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Ventriloquism: Ecstatic Exchange and the History of the Artwork

Privileging two voices not one, excluding writing by the nature of the act, ventriloquism is somewhere at the margins of phonocentrism. As performance, ventriloquism is associated with low art-from vaudeville to comedy clubs. In this paper, however, I treat ventriloquism as such—a rich historical practice with a complex logic of its own. Central to my analysis of ventriloquism is the notion of ecstasis, the ancient Greek word designating a being beside itself. I then attempt to apply a concept that grows out of that treatment-something I am calling the ventriloqual exchange—to an important art-historical idea, the work in progress. The history of art is most often taken to be the history of the finished work: how it is understood, how it moves through the world of galleries and museums. In the context of artworld history the prehistory of the finished work, including the work in progress, is usually neglected or devalued. I deal with the idea of a work in progress by drawing an analogy between it and ventriloqual exchange. In discussing ventriloquism I also turn to some brief applications in Plato's Ion and to some critical remarks regarding Foucault's work on the author.

1

It must be one of the ironies of American show business that its most endearing of ventriloquists spent so many celebrated years, his time at the top, on radio. It could certainly be said that Edgar Bergen's talent of appearing not to be speaking while speaking was simply assumed by the visually absent audience—the audience fully aware that Bergen and his dummy, the magnetic Charlie McCarthy, had paid their dues in the presence of vaudeville. Besides, those few mem-

bers of the studio audience could stand as proxy for the millions of others whose listening en masse was something like an act of faith.

However, I tend to think there was something more central to Bergen's talent than motionless speech. As I see it, Bergen's success had something to do with what the Greeks thought of as ecstasis, a stepping outside the self, a being beside itself, of which ventriloquism is a special case. Even in the dark of radio one could perceive Bergen engaging himself in conversational, rapid-fire exchange—phonetically indiscernible from two antithetical personalities going at each other, unless one knew what everyone knew: that the voices came from a single source.

At least since Pythagoras, ecstasis (from which our word "ecstacy" can be traced) has played a role in deep thinking. In The Birth of Tragedy, for example, Nietzsche says: "To be a dramatist all one needs is the urge to transform oneself and speak out of strange bodies and souls." The "primary dramatic phenomenon" for Nietzsche is "projecting oneself outside the self and then acting as though one had really entered another body, another character ... what we have here is the individual effacing himself entering a strange being."2 More recently, Arthur Danto, in the context of the relationship between reader and novel has written about "being taken out of oneself by art."3 Bergen/McCarthy is a special case of ecstasis, but only a single routine in ventriloquism's long evolutionary history.

Ventriloquism has taken many forms in the ancient world. Usually associated with priests and prophets, ventriloquism promoted the illusion that one person's voice was coming from another thing—sometimes a river or a stone, sometimes other persons, the charade often aided by facial hair conveniently obfuscating moving

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lips. The Greeks called such a person engastrimanteis or belly prophet; the bodily location being etymologically tenacious in the Latin venter (= belly) and loqui (= to speak). Today, ventriloquists are known to each other as vents and they prefer to call their dummies, figures, to which I might add, "figures of speech." Ventriloquism still can be found in a variety of social roles in a diversity of cultural contexts. Cullen Murphy, for example, writing for the Atlantic Monthly about his visit to a vent's convention in Kentucky notes, "I did not realize the extent to which ventriloquism, like puppetry in general, has swept through evangelical Christianity and become a mainstay of modern ministry."4

In choosing, then, the Bergen/McCarthy paradigm I will be choosing one model among many, one from the institutional background of Western show business. In dealing with this particular act I have picked the context of comedy and while there are certainly exceptions to the ventriloquist-as-comic model even within the culture of amusement (see the film Dead of Night [1945] and a later day version of one of its segments, Magic [1978], or Hans Jürgen Syberberg's seven hour, low-budget extravaganza, Our Hitler), the exceptions, I believe, gain a certain dramatic edge by the more standard comedic case as if they were all the more horrible for abusing the innocence of another performance kind. Aristotle might be helpful in explaining the ventriloquial bent toward comedy. Aristotle distinguished the comic from the tragic by virtue of differentiating between character types. While tragedy portrayed those of high or serious character, comedy was confined to those of inferior or ridiculous characters and what can be more ridiculous than a dummy except someone willing to converse with it? In any case, the first reference I could find to ventriloquism as entertainment was in a Pall Mall Gazette of 1865.5 Later, in the 1890s, a certain Englishman, Fred Russell, first did ventriloquism with a single dummy-on-knee act, not Bergen. Edgar Bergen wasn't the first either, to give the dummy the smart-alecky Irish character it seemed to retain, but he was the one to give a certain surprising reality to it and to carry ventriloquism itself into a mass medium.

The following narrative, taken from Candice Bergen's "National Best Seller" *Knock Wood*, (Candice is Edgar's daughter) refers to an event that was more or less the gelling of the character that the dummy Charlie McCarthy was to approximate until Bergen's death in 1978:

Everybody looked down on ventriloquism. "Vaudeville was dying," my father told me years later. "We thought we were through Charlie and I. Then I decided on desperate measures. I revamped my act. I had a dress suit and a monocle made for Charlie, and the same for myself." Unemployed, but resplendent in white tie and tails, they slowly broke into Chicago's supper-club circuit, getting a week's tryout at the Chez Paree nightclub. Coming onstage at three o'clock in the morning for their final performance before an almost empty club, Charlie suddenly turned on his master, asking, "Who the hell ever told you you were a good ventriloquist?" Telling Edgar to go back to the farm, the dummy refused to be shushed by a blushing Bergen; Charlie was confident of getting by alone. He then spun on the stunned customers, declaring them a disgrace to civilization, rattling on as Bergen propped him on a chair and slowly backed away. The management was catatonic, but the customers collapsed in laughter, hooting, howling, pounding on the tables. Later, a serene Bergen was found backstage saying, "I simply had to get that off my chest."6

When the Bergen/McCarthy act hit the airwaves, it was the creation of the McCarthy "personality" that drew critical acclaim. The following clip (also in *Knock Wood*) is from a 1939 New York Times:

Psychologists say that Charlie differs from other dummies because he has definite spiritual qualities. His throaty, almost lecherous chuckle is a haunting thing; his whole attitude of *Weltschmerz* is astonishingly real. He says things that a human actor would never dare to say in public and gets away with it.⁷

The contrast in personalities was also taken note of with the inanimate dummy as dominant and active and the creator passive and submissive. The following is from the old *New York Herald Tribune*:

On the one hand, there is the gay, irrepressible Charlie, through whom, by some strange alchemy, the shy and pallid Bergen is transformed into a brilliant comedian. On the other hand, there is an imperious and dominating Charlie, whose almosthuman personality has so eclipsed his creator that

Bergen cannot function as an artist alone. "Charlie is famous," says Bergen glumly, "and I am the forgotten man. I am really jealous of the way Charlie makes friends," Bergen complains wistfully. "People are at ease with Charlie. He is so uncomplicated."

In the account that follows I am not explicitly interested in a psychological theory either about Edgar Bergen personally or even about ventriloquism generally. For example, I am not claiming that Charlie is Edgar's alter-ego, or that Charlie is a repressed self, a reflection of an overt self, a catharsis or cathexis, a regression, death wish or all or any of the above. My interests are more modest than that. I simply hope to articulate some features of this particular ventriloqual paradigm and that they in turn will be used to shed some light on other art-philosophical issues later on.

II

Throwing one's voice is more like throwing a fight than it is like throwing a fastball. The dummy never does emit or noticeably reflect the thrown voice, but is, rather, made to appear to. But while throwing a fight (and here I have professional boxing, not wrestling, in mind) tends to keep the audience in the dark, throwing one's voice in the ventriloquist's act lets them in on the trick. There is, in ventriloquism, illusion without deception. Paraphrasing what Lacan once said about pictures, the dummy is a trap for the gaze.

Ventriloquism includes speaking in another voice or even in another's voice—a complex and difficult matter in itself with well entrenched arthistorical precedents.9 But ventriloquism is not simply speaking in other voices and hence differs in interesting ways from related performance types like acting, puppeteering, lip-syncing, and impersonating. Unlike acting, where the actress may or may not speak in some voice different from her own the ventriloquist must resort to another voice to help facilitate the appearance of conversation. In the role of ventriloquist, she may choose to retain her usual, recognizable voice but the dummy's voice must be significantly distinct from that—the more radical the contrast the easier the audience's shift in attention from the body of the ventriloquist to the body of the dummy. This is not to deny that

we utilize a wide variety of voices daily, but as in Charlie's case, the dummy's voice is somewhat eccentric as adult voices go, usually distinct from any other human voice encountered in quotidian life. Of course one explanation of the necessity of difference lies in the difficulty of sounding the same as one does ordinarily with the handicap of motionless lips. This physical limitation adds an arbitrary element of constraint, not only to what the ventriloquist says, but to the range of tone and volume of her thrown voice.

Lip-syncing or puppeteering, like dubbed acting, can get by without the voice source being present to the audience. Unlike puppeteering, in ventriloquism the voice-source appears with, is present to the figure and is itself a character in the performance as the ventriloquist impresses the appearance of the singularity of her role. Ventriloquism requires the thrown voice to take an object (i.e., the dummy) so that the ventriloquist and the dummy engage each other in smooth and natural conversation. So in ventriloquism, the voice source and the voice object are simultaneously present to the audience.

The idea of voice throwing is to offer the impression of conversation, one that takes place between two distinct characters, something like it does in a play. Conversation has its own requirements—a certain attention paid as well as responses crafted that are appropriate to remarks made and with a progression that is directed by the conversants. To do this the ventriloquist must not simply speak in another voice, she must efface herself as speaker while simultaneously promoting herself as listener. The ventriloquist as voice thrower, the one actually speaking and also hearing herself speak (as in reading this paper I would hear myself now) must pretend not only not to be speaking, but must pretend to be listening simultaneously. The key to the act is in the exchange—in the case of Bergen and McCarthy a rapid fire interplay that displays the ventriloquist's talent for switching personalities of two significantly different sorts. The dummy itself is dead, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, only in its use does it become alive.

With this in mind I find it strange that whatever pressure is generated by the audience to catch the ventriloquist in the act, it tends to be directed at the movement of lips rather than toward a possible failure at manipulating this character exchange. So then, on one level of the performance, Edgar is talking to Charlie—two very different characters, in different voices, listening and responding to the other. But on another level, Bergen is talking to himself.

Ш

"Talking to oneself," as we seem to use the locution, is talking to oneself aloud, talking without directing speech to an appropriate or present listener. Either the harmless kind that each of us allows ourselves every now and then or the kind that approaches the margins of society, talking to oneself is usually talking in a single voice. (I think of the kind of dissociative condition portrayed in The Three Faces of Eve, to be separate rather than interacting voices.) The ventriloquist's talking to oneself is played out in more than one voice with the dummy functioning as a license of propriety, making talking to oneself or rather talking with oneself, okay, buttressed of course, by the institution of show business. (Chevy Chase once reported that New York's Bureau of Tourism, for the sake of appearance, had paired up those citizens talking to themselves.) In Bergen's act it is not simply talking to oneself in itself that is licensed but the relatively outrageous, improper content of Charlie's speech which marks a clear difference with Bergen's polite demeanor. Charlie's role here, on the periphery of good taste, as the voice of otherwise unspeakable things, in a manner unlike that of any other of Bergen's companions, is similar to a relationship we have come to understand as that between jesters and kings when jesters were reputed to have been uniquely frank or abusive to an extent that would have brought others the dungeon or death. 10 In Wittgensteinian fashion it is possible to imagine a tribe of ventriloquists whose members never spoke except in the presence of their dummies. The dummies are always present in the event anyone would have something disagreeable to say or in case they were not in the presence of another person to speak with, the ventriloquists can address the dummy with the kind of propriety we reserve, in our form of life, for those who speak to animals. In any case, audiences knew Bergen was talking with himself and if they chose to do so could have understood the act exactly, or only, that way. But that would have spoiled all the fun.

There are, then, at least two ontological levels happening in a ventriloquist's act. But it is important to point to another phenomenon characteristic of most ventriloquist's acts, especially those that involve comedy. Here I want to call attention to what I think of as a falling between the ontological levels—the level of the mild illusion of Bergen talking to Charlie on the one hand and Bergen talking to himself, on the other. The kind of slippage I have in mind here is not unlike that expressed in Rauschenberg's remark, "Painting relates to both art and life (I try to work in that gap between the two)."11 Rauschenberg worked with ordinary objects like mattresses, clocks and chairs attached or juxtaposed to his canvases sometimes problematizing their relationship to the paint that often splattered their surfaces. We have already encountered in Candice Bergen's narrative the reference Charlie makes to Bergen as a lousy ventriloquist stepping outside the conversational act where Charlie then becomes just so much wood and Bergen is only alone. Here is another example of that from Bergen's radio program, The Charlie McCarthy Show, when the two are joined by W.C. Fields.

Fields: Tell me, Charles, is it true your father was a gateleg table?

Charlie: Well, if it is, your father was under it.

Fields: Quiet, you flophouse for termites or I'll sic a beaver on you.

Bergen: Now, Bill ...

Charlie: Mr. Fields, is that a flame thrower I see or is it your nose?

Fields: Why, you little blockhead, I'll whittle you down to a coat hanger. 12

Again, here we have Charlie as personality and Charlie as shaped wood as two quite compatible levels, the audience enjoying the free-play between them and pleased to be on the inside of that joke. Perhaps the reception of the ventriloquist's act has a visual analogue in a multi-imaged duck-rabbit, one with a sense of humor, in which each image independently takes on interest only as one of a pair of possibilities, playing upon various perceptual levels, each cognitively related. As in that famous perceptual example, the trace of one level is always present

even if it is not the one being privileged or foregrounded. I will return to this point shortly.

In Heidegger's essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," there is a point about the relationship between artwork and artist that is worth mentioning in the context of ventriloquism. In that essay Heidegger says that the origin of the work of art is the artist but also that the origin of the artist is the work of art. 13 There is then, according to Heidegger, a symbiotic relationship between artist and work such that without works, or at least without objects of art, there would be no artists. The artist's identity is in part determined by the work and, Heidegger adds, both are dependent upon art itself. That Charlie is dependent upon Bergen for what is said is clear enough. But also that without Charlie, Bergen qua ventriloquist would not have happened or could not happen. Not only is it true that if not for Charlie at least one voice of Bergen's would not have been heard but also Bergen's identity as person would be seriously altered were it not for his work as ventriloquist. The dummy defines (identifies) the ventriloquist. In Heidegger's words, "Neither is without the other." Ventriloquism is the occasion for letting strange voices speak.

The mention of Bergen as person, by which I somewhat misleadingly refer to Edgar Bergen outside the work, as hors d'oeuvre, as Derrida would put it, leads to a further complication. Unlike the names of the characters' roles of Bette Davis or Dustin Hoffman, the name "Edgar Bergen" is the name of the man in and out of the performance. Some have said that Bergen's personality outside the act approximated his personality in it and also that Charlie had a role in Bergen's "real life" not entirely unlike that which he played in performance. So it may well be that Bergen qua performance artist just is Bergen qua person the way the plumber or the pitcher just are people at work. That may be a contingent claim, not so much about Bergen, as about certain conditions of labor which I shall attempt to sort out later on. Nevertheless, I am tempted to attribute this claim to ventriloguism a priori. Now, however, for purposes of clarification, I want to better articulate a point about the limits of my analysis thus far. The ecstasis I am proposing is the ecstasis of Bergen in performance, which just may also be an ecstasis of Bergen as person, just as Davis or Hoffman may

actually become sad or angry just as Mary Queen of Scotts or Ratso Rizzo do.

That aside, let me give the name "ventriloqual exchange" to the ecstatic relationship that takes place on the aforementioned relevant ontological levels-the exchange between Bergen and McCarthy which just is, as well, the exchange between Bergen and himself when Bergen is engaged in the project of ventriloquism. This exchange is viewed as conversation on one level and as talking to oneself on another (which, since it includes in any case, two voices, can also be understood as a special or deviant form of conversation). But it is important to recognize that the binary opposition between these modes of ventriloqual exchange are continuously being undermined by the act itself, suspending suspended disbelief on the part of the audience, deflating the pressure of being caught with one's lips moving (by not taking the mild illusion of two persons talking too seriously) and by playing with the ontological levels by vacillating between them in comedic reflexity. 14 On the one hand there is an exchange between persons and on another there is one person talking to himself and then, too, there are those reflexive moments when the exchange falls between the two.

ΙV

I now would like to compare the ventrilogual exchange with a certain designated period in the prehistory of an artwork that I am calling the work in progress. The work in progress is the period of interplay between artist and artistic project. I would not want to insist that all works of art have such works in progress, have such histories, and will in fact soon consider a case in which the work in question does not. These works in progress are of more or less duration or intensity and may include such acts as sketching, rewriting, whistling, practicing, tracing, erasing, demolishing, rehearsing, doing research, as well as the more usual artistic activities like painting and/or writing that are part of the history of that work however the lines of that history are plausibly drawn. Those that are interested in this period, e.g., those who are interested in intention, in the lives of artists, or in simply gaining a certain perspective for purposes of understanding certain things about the work itself, may be interested in using the ventriloqual exchange as a model for the artist's work in progress.

John Dewey's analysis of the act of expression warrants comparison here, although he does not specifically consider the ventriloqual elements that I emphasize. In his Art as Experience he says, "the expression of the self in and through a medium, constituting the work of art, is itself a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess."15 My own feeling is that the work in progress, which Dewey paints as expression, can be considered intention-inthe-context-of-practice. Neither simply expression nor monolithic intention, the work in progress is often a set of fragmentary stops and starts, numerous intentional acts mingled with accidents, some only barely related to the finished work by the time work stops.

In a work in progress the artist will be dealing with something in another voice-music and literature are other voices, paint is another voice and so on. Yet the source of this voice is no ordinary other, since it is the voice of an ecstatic exchange-the voice, in some respect, of the artist him/herself. In addition, during this period of time there is something of an exchange and sometimes a complicated one between the artist and the artistic project-soon and hopefully to be the work of art. Sometimes, during this period, the artist thinks of the work as the voice of another (while retaining full responsibility for the other's voice embodied eventually in an object or projected in an action the way the ventriloquist's voice is embodied in the dummy). Sometimes it is the work saying something to the artist with the artist responding appropriately.

At other times, work is just the artist talking to himself. But in a different voice. And there is plenty of vacillation between these levels—now I work with paint or stone, a commonplace from my life, now I work with the hemlock of Socrates or the beard of Christ, something from the life and death of Socrates or Christ depicted in a work and which means or represents independent of me. On one level I am emphasizing what Danto calls "that intimate and mutual communication between artist and work that resembles a long, difficult and rewarding relationship," 16 necessary, I think he claims, for art to have a history at all.

I am imagining here that during the work in progress the artist sees the work at one time and asks, "What does the work say?" and sometimes, "What am I saying?" Sometimes as if she were dealing with another person, one with a distinct character, a style, a vision that needs fixing, completing and so forth and sometimes as if she were talking to, perhaps expressing, herself. In the first set of instances, the work has a character independent of the artist something like the way Charlie is taken to have a personality independent of Bergen. Danto's remarks are relevant here again:

As a philosopher I am struck by the way in which idea and embodiment in art parallels the way in which our minds are embodied in ourselves as persons. But works differ from one another as personalities differ from personalities ... greatness in works is like greatness in human beings ... there are certain works, as certain persons, one likes or dislikes for reasons having nothing much to do with their excellences or failures." 17

Or, as Bruce Wilshire puts it:

The work of art might be called a substitute self, or perhaps a quasi-self. It is deeply one's own and it speaks for one. ... Deliberately, skillfully, and frequently through trial and error meaning is selected, concentrated, and funded in the stone, the canvas, or the performance. It is then unleashed for a relatively short time upon the viewer or auditor." 18

We do sometimes ask, "What does this work say (to you)?" And the explanation of that response would be seriously incomplete were it couched in terms of the artist's voice alone. It would be like mentioning Bergen's voices, or what Bergen was saying but without reference to Charlie.

V

I'd like now to turn to an example of an artrelevant ecstasis where a ventriloqual exchange of the sort I have tried to characterize does not take place although something quite similar does. In Plato's Ion, Socrates is aware that Ion, the rhapsode, is the benefactor of an ecstatic experience—that given no relevant difference between Homeric songs and others, Ion's success only with Homer is explained by seeing Ion as someone outside or beside himself and as something like the dummy for a divine voice. In Ion's case, Socrates says, "God takes away the mind of poets and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God himself is the speaker, and that through them is conversing with us." ¹⁹

Socrates insists that it is some other voice, not Ion's, that addresses "the twenty thousand friendly people" of his audience (thus denying Ion authorial credit in case we think it is due him). And importantly, there is no exchange-nothing that resembles the kind of dialogue that Socrates believes to exemplify philosophical progress. With Ion there is another voice but only one voice, not two. God may be as unseen as Bergen was on radio, as Cyrano is from Roxanne's balcony, but God is also unheard, perhaps logically so, in his or her own voice the way Cyrano is unheard in his. (There is a wonderful line by Cyrano that comes after Roxanne, thinking she is conversing with Christian but sensing something different, says, "Your voice/ even, is not the same." Cyrano then answers, "How should it be?/I have another voice tonight/My own.") On the ontological level chosen by Socrates, God speaks in an other voice, which is also another's voice, and the blessed Ion is as silent as Charlie qua wood.

During one phase of his amazing, multi-faceted life, Malcolm X draws his own analogy between himself and Charlie McCarthy. In treating just those features that are relevant to the example from the *Ion*, Malcolm explained why it was he thought, "Mr. Muhammed (Elijah Muhammed) is everything and I am nothing."

When you hear Charlie McCarthy speak, you listen and marvel at what he says. What you forget is that Charlie is nothing but a dummy. He is a hunk of wood sitting on Edgar Bergen's lap. If Bergen quits talking, McCarthy is struck dumb. If Bergen turns (him) loose, McCarthy will fall to the floor, a plank of sawdust fit for nothing but the fire. This is the way it is with the Messenger and me.²⁰

The silencing that Socrates attributes to Ion's voice suggests comparison with the silence he

inveighs against painting and writing in general in the *Phaedrus*: "Writing, you know, Phaedrus, has this strange quality about it, which makes it really like painting: the painter's products stand before us quite as though they were alive; but if you questioned them, they maintain a solemn silence."²¹ What is problematic for Socrates about Ion or about painting is their inability to enter into the kind of exchange necessary for philosophical dialogue, their externality to conversation. Charlie interacts with Bergen but Ion and God are a vocal one-way street.

So then, my idea of the work in progress as ventriloqual exchange may be a cartoon of some actual artistic examples, may miss the mark entirely in others or be right on the money in yet others. The ventriloqual exchange is a paradigm for artistic work that covers some cases but I am unprepared as to how many cases it includes. There are artists who certainly engage in this kind of exchange and those who don't and there are those who engage in it sometimes and not others, perhaps in the initiating phases of their own signatures, their own identifying works, and thereafter do so only in a token or casual manner, coasting on the coattails of previous accomplishments.

I am not, here, interested in rendering a general theory of the pre-history of a work. But I think it is valuable for those who are interested in issues say, centered around artistic intention, or of the cognitive or theoretical content of artworks, those who may even stress or essentialize those conditions, to keep ventriloqual exchange in mind. The point, again, is not to say that only after such exchange can "a genuine" artwork occur but that a significantly different narrative regarding the pre-history of works is necessary in cases where it does not.

VI

One year after the appearance of Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" in 1968, Michel Foucault published his own challenge to the canonical author in his essay "What is an Author?" Like Socrates, Foucault sets up his analysis in ecstatic terms:

Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, nor the present indicative refer exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from which the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author-function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance."²²

For Foucault then, the voice of the author or person writing is not the voice of the novel or narrator but emerges at different "distances" from the author/writer/person during the course of the work. This so-called distance designates an *ecstasis* between the self of the author and the self of the narrator, manifested at least in a difference of voice, a distance which Foucault notes is generally acknowledged.

But while Socrates is willing to attribute gifts and a special status, if not artistic knowledge, to the artist, Foucault's work on the author purports to vitiate a further difference, one between author and person. The author/person opposition is a different one for Foucault from the author/narrator or person/narrator distinction (although it is not always so clear that Foucault is aware of it). "We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely."23 Foucault, here, is identifying and opposing at least one authorial canon: a privileging of the author by first distinguishing the author from others.

I take Foucault's warning against "presenting the author as a genius" or as "an indefinite source of significations which fill a work" as well taken. Some cultures do have a tendency to fetishize or idolize the person that is the artist, at least during those times when they are not jailing, impoverishing, trivializing, disenfranchising, harassing, demeaning, black-balling, firing, marginalizing, exiling or merely misunderstanding him or her. When Foucault says, as he does in The Order of Things, that "Mallarmé was constantly effacing himself from his own language" and when he cites Nietzsche's rhetorical question, "Who is speaking?" his point is to cast doubt on the author's presence to her own work and on her relevance with respect to her voice in favor of the speaking of the word, language itself. Again, in "What Is an Author?" he sees writing as the creation of "a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears."²⁴ The disappearance or effacement of the speaking subject by virtue of the spoken voice is like the effacement of the ventriloquist as the source of the voice of the dummy. It is and it isn't the voice of the author depending upon the ontological level of analysis. From the point of view of the receptor of a work, e.g., the reader of the novel or the auditor of the ventriloquist's act, the ontological levels are crossed and fallen between so that alternate possible responses might be, "Is Philip Roth really saying this?" "Is Alexander Portnoy really saying this?" or both. Portnoy, it is at least plausible to suggest, says things, like the dummy, that Roth himself might not.

In problematizing the idea of "an author" Foucault welcomes the problematization of "a work." But Foucault would not explicitly attack so proletarian a notion as work itself—the work, for example, of the plumber or the seamstress. But the artist works too, and while she effaces herself as quotidian self in exchange with her project, she forms herself again-not as an untouched former self but as an author. The effacement of the artist is the effacement as speaking voice, it is not the effacement of the artist as one source of that voice (whatever other forces may have prepared that source). The useful distinction between authorial voice and artistic persona, e.g., as narrator, does not nullify the causal exchange that shapes them both. The ventriloqual exchange identifies the ventriloquist. The work in progress is also work, is also the progression of an identity relative to the work and it is that identity that informs a distinction that sets off the author or artist from other persons.

When Foucault sees the author as an "ideological product" he understands "author" as an intersection of social forces without recognizing the author's role in "conversation" or exchange with her own projects. When he says that, "Critics doubtless try to give the intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design,' the milieu in which writing originates," he omits work, the artist's work as one of those forces. The artist is a product of, as well as an agent for the work in progress—the ventriloqual exchange is what sets the author off from those who don't go through it. So it is helpful to think about artistic work as an exchange of voices instead of a one-way ticket from artist to object.

In addition, I want to suggest that a crucial, but misleading and unarticulated assumption of Foucault's essay, is that the author's work is alienated or estranged labor-that when the author writes, the product is both external and in opposition to the writer's exemplification of her species being; a free conscious expression or extension of some status quo self, hard at work writing. In the course of writing the writer is also authoring, investing herself with an authority (but by no means as the sole authority) gained from that work, transfiguring herself by her labor. Indeed, I believe it is the absence of or repression of non-alienated labor that informs, dramatizes, enlivens Foucault's claims about the author with estranged labor transforming the individual to mere function. This last, of course, is one of Foucault's general goals, namely his aim to "de-individualize" individual, the concept itself being a product of power. In his Preface to Anti-Oedipus, he says, "What is needed is to 'de-individualize' by means of multiplication and displacement. ... "25 For Foucault the author is merely a special and obvious case of the individualization of persons.

My own position, however, may not be as far from Foucault's birth of the author-function as it may seem. When he suggests as a new appropriate question, "What place can (the subject) occupy in each type of discourse and what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules?" I am suggesting here that one "function" just be the ventriloqual exchange and that that function be understood as forming or identifying that authorial subject. What makes Foucault's work here so ripe or apt for a ventriloqual analogue is that he sets up his issue as a separation of self from self, an ecstasis, and then identifies the place between the two in which multi-voiced exchange or conversation can take place. In that part of the pre-history of the work I have called the work in progress there is, on one level the author encountering another character, a persona, a voice different from her own voice and on another level it is just the voice of herself with which she is engaged.

VII

I have come to think of ventriloquism as a paradigm of a certain power for organizing artisthistorical phenomena. But I also see its possibil-

ities in more deviant pursuits. Without Bergen, Charlie may be silent but he is not empty. Like any face and body, Charlie is replete with meaning, ready for voice. Perhaps ventriloqual exchange can help to understand what Hegel calls a "voiceless" history or in general help us to interpret more freely aspects of a silent world whose voice we are constructing as we, at the same time, pretend to listen—that sometimes the voices of others are also our own, and sometimes our own are also those of other, for example, more powerful voices. Less carefully, let me close by suggesting that being outside the self, in a Nietzschean manner, is a way of extending, even empowering the status quo self, of recognizing other voices in ourselves and of problematizing the idea that the self is located in the behavior of a single mind or body. I am suggesting, further, that interpreting entities with meaning is something like projecting and engaging voices and is partly constituted by aesthetic response.²⁶

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- 1. Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), p. 55.
 - 2. Ibid., pp. 55-56.
- 3. Arthur Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (Harvard University Press, 1981), p.173.
- 4. Cullen Murphy, *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1989, p. 64.
- 5. Oxford English Dictionary (two volume edition), p. 519.
- 6. Candice Bergen, *Knock Wood* (New York: Random House, 1984), pp. 21-22.
 - 7. Ibid., p. 25.
 - 8. Ibid., pp. 25-26.
- 9. Speaking in the voice of another is a topic that has generated a good deal of literature in recent years, especially in the context of feminism. As one example see C. Jan Swearingen's Rhetoric and Irony (Oxford University Press, 1991).
- Arthur Danto offered this suggestion during a presentation of this paper.
- 11. Quoted in Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, p. 12.
 - 12. Candice Bergen, Knock Wood, p. 23.
- 13. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 17.
- 14. In discussing the ventriloqual exchange I am not discussing the relationship between Bergen and his act, but rather the relationships Bergen assumes within the act.
 - 15. John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: C.P.

Putnam's Sons, 1934), p. 65. I thank Jerrold Levinson for this comparison.

16. Arthur Danto, Encounters and Reflections (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1990), p. 17.

17. Ibid., p. 9.

18. Bruce Wilshire, Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor (Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 219.

19. Plato, *Ion*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937) Vol. I, p. 534.

20. Quoted in Bruce Perry, *Malcolm* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1991), p. 229.

21. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Helmbold and Rabinowitz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p. 69.

22. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in *Textual Strategies* (Cornell University Press, 1979), p.152.

23. Ibid., p. 142.

24. Ibid.

25. Michel Foucault, "Preface," Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari, (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. xiv.

26. I would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for making possible my participation in the 1991 Summer Institute, "Philosophy and the Histories of the Arts," during which this paper was drafted and where I had many stimulating conversations. In particular, I am much better off for discussions with Noël Carroll, Jerrold Levinson, Larry Lutchmansingh and C. Jan Swearingen. I am also grateful to Ralf Remshardt and especially to Steven Meyers, who suggested the richness of this topic as a natural outgrowth of some of my previous work.