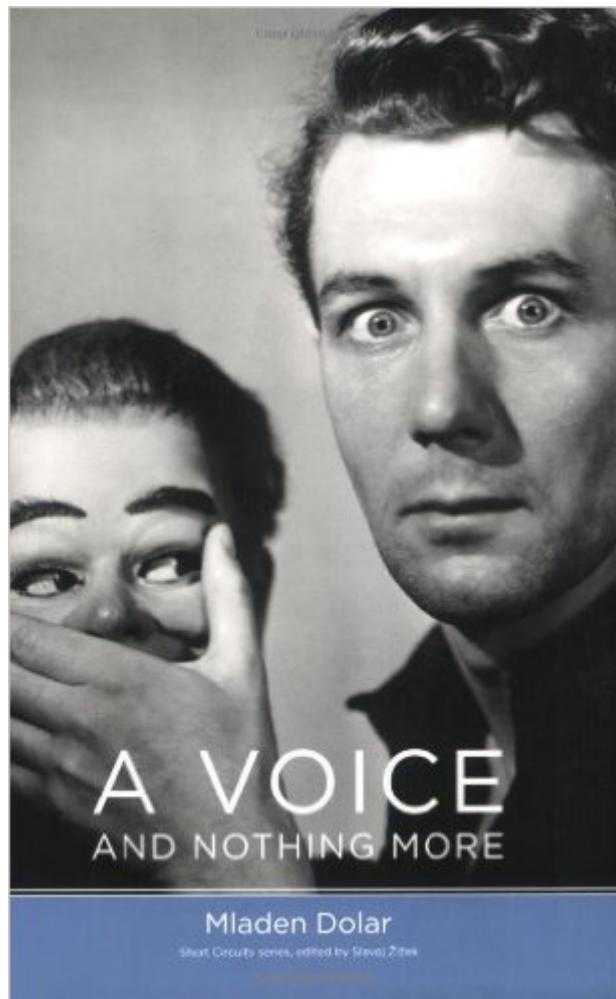


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A Voice And Nothing More (Short Circuits)



Synopsis

Plutarch tells the story of a man who plucked a nightingale and finding but little to eat exclaimed: "You are just a voice and nothing more." Plucking the feathers of meaning that cover the voice, dismantling the body from which the voice seems to emanate, resisting the Sirens' song of fascination with the voice, concentrating on "the voice and nothing more": this is the difficult task that philosopher Mladen Dolar relentlessly pursues in this seminal work. The voice did not figure as a major philosophical topic until the 1960s, when Derrida and Lacan separately proposed it as a central theoretical concern. In *A Voice and Nothing More* Dolar goes beyond Derrida's idea of "phonocentrism" and revives and develops Lacan's claim that the voice is one of the paramount embodiments of the psychoanalytic object (*objet a*). Dolar proposes that, apart from the two commonly understood uses of the voice as a vehicle of meaning and as a source of aesthetic admiration, there is a third level of understanding: the voice as an object that can be seen as the lever of thought. He investigates the object voice on a number of different levels -- the linguistics of the voice, the metaphysics of the voice, the ethics of the voice (with the voice of conscience), the paradoxical relation between the voice and the body, the politics of the voice -- and he scrutinizes the uses of the voice in Freud and Kafka. With this foundational work, Dolar gives us a philosophically grounded theory of the voice as a Lacanian object-cause.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Jacques Lacan claimed there were four figures of *objet petit a*: the breast, feces, the gaze, and the voice. In the critical work on Lacanian psychoanalysis, the gaze has taken the spotlight--especially

in the film studies reception of Lacan. Mladen Dolar seeks to rectify this situation by producing a book on the voice. However, if you are expecting a long commentary on the voice in Lacan or a spectacular application of Lacanian theory to film and other cultural phenomena, then you will be shocked. Dolar is a serious philosopher, and his book reflects that. What he attempts to do is isolate the voice as an object unto itself. What he needs to do this is psychoanalytic theory. Therefore, while psychoanalysis is very important, it is usually in the background informing his discussion of the voice in linguistics, politics, ethics, etc. The first 3 chapters are an attempt to distill the voice as an object of philosophical reflection. If language is a chain of signifiers, then the voice is the invisible but material string that holds it together. But what does that mean?--this is what Dolar attempts to answer in these three chapters. The next two chapters examine the voice in moral philosophy and political philosophy. These are very interesting discussions. What do we mean when we say "the voice of reason" or "the voice of conscience"? What do we mean when we enjoin others to "have a voice in the political process"? Especially if the voice is an object unto itself, which has rarely been thought through?--Dolar answers these questions in these chapters. The last two chapters are reflections on the voice in psychoanalysis and the work of Kafka. The discussion of Freud is logical. But why Kafka? It is never made clear. I have only two major quarrels with this book. One is its style.

To the list of objects inherited from Freud, Lacan notoriously added two new ones, the gaze and the voice. But one quickly took precedence over the other: as Mladen Dolar notes, "it seems that all gazes were fixed on the gaze, both in Lacan's own work and in a host of commentaries, while not all ears were open to the voice, which failed to get a proper hearing." If, according to Alain Badiou, "there are only bodies and languages", the voice is that which holds bodies and languages together. Yet the voice does not belong to either. It is not part of linguistics: it makes the utterance of meaning possible, but it disappears in it, like the Wittgensteinian ladder to be discarded when we have successfully attained the peak of the signifier. But it is not part of the body either: not only does it detach itself from the body and leaves it behind, it cannot be situated in it, and its point of origin is structurally concealed. It comes from a gaping hole, an undescribable place, so that every emission of the voice is by its essence ventriloquism. The voice comes from the innermost realm of our being, but at the same time it is something that transcends us, it is in ourselves more than ourselves, and represents a beyond at our most intimate. Its proper location is the Unheimlich, with all the ambiguity that Freud has given this word: the internal externality, the exclusive inclusion, the expropriated intimacy, the extimacy - the word Lacan uses for the uncanny. The voice shares with all the objects of the drive a topological paradox: they are situated in a realm which exceeds the body,

they prolong the body like an excrescence or an appendix, but they are not outside the body either. This is the topology of what Lacan calls *objet petit a*.

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