voice. While I am sanguine about the utility of Cavarero's thought to musicology, in the second section I pay some critical attention to her conception of song in its role as "an antidote to metaphysics" as well as in the relationship she envisions between song and politics. Cavarero's understanding of song, even as she attributes to it the power of dismantling metaphysical systems, is restricted to a source of pleasure that destabilizes masculine systems of language or makes one susceptible to political domination. In the final section I take up Cavarero's refigured concept of *phone semantike* and use it to analyze the vocal practice of Meredith Monk. I argue that Cavarero's vocal philosophy finds both its limits and its clearest expression in the work of Monk and her ensemble.

Cavarero's Philosophical Project and the Theme of Voice

Cavarero's philosophical work first came to the attention of the Anglophone academic community in the early 1990s as part of a burgeoning interest in Italian feminist thought. Cavarero's earliest writings to appear in English developed the topic of sexual difference—a central concern of the Diotima feminist philosophical collective based in Verona. Because of her training in philosophy and philology, Cavarero largely concerned herself in the 1980s and 1990s with the exploration of sexual difference within ancient and Western philosophy. She critiqued its construction on the abstract image of a universal subject devoid of sexual difference.[8] The universal category of "man" is in Cavarero's view a monstrous creation that bears no relationship to men or women on earth. Aristotelian "man" is an instance of what Alfred North Whitehead would call "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Stripped of sexual difference, "man" abandons the feminine and retains only its masculine referent. This falsely concrete subject became the basis for faulty philosophical construction.[9] By defining the universal man as the living

7. Brigid Cohen and Martin Brody are rare examples of musicologists who have explored the life and work of Hannah Arendt. See Brigid Cohen, *Modernism Untethered: Wolpe, Music, and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Martin Brody, "Where to Act and How to Move: Unruly Action in Late Wolpe," *Contemporary Music Review* 27, nos. 2–3 (2008): 205–25. Italian feminism is distinct from its French and US counterparts because of its attention to and assertion of sexual difference and, in some quarters, a more separatist social program. The intellectual genealogy of the movement goes back to the early work of Luce Irigaray and reworks Hannah Arendt's political thought. I discuss Cavarero's relation to these strands of thought in greater detail below. For a summary of various forms of Italian feminism, see Carol Lazzaro-Weis, "The Concept of Difference in Italian Feminist Thought: Mothers, Daughters, Heretics," in Parati and West, *Italian Feminist Theory*, 31–49. See also Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio, "I Don't Know What You Mean by 'Italian Feminist Thought.' Is Anything Like That Possible?," in *Feminine Feminists: Cultural Practices in Italy*, ed. Giovanna Miceli Jeffries (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 209–32. One of the foundational texts of the movement is the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, trans. Patricia Cicogna and Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

8. Cavarero states that "sexuation is an empirical fact, and all women can call themselves alike simply by virtue of being the same sex" ("Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference," in *The Lonely Mirror*, ed. Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono [New York: Routledge, 1993], 189–221, 214). Cavarero and Judith Butler have debated this claim (among many others) ("Condizione umana contro natura," *Micromega* 4 [2005]: 134–64). For Butler's critique of Cavarero's conception of selfhood, see Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University, 2005), 30–40.

9. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 58—59.

being with language (logos), Aristotle gave over language to this abstract figure, creating a discourse in which only men could recognize themselves. Women's essence, as Cavarero describes it, is the experience of living this scission from language, this separateness:

> Thinking sexual difference can only be thinking of itself, here and now, of a femininely gendered living being rooted in history. The definition of woman's essence is real only if I, a woman, can recognize my expressing myself in it as I am, and not as I might have been in some improbable era whose sun has set.[10]

Cavarero's intention is to revise this abstraction, to care for it in a Whiteheadean sense that reimagines a pragmatic and radically empirical basis for philosophy. Following from the work of Luce Irigaray, Cavarero has taken a conception of sexual difference—an ontological and empirical (some have said essential) difference—as the basis of her philosophy.[11] She understands that women's distance from language and the patriarchal symbolic order is a position from which to destabilize that exclusionary sociopolitical realm. As she notes, women cannot "get out of a system of thought simply by thinking of getting out of it, at least not while that thought of a way out is structured on the same categories from which it wants to escape."[12] Her preferred path is instead one of *autoconscienza*, a form of consciousness-raising effected by women individually that allows each to "arrive at an understanding of what she is and why she is like she is, not what she wishes she were."[13] Cavarero lays the conceptual groundwork for the formation of provisional spaces where old categories can be broken down and new relations constructed. These provisional spaces are arenas for women to collectively work out new systems of practice and thought, and these spaces have found practical expression in the practices of the Diotima group as well as the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective.[14] Cavarero returns to the idea of the provisional space of resignification in *FMTOV*. There she redefines such a place as an "absolute local"—a ephemeral taking place of politics produced by the reciprocal communication of voices.[15] It should be noted that Cavarero's political thought does not mark admission to an already existing society as a goal, founded as it is upon the monstrous universal-masculine subject. Instead, her goal is the practical reconstruction and reimagining of society.[16]

Cavarero's philosophical-political project has two principal goals. On the one hand, she seeks to describe new relational spaces for the taking-

10. Cavarero, "Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference," 203.
11. The topic of sexual difference feminism is certainly one of the most controversial, and a full consideration of the issues raised by it is beyond the scope of this article. For a reworking of sexual difference thought through a reconsideration of the philosophy of Luce Irigaray, see Alison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
12. Cavarero, "Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference," 208.
13. Cavarero, "Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference," 207. Autoconscienza has a long and important history in Italian feminism. Cavarero indirectly references autoconscienza in this passage, and she describes its effects as a goal of her philosophical-archaeological method.
14. That Cavarero considers these spaces of resignification and dismantling patriarchy "provisional" distinguishes her from other members of Diotima, particularly Luisa Mauro, who has had a greater interest in maintaining permanent spaces for women's assembly. On the differences in position and eventual break between Cavarero and Mauro, see Re, "Diotima's Dilemmas." On Cavarero's interpretation of the practices of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, see Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 55–66.
15. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 204–5.
16. Cavarero notes, "My argument is that, although contradictory and assimilative, emancipation is a point of no return, and one has to use it strategically. Allow me to explain. I share the idea, expressed not only by Italian feminists, that emancipation is a trap, which—in the name of overcoming the exclusion of women from knowledge and power—incorporates women into the paradigm constructed by and for the masculine subject. Following the formal equality principle, women ought to be valued as men, even though they are women and not men" (Adriana Cavarero with Elisabetta Bertolino, "Beyond Ontology and Sexual Difference: An Interview with the Italian Feminist Philosopher Adriana Cavarero," *Differences* 19, no. 1 [2008]: 128–67, 153).

place of politics. On the other, she destabilizes and reconfigures the symbolic order. To do so, she draws out of that order feminine figures that, when deliberately misread, contest the patriarchal tradition. These symbolic figures provide conceptual tools of thought for women who, because of their exclusion from philosophical language, have been unable to think themselves through philosophy. Cavarero notes that philosophy is slow to adapt itself to empirical facts (such as sexual difference), and, "in general, [facts] do not say anything if they do not rise to the symbolic level."[17] To counter this, she seeks to create a feminine symbolic order, beginning with Plato and continuing further afield to include figures extracted from writers Isak Dinesen, Gertrude Stein, Italo Calvino, and Jorge Luis Borges.[18]

Cavarero constructs a female symbolic order through a hermeneutic method she calls "stealing." As Michel de Certeau has noted, "to read is to wander through an imposed system," and Cavarero's thefts from ancient Greek philosophy bring our attention to devalued female figures from Greek antiquity.[19] Penelope, Demeter, Diotima, Antigone, Echo, and the Sirens are among the figures she has stolen from their patriarchal contexts. Cavarero describes her method:

> My strategy . . . consists of stealing figures from the phallogocentric imaginary and relocating them in anomalous ways so they are made to react differently, thus changing their significance. More simply, I could say that I work on stereotypes, seeking to decontextualize and reposition them in a game of resignification through unscrupulous and irreverent decodifications.[20]

Through this method, Cavarero has used these figures as lures for feminist thought. Rereading the *Odyssey*, Cavarero interprets Penelope's exclusion from the male-dominated political realm as impetus for the creation of a provisional space of communication and practice among other women.[21] Diotima's speech from Plato's *Symposium* displays the usurpation and abstraction of maternity from women to the figurative realm of masculine philosophy as well as the containment of women's voices in the speech of men.[22] Echo's cruel fate—first losing the ability to speak with her own voice, then becoming entirely disembodied, existing only as sonorous echo—is a narrative of women's own devocalization and disembodiment by Western metaphysics.[23] Each of these readings reasserts sexual difference and invites the reader to think of the lived world of mutual relation. Voice is key to her revision of concepts, and restoring the proper concreteness proper to it will be the goal of her philosophy.

Natality

In concert with her hermeneutical revision to the symbolic order, Cavarero calls for a shift in emphasis within the philosophical enterprise from

17. Cavarero, "Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference," 214.

18. Cavarero's attention to a feminine symbolic realm is another important point of contact between her and Irigaray. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). On Cavarero's overlap with Irigaray's thought, particularly in terms of voice and breath, see Diane Perpich, "Subjectivity and Sexual Difference: New Figures of the Feminine in Irigaray and Cavarero," *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): 391–413.

19. Michel de Certeau elaborates: "Readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 174, 169).

20. Cavarero and Bertolino, "Beyond Ontology," 134.

21. Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (New York: Routledge, 1995), 11–30.

22. Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, 91–120.

23. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 165–72. Emily Wilbourne draws upon Cavarero's rewriting of Echo and Narcissus in her article "Amor nello specchio (1622): Mirroring, Masturbation, and Same-Sex Love," *Women & Music* 13 (2009): 54–65, 57.

mortality to natality.[24] Going back to Socrates, philosophy has been figured as preparation for death and been focused on the nonliving world of ideas. Cavarero, in contrast, attends to beginnings. The importance of natality to Cavarero is manifold. For one, it is the strongest indication of her productive thinking-with Hannah Arendt's political philosophy.[25] Second, if we attend to natality, our focus shifts to things-in-the-world and the unpredictability inherent in any beginning. Also, attention to birth shifts our gaze to the body of the mother, who can no longer remain invisible to thought. Attention to birth is also attention to sexual difference. Concerning voice, the natal scene is the first moment of utterance. It marks the coming into the world of a voice and the possibility of communication with others. The natal scene of mother and child—the commingling of their voices and bodies—is the maternal *chora*, defined by Julia Kristeva as the sonic envelope that gives a child not only the pleasure of phonic emission but the beginnings of language.[26] As this chora is nonlinguistic, at least initially, it marks for Cavarero another provisional space where the symbolic order is suspended.

24. For a broader consideration of natality and mortality in Cavarero's thought, see Adriana Cavarero, "Birth, Love, Politics," *Radical Philosophy Review* 86 (1997): 19–23; Lisa Guenther, "Being-from-Others: Reading Heidegger after Cavarero," *Hypatia* 23, no. 1 (2008): 99–118; and Alison Stone, "Natality and Mortality: Rethinking Death with Cavarero," *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010): 353–72.

25. Cavarero writes: "In my desire to disinvest myself from the existing context, I found the second axis of my theoretical approach in Hannah Arendt's category of birth. Arendt does not highlight the concept of birth as coming from the mother's womb, but accepts the Greek meaning of birth as coming from nothing. Despite this, the central position of birth within her work brings about a subversive shift in perspective with respect to the patriarchal tradition that has always thrived on the category of death" (*In Spite of Plato*, 6–7).

26. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 131–38. See also Julia Kristeva, *Revolutions in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); and Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 93–98. Cavarero also connects the idea of chora to Hélène Cixous's *languelait*. See Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 139–45.

Uniqueness and Plurality

With her attention to birth and beginnings, Cavarero emphasizes Arendt's own assault on the abstraction of "man." Arendt, particularly in *The Human Condition*, took pains to distinguish the category she called "action" from labor and work. Closely linked to natality, action is the activity that "corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. . . . [T]his plurality is specifically the condition . . . of all political life."[27] For Cavarero, this relational plurality is composed of unique and unrepeatable selves. Cavarero's conception of uniqueness is this: different people exist and are distinct in their bodies and their voices. It is another pragmatic, empirical move, as Cavarero seeks to revise the abstract and universal categories of philosophy in order to think difference as it is experienced in the world.[28] Cavarero argues that each man or woman has "an identity that consists in an embodied existing being, unique and unrepeatable."[29] Each of us has a birth and a death that are our own. We can neither repeat them nor substitute another's experiences for them. Within corporeal economy, voices are markers of this uniqueness and transform what would otherwise be simply physical proximity into a space of relation and communication. Cavarero understands these provisional spaces as absolute localities where the work of politics occurs.

Emily Wilbourne has strongly critiqued corporeal uniqueness, stating that Cavarero and other philosophers of voice rely upon the assertion that "the voice operates in Western culture as indicative of individual bodily difference."

27. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.

28. Luce Irigaray has also explored the theme of relationality along similar lines. She describes a type of freedom and intersubjectivity in which "freedom remains freedom only if the other remains transcendent to me, and if I respect his freedom" (*To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Concito-Monoc [New York: Routledge, 2001], 93).

29. Adriana Cavarero, "Who Engenders Politics?," in Parati and West, *Italian Feminist Theory*, 88–104, 92–93.

She goes on to summarize theories of voice offered by Barthes and Butler:

> Threaded through with confessional psychoanalytic assumptions that presume all bodily secrets to be sexual secrets, the voice is understood as a mechanism of unconscious betrayal—the voice is noticed only when it intrudes on and contradicts the semantic content of the words it transmits. Conditioned by and yet fragmented from semantic meaning, voice has become the sonorous remnant of speech, an unwieldy synecdoche for the body.[30]

Wilbourne suggests that a voice is a poor index for a body. Unstable, mutable, mediated by performance, an essentialized voice-body matrix risks becoming the naturalized foundation of Cavarero's philosophy. Wilbourne is certainly correct in her description of specifically psychoanalytic theories of voice that trade in the exteriorization of interior knowledge. Yet, by linking Cavarero to this group, Wilbourne misreads both her philosophy and her larger project. Attendant as she is to natality, exposure, and plurality, Cavarero does not hear voices as projections of some hidden inside. Hers is an exteriorized, exposed model of voice based on our being-in-the-world together. Voice is no "remnant of speech" but an indication of someone there to be heard and seen. Language is not a voice's primary destination as it is with Aristotelian *phone semantike*. From this, Cavarero defines an ethics of mutual vulnerability and responsibility toward one another in our fragile state of affairs.[31]

With her conception of selfhood based upon absolute uniqueness, Cavarero distinguishes between what someone is and who someone is. As Wilbourne explores in her own work, what a voice is is mutable, subject to transformation in both performance and social construction.[32] The whatness of an individual includes one's share in broader abstract categories: race, sexuality, linguistic background, class, nationality—those things that do not mark uniqueness but that mark one's belonging to others. Cavarero explains this through reference to Virginia Woolf. Woolf is "a Eurocentric, white, lesbian, bourgeois, eccentric, feminist, etc., etc., writer. But no matter how long we continue in the etceteras of this list, we would never hit upon precisely who Virginia Woolf is in her unrepeatable uniqueness."[33] This distinction between the who and the what does not square easily with various forms of identity politics, as it calls for the recognition of a radical singularity, irreducible to any set of descriptors or irreplaceable as a distinct physical-acoustic presence.[34]

The who of some woman or man is approachable through the description of the life lived by that person. The theme of the voice in Cavarero, beginning at the natal scene, develops as a narrating voice—the voice of another or many others who are capable of telling the story of who someone was. As Arendt writes, "that every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history."[35] Cavarero describes this through her

30. Wilbourne, "Lo Schiavetto," 5.

31. Cavarero, in her most recent work to appear in English, has taken up the theme of vulnerability and mutual exposure. See her *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

32. Nina Eidsheim explores the social construction of vocal timbre and its signification of gender, sexuality, and race. She also distinguishes between the who and the what of a voice with reference to Cavarero: "Vocal timbre is mediated both in performance and by the way our listening organizes it. I do in no way reject the notion that in the sound of the voice there is also the expression of the uniqueness and singularity of a human being. Adriana Cavarero has written with deep insight about this subject" ("Synthesizing Race").

33. Cavarero, "Who Engenders Politics?," 92.

34. Cavarero's conception of uniqueness is not equated with exceptionalism. Vocalic, somatic singularity is a basic ontological attribute. This is closely related to Arendt's own understanding of uniqueness: "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and the sound of the voice" (*The Human Condition*, 179).

35. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

reading of the story "The Dreamers" by Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen).[36] Dinesen's story tells of a young opera singer, Pellegrina Leoni, who, after losing her singing voice during a theater fire, gives up her career as a singer and takes on a number of new names and identities: a Roman prostitute, a Swiss revolutionary, and a Swedish dame. At her death, she is surrounded by former lovers from each of her lives, and she recovers not her singing voice but the memory of her first life as a singer. In the company of those who have come to know and love her and who together narrate her life, she dies. Cavarero reads this story in two ways. In *FMTOV* Cavarero emphasizes Leoni's sonorous and seductive power—even without song she retains the power of the Sirens to seduce and overwhelm others with her voice. In Cavarero's earlier work, *Relating Narratives*, in which she extensively explores the distinction between the who and the what, Leoni's moment of death is the moment when, at last, we can know who she is. Her story is "assembled through the stories told by her lovers, and which composes, in the end, a unique and unrepeatable destiny."[37] These external voices, in communication with Leoni's own, do not access anything secret or hidden in the innermost depths of her subjectivity but instead open up a relational space—a plurality—through which her uniqueness is communicated by a polyphony of other singular voices. The uniqueness of some woman or man is told as it existed in the world, experienced by others.

Phone semantike and Cavarero's Conception of Song

Voice in Cavarero's thought plays a mutable role, ranging from the usurped voice of Diotima to her later concern with narrating voices that reveal who men and women are as they are exposed to one another. Cavarero's sustained reflection on voice, offered in *FMTOV*, should be understood within this broader project of revising philosophical abstractions and attending to unique existents in relation to one another. Voices are central to her project inasmuch as they are necessary for creating spaces of plural relation and narration. Prior to *FMTOV*, Cavarero had not attended to song or musical performance. Perhaps surprisingly, her method of textual hermeneutics brought voice and later music to her attention.

In *In Spite of Plato* Cavarero rewrites classical philosophy from the point of view of birth, and in *FMTOV* she performs another revision of that tradition, this time turning attention to Aristotle's definition of language. Cavarero argues that logos has been devocalized. To show this and to write the history of this devocalization, Cavarero focuses on another instance of misplaced concreteness—Aristotle's definition of man as living being that uses language—what Aristotle describes as *phone semantike* (signifying voice).[38] Her argument begins from a critical reinterpretation of this definition, focusing on *phone* as the physical, corporeal element of language that places it in the world, among others. As with philosophy's tendency to manufacture universal, abstract, and immaterial ideas, so language has been rendered as abstract, unvoiced signs. Aristotle, she argues, absorbed *phone* into the mute realm of thought (*semantike*):

> In my view, the fact that Aristotle says that the logos that is discourse is *semantike* (semanticizing voice) indicates that he is already writing in a tradition in which it is only the semantic aspect of the logos that counts, while the element of the voice is marginal, secondary, servile, and ancillary.
>
> There is already a hint of an anomaly if we consider that in the Greek expression *phone semantike*, voice is a noun, while *semantike* is an adjective. It would seem here that the main theme consists of the voice, which becomes

36. Isak Dinesen, "The Dreamers," in *Seven Gothic Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 271–356.
37. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 143.

38. Mladen Dolar also depends upon Aristotle's definition of signifying voice for a "politics of the voice" and is grounded in Lacanian psychoanalysis. See his *A Voice and Nothing More*, 105–7.

> the signifier. If one then looks at the story of the Western metanarrative and that of metaphysics, it is the signified that is vocalized. So, even here, I have stolen in a manner that seems paradoxical in relation to the same Aristotelian text, and I have tried to elaborate on this.[39]

Like the abstract category of man, *semantike* is concretized, while voice is derealized. To correct this, Cavarero shifts philosophical emphasis toward *phone*, refiguring it as the bodily basis of language. In doing so she seeks to rebalance the terms. Her reassertion of *phone semantike*'s grounding in corporeality brings Cavarero to song as a space of contestation between voice and signification. Like Roland Barthes, toward whose work Cavarero is ambivalent, she hears in voices a meeting of body and language, and for her, as for Barthes, this is a site of tension as well as a source of pleasure.[40] Nowhere is the pleasurable tension more felt than in song. Within Cavarero's logic of sexual difference, it is "where the femininity of the phonic takes the masculinity of the semantic head on." The result, then, is not *phone*'s triumph over signification but the defeat of "the register of thought to which the metaphysical tradition subjugates speech."[41] Carolyn Abbate has noted that "opera puts philosophy out of commission," and Cavarero too is attracted to its antimetaphysical force.[42] Operatic performance addresses this precise tension between voice and meaning by virtue of its being "melo-drama."

As much of her account focuses on the erotic possibilities of song, Cavarero distinguishes her conception of pleasure from the kind described by Barthes, Kristeva, and Cixous. For them, pleasure is a dissolution of subjectivity. The pleasure of voice is felt in a body that is "desubjectivized, deindividualized" and thus has lost its uniqueness. More strongly, Cavarero insists that "understanding pleasure as the site of the individual's or the subject's dissolution—if not of the political order on which they are founded—thus ends up paying yet another homage to the binary economy of metaphysics."[43] Far from breaking down individuality in *jouissance*, the pleasure described by Cavarero remains grounded in an experience of unique selves within a relational plurality. To listen to a voice is to recognize another in the voice and to derive pleasure from that experience. It is an ethical response and appreciation of uniqueness.

Cavarero's reading of Italo Calvino's "A King Listens" further describes her philosophy of song.[44] Calvino's story tells the tale of an unnamed king's paranoid surveillance of his realm and his unrelenting attention to voices. Immobilized upon his throne, his sole activity is the constant audition of his kingdom. The castle is designed so that it functions as an enormous ear through which he can hear every sound and voice in the land. Power relations and vocal uniqueness are at stake in Cavarero's interpretation. As the story progresses, the singing voice of a woman distracts the king, and Calvino stages a scene in which the ruler senses or imagines—Calvino's text is masterful in its indirection and equivocation—that his voice sings a love duet with that of his unseen beloved. Through this performance he senses his own uniqueness, the

39. Cavarero and Bertolino, "Beyond Ontology," 135.

40. Cavarero's difficulties with Barthes are based in part on his psychoanalytic hermeneutics. She also, I believe, wrongly faults him for his lack of attention to specific voices. Barthes's singular and loving attention to the voice of Charles Panzéra animates his writing on voices, a fact that Cavarero does not notice despite her attention to his essay "The Grain of the Voice." However, Barthes certainly uses his attention to a unique voice to develop an abstract entity, "the voice." See Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice"; and Barthes, "Music, Voice, Language," in *The Responsibility of Forms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 278–85. On Barthes's pedagogical relationship with Panzéra, see Jonathan Dunsby, "Roland Barthes and the Grain of Panzéra's Voice," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 134, no. 1 (2009): 113–32.

41. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 127.

42. Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 36.

43. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 199.

44. Italo Calvino, "A King Listens," in *Under the Jaguar Sun*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, 1988), 31–65. The story was initially developed as a libretto for Luciano Berio. It was substantially transformed as *Un re in ascolto* by Berio himself and bears little relationship to Calvino's story.

special sound of his voice, for he becomes a source of sonorous emission, no longer the all-hearing ruler. This distraction, this overwhelming attention to and pleasure from a woman's voice, draws him away from his surveillance. The king's musical listening in Cavarero's interpretation of this story does two things: it leads to pleasure, which initiates a desire to know the voice the king hears, and it disrupts his totalitarian regime. His own offer of song to another prevents him from listening to everyone. Focused on pleasure and the possibility of relation, he loses sovereignty. With his reign undone, he in turn becomes part of a community subjugated by a new unknown ruler. In this account, song's pleasure is ambivalent. It opens up a relational space between unique voices while also threatening to absorb those voices into a larger political force. Song has its usefulness in undermining the metaphysics of *phone semantike*, but it is not itself an ideal sphere of politics, even as it draws attention to our shared being-in-the-world.[45]

National Anthems, Politics, and the Problem of "We"

Music is given further political import in Cavarero's vocal philosophy through the decidedly negative performance of a national anthem. Its performance is the erasure of uniqueness, where individual voices "lose themselves" in an anthem dedicated to the abstract idea of the nation-state.[46] Because Cavarero privileges relational speech as the only authentic political scene, singing a national anthem undoes two necessary conditions for politics: communication is rendered monological, and uniqueness is denied by unison song. Benedict Anderson describes the singing of a national anthem as an "experience of simultaneity" in which "people wholly unknown to one another utter the same verses to the same melody." Anderson calls this experience "unisonance," and it provides an example of the political misuse of song Cavarero deplores. Such absorption into a collective is the dangerous underside to the pleasures of musical performance.[47] When singing the anthem, we come to know one another not as unique beings, each with our own story, but as what we are as citizens, patriots, or nationalists who share an identity.

In contrast to Cavarero's conception of nationalistic song, Judith Butler's account of a performance of the US national anthem documents an instance in which musical performance and the totalitarian effects of the national anthem are subverted by a linguistic shift—from English to Spanish—that engenders a moment of political resistance:

> In the spring of 2006, street demonstrations on the part of illegal residents broke out in various California cities, but very dramatically in the Los Angeles area. The U.S. national anthem was sung in Spanish as was the Mexican anthem. The emergence of "nuestro hymno" introduced the interesting problem of the plurality of the nation, of the "we" and the "our": to whom does this anthem belong? . . . [W]hat makes for a non-nationalist or counter-nationalist mode of belonging? . . . For the "we" to sing and to be asserted in Spanish surely does something to our notions of the nation and to our notions of equality. It's not just that many people sang together which is true—but also that singing is a plural act, an articulation of plurality.[48]

Butler's example of song is social and, moreover, political action. Cavarero, though, would take exception to the use of the plural first-person

45. Her philosophy of song is a model of listening in which one person is active producer of *phone semantike* and another receives it. As I argue below, attention to relational, communicative modes of performance can serve as the kinds of provisional spaces to which Cavarero gives a philosophical foundation.
46. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 201.
47. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 145.
48. Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (New York: Seagull, 2007), 58–59.

"we"—any scene in which the resonance of unique existent is subsumed within a totality is, for her, ethically untenable. By contrast, Butler's understanding of song as the basis for community, especially when coupled with an assertion of linguistic difference, keeps music as a form of political action. The singing of a national anthem does not cause the group to lose the unique identities that each voice offers but is a dynamic scene of resistance caused by the tension between the melody and the language in which it is sung. However, Cavarero's argument against this form of political action would be that it depends upon a politics of the what, not the unique who. Musical performance might have its politics, but to be authentically political, both in Cavarero's and Arendt's sense, it must maintain the plurality of voices while working in tandem with speech to disrupt preexistent codes and generate a unique vocal assembly.

Butler's example of "nuestro hymno" brings to the fore a problem with Cavarero's philosophy that I have been avoiding until now. Cavarero's interpretations are striking from a musicological understanding of voices precisely because hers are not reactions to the "throats of flesh" that she celebrates in Calvino's text. Throughout her work, she attends to literary and metaphorical voices or voices of thought experiments (as in her imagination of the singing of a national anthem). Despite echoing Hannah Arendt's concern with unique voices and her hopes for a radical empiricism attendant to those voices, nowhere in Cavarero's philosophy does she engage with sonorous voices as she has heard them. We are left with an aporia in Cavarero's philosophy—a lack of any description of her musical experience and a method grounded in textual hermeneutics.[49] Music's power in her philosophy is derived from its literary representations, not any experience of sound in the world. She sees voices (the verb is apt) as ripe for theft and reconfiguration: "As regards the voice, even here I have been stealing. What is more, I stole from the Western metanarratives, where there were evident anomalies."[50]

With Arendt's understanding of action as my touchstone, I want to stress that music's unpredictable reception is of political value. To overdetermine the experience of song—as Cavarero does—as a source of pleasure is to miss those moments when musical performance acts otherwise, when it sets up unexpected situations that go somewhere (affectively, politically) we weren't expecting, in short, when music gives birth to something new whose circulation and mediation can't be foreseen.[51] Music does not always destabilize meaning; it is not always that drastic or enjoyable. Sometimes music is boring; sometimes it fails.

While Cavarero does not attend to other forms of musical sociability, that does not mean that we cannot find such instances of reciprocal communication among performers and audiences. Musical performance and experience open up myriad modes of sociability and association that repay analytical, historical, and ethnographic attention.[52] Like affect, music's potentialities are underdetermined and open-ended. They can best be detailed through accounts of specific worldly performances, by tracing networks of association as they coalesce and dissolve. In the final section of this essay, I want to attend to a specific voice and consider the ways in which attention to actual voices allows us to revise Cavarero's concepts through musical experience.

Phone semantike as Interpretive Tool: Meredith Monk's Voice

Though the role of music in Cavarero's philosophy seems unnecessarily circumscribed, her

49. The absence of reference to real voices is especially ironic given her extended critique of Derrida on these grounds. See Cavarero, "Appendix: Dedicated to Derrida," in *For More than One Voice*, 213–41.

50. Cavarero and Bertolino, "Beyond Ontology," 135.

51. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175–247.

52. Marion A. Guck provides one model for a relational understanding of musical experience. See Marion A. Guck, "A Woman's (Theoretical) Work," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (1994): 28–43; Guck, "Music Loving, or the Relationship with the Piece," *Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 3 (1997): 343–52; and Guck, "Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention," *Music Theory Spectrum* 28, no. 2 (2006): 191–209.

reconfiguration of *phone semantike* is ripe for further reflection and is a promising way of responding to musical experience. On the surface, it may seem similar to that of Barthes's "grain"—the interaction between a body and a sign system. However, because of Cavarero's careful distinction between the what and the who of a voice, her conception of *phone semantike* (as vocalized logos) is less susceptible to the common misreading of grain as timbre. More than the corporeal qualities of a voice, *phone* is in a state of tension with *semantike*. Noticing where the stress falls in a given musical situation can go a long way toward revealing a performer's, composer's, or musician's particular philosophical or ideological attitude toward voice.

Much like Cavarero, composer-vocalist-polymath Meredith Monk has considered the relationship between word and voice. She has, over a diverse body of work, sought to deauthorize language by emphasizing the physicality and capabilities of human voices. Monk's understanding of her singing style also correlates with Cavarero's undermining of philosophical logocentrism. In a 1983 documentary, director Peter Greenaway asked Monk about the absence of text in her composition *Dolmen Music* (1979) and wondered if she had "contempt for the word." She responded:

> I don't really have contempt for the word. I have contempt when the word is used as the glue of something, which has happened a lot in theater and a lot in film. I really don't like it; that one has to sit and listen to words all the time when really all the other faculties are not being used. That I really don't like. I think the word has its own beauty and also should have its own integrity, stand alone as any of the other elements.[53]

Monk emphasizes *phone* through her exploration of vocal characters and the gradations of feeling it can produce. Monk hopes to break through the limits of language and access "feelings we have no words for."[54] Unlike the solo operatic performances read by Cavarero, Monk's theatrical works rarely emphasize solo performance (there are few diva turns); instead, they are relational spheres of vocal interaction among men and women. She has explored the making of a women's community in *Education of the Girlchild* (1972), an agrarian collective in *ATLAS* (1992), and abstract affective landscapes in *Songs of Ascension* (2008), *mercy* (2001), and *impermanence* (2007). Words in her pieces are rare, and when they appear they are often abstract and fragmentary. They do not narrate; they are not, as Monk puts it, glue holding a performance together. Voices, inasmuch as they are expressive *phone*, are the material of which performances are woven.

Through her years of practice, Monk has developed a nuanced vocal discourse focused on mutability of affect, timbre, and characterization. Some of the identities she cultivated in her theater piece *Education of the Girlchild* were "the voice of the 80-year-old human, the voice of the 800-year-old human, the voice of the 8-year-old human; Celtic, Mayan, Incan, Hebrew, Atlantean, Arabic, Slavic, Tibetan roots, the voice of the oracle the voice of memory."[55] These, again, are qualities of whatness of a voice, yet sexual difference is also her concern. Beyond her creation of a communal space for women in *Girlchild*, in her song cycle *Our Lady of Late* (1975) she explored "the naked voice, the female voice in all its aspects; gradations of feeling, nuance, rhythm, quality," stripping away the what to approach the who of her voice as a woman.[56]

53. Peter Greenaway, *Four American Composers* (Transatlantic Films, 1983).

54. Meredith Monk, "Notes on the Voice," in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jewitt (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 56–57, 56.

55. Monk, "Notes on the Voice," 57.

56. Monk, "Notes on the Voice." Monk here provides a list of qualities Cavarero would consider part of what a voice is. Below I discuss her understanding of who each voice reveals and how her compositional practice respects that dimension of a voice.

The resonances between Cavarero's vocal philosophy and Meredith Monk's practice are striking. Both women are interested in voice qua voice—its powers, its pleasures, and its sociality. Yet, in considering Monk's revaluation of the relationship between word and sound, Monk's music may mark the limits of Cavarero's conception of a voice's ability to indicate uniqueness. As I stressed above, Cavarero's conception of voice (and the ethical and political dimensions that flow from it) is predicated upon a productive tension between the two parts of *phone semantike*. Cavarero revocalizes logos by emphasizing *phone* as the substantive element in language, thereby returning meaning to the world. Monk, too, emphasizes voice over word but has in some instances perhaps gone too far in that regard.

It was a pedagogical moment that got me thinking along these lines. In a class devoted to Monk and her music, I showed my students the opening of Greenaway's film *Four American Composers*, in which Monk gives a performance of "Do You Be?," a solo from her opera-epic *Vessel*. Listening to "Do You Be?" is, to put it mildly, affecting. Monk begins by playing a dirgelike piano ostinato that provides a sonic platform over which she ululates with ever-increasing dynamic intensity. Her voice shreds the somber accompaniment and defies its harmonic—minor mode, consonant—limits. Monk bends pitches microtonally, each note emphasized with labial consonants that draw our attention to her mouth. Moments later, she suddenly shifts to taut guttural clicks and moans. Unencumbered by linguistic signification (*semantike*), Monk's performance is all voice, all *phone*, and, so it sounded to me, all body. Yet one particularly precocious student challenged my hearing and responded to the performance with the assessment: "It's like her voice separates from her body." I asked my student to elaborate on his response, and he suggested that, by pushing her voice to such extremes, it became monstrous and snapped off. Her voice no longer provided evidence for the body that emitted it. It was, in Wilbourne's words, "an unwieldy synecdoche."

Interpreted through Cavarero's understanding of *phone semantike*, by moving too far to the pole of *phone*, my student could no longer identify the voice of Monk with her body. Something in the voice resisted recognition as human, dissolving as it did into inhuman sounds that could not be understood as a semblance of language. This monstrous, haunting quality of certain voices has been a concern of some recent musicological writing on voice. Michal Grover-Friedlander's work on opera and cinema has been precisely about these kinds of disembodied vocal effects afforded by cinema technologies. Following from the work of composer–film theorist Michel Chion, she has explored the difficulty of attaching voices to bodies with any certainty. She notes: "Each cinematic attempt [to present a unified body and voice] in its own way makes manifest a fundamental problem with the embodiment of the operatic voice, as though the mismatch between voice and body brings out a haunting quality of that voice."[57]

The effect of rupture, in my student's experience, extended to the seemingly more minimally mediated voice of Meredith Monk. Beyond the problem of overemphasizing *phone* having caused the complete breakdown of *semantike*, there emerges a problem of mediation within Cavarero's conception of vocal expression. How does the technological transformation of voices effect both the who and the what of their identities? Beyond the intimate sphere of an absolute local, how can we account for the work voices do? Benjamin Piekut and Jason Stanyek have offered some answers to these questions.[58] In their work on the technological mediation of dead voices, they suggest that voices have their own autonomy, irreducible to any essential corporeal link. Voices have lives long after the bodies that emitted them have gone. Yet the relational sphere that Cavarero celebrates—in which we

57. Michal Grover-Friedlander, "The Afterlife of Maria Callas' Voice," *Musical Quarterly* 88 (2006): 35–62, 37.
58. Benjamin Piekut and Jason Stanyek, "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54, no. 1 (2010): 14–38.

relate to one another through reciprocal communication and a recognition of one another's uniqueness—is not the assertion of a current or permanent state of affairs, it is an ethical goal. Much like the provisional space inhabited by Penelope and her companions, the relational space of vocal exchange is, ideally, an ephemeral space affording recognition and contact that exist momentarily and will vanish.

While "Do You Be?" courts an experience of monstrous detachment, Monk's *Dolmen Music* encourages a reconsideration of language's presence in her music as well as forms of relationality her performances make possible. Monk composed *Dolmen Music* for three female singers, three male singers, and cello and premiered it at the Kitchen in New York City in 1979.[59] Unlike much of her prior work, *Dolmen Music* is not an overtly theatrical piece. The singers sit in a semicircle, grouped by gender, and they have no organized choreography. For much of the performance, Monk delineates individual sonic spaces for men and women, honoring an idea of sexual difference in which members of each gender communicate with themselves, at least at first. This sexual division of their voices gives way to increasing individuality of each voice over the course of the twenty-four-minute performance. The singers forge other relationships, and the men and women end by singing in harmony and in rhythmic unison. With the absence of choreography, the musicians' communicative gestures telegraph the changing configurations of voice. The ensemble members relate through sound and in physical movement—they exchange glances, tap their hands and feet, and sway their torsos. This gestic communication, without language, is an affective and nondiscursive mode of relation. This is more remarkable than it may seem at first, and it requires an adjustment in the conception of politics that Cavarero inherits from Arendt. In Arendt's philosophy, politics occurs only with the communication between equals who have put aside what they are in order to disclose who they are. As I suggested earlier, Cavarero encourages just such an ethical imperative that would have us listen for uniqueness. This absolute locality has "the physical dimension of gazes and voices":

> In the politics of locality, before communicating specific meanings—to use Arendt's terms again—those who are present in fact communicate, one to the other, first of all their uniqueness. This signifies that the value of uniqueness is the primary principle of the political scene if not the rule that decides its spatial and temporal disposition.[60]

Within a horizon of locality, Monk's ensemble finds ways to communicate without language. Yet, having eschewed words, Monk manages otherwise to create a semblance of language. In the midst of the performance, I hear linguistic effects moving on a continuum of song and speech. Throughout the performance of *Dolmen Music*, Monk's performers move back and forth along this continuum, stopping short of resorting to any words that we could understand (though occasionally recognition does occur, as in the piece's final moments, when both Monk and Monika Solem seem to repeat the word "willow" over and over again). Monk remarked that the discursive aspect of the piece gave a listener the sense that "you were overhearing some mysterious conversation, that you couldn't make it out. You couldn't make out the language. You couldn't make out what they were saying; that you were hearing it from far away."[61] Considered in this way, *Dolmen Music* is glossolalia. As

59. All musical comments here refer to the recording Meredith Monk, *Dolmen Music*, ECM New Series 1197, 1981, compact disc. The vocalists on this recording are Meredith Monk, Andrea Goodman, Monika Solem, Paul Langland, Robert Een, and Julius Eastman. I discuss Eastman's contribution to the piece below. For my description of the physical aspects of the piece, I draw upon rehearsal footage from Michael Blackwood, *Making Dances: Seven Postmodern Choreographers* (Michael Blackwood Productions, 1980); and performance footage from Greenaway, *Four American Composers*.

60. Adriana Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory," *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 506–32, 527–28.

61. Greenaway, *Four American Composers*.

described by Certeau, glossolalia is a "trompe l'oreille," it is "the art of speech within the bounds of an illusion."[62] Monk creates fictions of language that ground *semantike* in *phone* without annihilating it; she maintains a tension just shy of the breaking point and grounds sounds in the relations between the voices and bodies of the ensemble.

By making a relational space of performance and communication, Monk also allows the uniqueness of individual vocalists to be recognized. Men and women offer themselves not only in performance but in the working out of the composition before an event. Their uniqueness shapes the music, and Monk draws upon the capabilities of each singer. Monk's working method in the 1970s was not that of an isolated composer. When she began to compose *Dolmen Music*, she was drawn to specific qualities of particular singers: "In some ways, I work in music as I work in dance, which is that I work right on the people themselves. I create the music for their particular voices and that's a process that's closer to dance than music."[63] Monk described how she came to work with one member of the *Dolmen Music* ensemble, the composer-performer Julius Eastman, an experimental musician renowned in the downtown Manhattan music scene for his vocal virtuosity:

> I knew I was going to be working on [the piece] *Dolmen Music*. I'm not sure if at the point that I met Julius that I knew the name of the piece. . . . Michael Byron and Rhys Chatham said, "If you want a bass, you've got to get Julius Eastman." I found out that he was doing a concert . . . at St. Mark's Church . . . and he was doing some of his own music as well as . . . playing [Federico] Mompou. . . . I loved him immediately because I always loved Mompou, and a lot of people didn't know his music. And there was Julius in his leather vest and his keys hanging out of his jeans and his dreads. And I said, "I'm Meredith and I'm working on this piece. Would you like to be in it?" and he said, "Oh, sure." You know Julius—"Of course, of course."[64]

Eastman's capabilities shaped *Dolmen Music* in unexpected ways. Eastman's extended techniques allowed him to produce multiphonics, to sing in extreme low and high registers, and Monk wrote his part to use all of his abilities. Eastman and his fellow singers in Monk's ensemble were, in Cavarero's words, necessary others.[65] They lent their unique qualities and voices to Monk's work, and it would have been impossible without their particular contributions. In offering his voice to Monk, Eastman exemplified what we might call an altruistic vocality—an offering of one voice to another, not dependent upon language but able to disclose its uniqueness in relation to others. It is a giving of oneself as a necessary other for the work of music to happen. Cavarero describes altruism as an ethics that "desires a you that is truly other, in her uniqueness and distinction. . . . [Y]our uniqueness is exposed to my gaze and consists in an unrepeatable story whose tale you desire." In their collaboration and communication, Monk, Eastman, and the other singers revealed another link between Cavarero's vocal philosophy and her earlier work on narration. This offering up of one's abilities to the work of another is what Cavarero describes as "a relational ethic of contingency." It is "an ethic founded on the altruistic ontology of the human existent as finite."[66] Once the particular voices no longer were part of the ensemble, *Dolmen Music* was not the piece that it had been. Monk remarked that after Eastman left the ensemble in the early 1980s and died in 1990, the singers that took his part were not able to achieve everything he was capable of, especially his production of multiphon-

62. Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias," trans. Daniel Rosenberg, *Representations* 56 (1996): 29–47, 29.
63. Meredith Monk, in Blackwood, *Making Dances*.

64. Meredith Monk, interview by the author, January 14, 2009. Julius Eastman recorded *Dolmen Music* with Monk in 1981.
65. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 81.
66. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 92, 87 (emphasis in the original).

ics.[67] Performed today, *Dolmen Music* is fraught with a melancholy of lost uniqueness: the loss of others and their singularity is felt in the distance between the voices for whom a piece was made and those who sing it now.

Conclusion

According to Rainer Maria Rilke, "Song . . . is not desire. . . . Song is existence."[68] As Cavarero and Monk both show, song models existence in its state of communication, interaction, and intersubjectivity. Vocal performance is suffused with bodies, voices, and pleasures. Her ontology of uniqueness, developed from Italian feminist thought and Arendt's political philosophy, offers a corrective both to the "ventriloquist" strains of contemporary voice theory critiqued by Michele Duncan and to more entrenched psychoanalytic theories.[69] Even though Cavarero does not necessarily practice a radically empiricist philosophy of voices (proceeding as she does from textual hermeneutics), her concern with a relational and exterior conception of voice provides us with conceptual tools for documenting musical and vocal relations. Especially useful is her revision of *phone semantike* as a productive tension between language and physical voice. As such, *phone semantike* is a site for the identification of ideologies of voice, ideologies that have in the patriarchal economy devocalized logos and diminished our attention to being-in-the-world.

However, Cavarero's politics of absolute locality should not block our attention to the increasing mediation and autonomy of voices noted by Grover-Friedlander, Piekut, and Stanyek. Their insights and those of others bring to light the difficulty of bracketing off the effects of technology. If modified with greater attention to forms of mediation, Cavarero's philosophy will continue to be a tool with which we might measure other approaches to voice and the degree to which they misplace concreteness or realize the here and now of musical and political praxis. While musicologists may be less interested in her unnecessarily restricted model of musical experience or find her model of relationality unable to account for the contingencies of contemporary life, we should attend to her call for serious attention to difference and uniqueness as an ethical necessity. Musical relations constantly present us with difference, and thinking with Cavarero may help us narrate those voices we have yet to hear.

67. Monk, interview.

68. "Gesang . . . ist nicht Begehr. . . . Gesang ist Dasein" (Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. M. D. Herten Norton [New York: Norton, 1992], 22).

69. Duncan, "Operatic Scandal."

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