

Introduction

The Scene of the Voice; or, What to Do with Language after Affect

These days, it may seem odd or even quaint to be undertaking a study on the voice. Studying the voice inevitably means engaging with language, and recent research in the humanities and interpretive social sciences testifies to a decisive turn away from the concern with language that characterized post-modern and poststructuralist thought. Continental philosophy is currently in the thralls of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, movements that are imagined to be breaks with what they describe as the straitjacketed “correlationalism” of post-Kantian philosophy.¹ Elsewhere along the contemporary theoretical horizon, one encounters invocations of a “new materialism” that would finally dispense with critical theory’s anthropocentric nature.² Interwoven among these developments are the turn to affect and the so-called return to the aesthetic, which emphasize embodied forms of belonging and ideas of trans-, nonindividualized, and shared sensibility.³

From the perspective of these recent critical occupations, the engagement with language cultivated by poststructuralist thought—for example, as in deconstruction and psychoanalysis—does too much and yet not enough. Too much in the sense that Jacques Derrida’s famous phrase “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” (“There is nothing outside of the text” / “There is no outside-text”)⁴ gave rise to anxieties of linguistic and social determinism, of speaking subjects suddenly rendered imaginary fictions, thus robbing actual persons of voice, rights, and responsibilities. Too little, then, in the sense that with the turn to language, the body, it was said, was also done away with and thus the world, nature, and matter along with it. Purportedly trapped in the representative structures of language and culture, many have felt it imperative to regain the supposedly lost external world and, with it,

the certainty and freedom that the idea of material existence promises. In response to such perceived trappings, speculative realism and new materialism hold out hope of engaging once again with objects themselves rather than the interiority of the mind, of which language is supposedly a mere expression. Similarly, the affective and aesthetic turns affirm the fact that we have bodies, whose capacities for sensibility cannot be spoken away.

Given this supposed legacy of poststructuralist thought and the current attempts to overcome that legacy, what could be gained from a return to the voice, much less from theorizing a “scene of the voice”? In this study, I contend that a reconsideration of the voice corrects some of the presuppositions at work in contemporary theory’s latest turns. I include among these presuppositions not only an idea of poststructuralism’s conception of language but more importantly, the self-evident opposition of language to affect and materiality. When we look at the voice as it appears in one of poststructuralism’s guiding texts—Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*—these presuppositions are revealed to be untenable.

Beginning with its conceptualization in Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology in *Being and Time*, and continuing with its reception by French post-Heideggerian philosophers, the voice realizes the social-political and ethical ambitions at the heart of critical thought’s most recent projects by affirming language as a condition for the affective and aesthetic conceptualization of difference. Without a reconsideration of the voice and without attention to what I describe as the “scene” of the relation between language and the sensibility of existence Heidegger calls human finitude (our understanding and interpretation of the sense/meaning of Being that precedes and makes possible affective and aesthetic sensibility), the pursuit by the contemporary turns to affect and the aesthetic to regain an experience of difference remains incomplete. By eschewing the question of language, these turns, I argue, end up blocking their access to the very object to which they lay claim.

The Scene of the Voice analyzes the figure of the voice in contemporary Continental thought in order to reassess, trouble, and ultimately rewrite the exclusion of language from the material and bodily concerns the currently circulated notions of affect, sensibility, and the aesthetic are intended to signal. Heidegger’s importance for the poststructuralist tradition makes his oeuvre—and specifically his conception of the voice—a logical starting point for this rewriting. More crucially, I argue, the destiny of the voice in Heidegger and post-Heideggerian Continental thought shows that these recent turns to affect and the aesthetic are mistaken in their conviction regarding

the priority of affect over language. The voice shows that this relationship is actually the reverse. Or, more precisely, while the image of language as representation or communication may be an abstraction in comparison to the supposed immediacy of affective sensibility (though that is far from proven), the image of language embodied by the figure of the voice testifies to the human being's fundamental (or what Heidegger calls "originary") understanding and interpretation of the sense/meaning of Being. It is an image of language that not only makes possible signifying communication; it is also one that makes possible the form of sensibility that is said to be captured by the concept of affect.

For Heidegger, the voice names an experience with language that reveals its formational role in human existence. To exist is to interpret one's existence from an originary understanding of the sense/meaning of Being. Since this fundamental relationship of human finitude seldom appears before us in our quotidian dealings in the world when we are in commerce with beings (and in fact is typically suppressed or overlooked as a condition of our dealings with the world and as a condition of "having" a "world" filled with meaning in the first place), the human being needs to be "re-called" to this fact of the sense/meaning of Being and our interpretative relationship to it, which is always-already underway as a condition of our existence. The voice arrives to us—calls us, claims us, affectively—to confront us with the fact of the sense/meaning of Being and our interpretive relationship to it through the fact of language, the fact that language exists at all. By opening on to an experience with the fact of language, the voice reveals the fact of Being (that there are beings⁵), and the fact that our interpretive relationship to the sense/meaning of Being makes possible our engagement with materiality, including that materiality supposedly "signified" by affect.

Just as the Heideggerian voice reveals a relation to language that precedes and grounds representation and the conventional meanings of voice previously indicated, and just as it reveals a fundamental sensibility that precedes and grounds the conception of sensibility promoted by the affective and aesthetic turns, it also harbors a conception of shared sensibility (a sharing of the sense/meaning of Being between human beings) more fundamental than the one presupposed by the affective and aesthetic turns. As we will see, it is a sharing so radical that it is not a sharing between subjects but an originary "Being-with" that gives rise to subjective relationality. Moreover, as a figure, the voice serves as a scene for this constellation of language, sensibility, and human finitude. The voice is a figure for the appearance of the sense/meaning of Being and the human interpretive relation to it.

This “scene of the voice” in Heidegger is so radical that it does not belong to the speaking subject but instead calls the subject out and places a “claim” on the subject; the voice is a scene of the subject’s dispossession, an event in which the human being is revealed in its exposure to the sense/meaning of Being and whose existence is constituted by this very exposure. Still, it is exactly this dispossession that Heidegger theorizes as a condition of human freedom, of existence as possibility. For Heidegger, the voice reveals human existence as an experience of freedom that is born out of an intimate relation to Being, an intimacy also simultaneously and unavoidably shared with other human beings.

The voice plays a crucial role as a vehicle of materiality and freedom: as a figure, the voice is an appearance of the human being’s freedom to itself, as well as the human being’s interpretation of its freedom, which Heidegger calls “facticity.” The voice is a testimony to human existence as open, self-interpreting possibility. Showing how Heidegger works out this conception of the voice is the central project of this book. But it is also devoted to examining the critical pressures French post-Heideggerian thought has placed on Heidegger’s theorization of the voice, particularly with regard to the voice’s figural dimension, which, due to the centrality of the self-interpretation of human existence, Heidegger posits as necessary to the structure of human finitude.

Since, in Heidegger’s view, the voice appears to the human being in order to testify to the human’s self-interpreting relation to Being, it is consequently inseparable from its opening as a scene of appearance, which is to say, presentation. And although this scene of presentation reveals the ways the human subject is always-already outside of itself—in what Heidegger describes as an ecstatic relation that also places into radical question the assumptions made by the entire Western metaphysical tradition regarding the human subject’s self-presence—the voice’s scenic/figural character nonetheless renders it vulnerable as a site of specular capture. As a figure of the human relation to Being, it offers the temptation to think that this relation can be mastered through this very figure or image. Hence, there is a threat that the voice serves as yet another moment of speculative thought’s drive to spectacularize Being, a drive often seen as exemplified by Hegel where the ambition is to fix an image of Being in order to know it and to know it in order to master it.

The role of spectacularization in the metaphysical impulse to master Being extends to the political sphere, specifically in the drive to master social existence through a fictive or mythic image of community, such as

das Volk (“the People”) or “the Nation,” which invite affective identification. Heidegger’s emphasis on the voice as a figure of the shared sense of Being, culminating in what he describes in *Being and Time* as the human Dasein’s historical destiny in *das Volk*, not only suggests a possible spectacularization of community in his text but also his thought’s close and uncomfortable proximity to the ideology of National Socialism, which of course traded on that very spectacularization of community.⁶

Rather than having the possibility of its share in the spectacularization of Being and community disqualify it from having any critical purchase on the contemporary theoretical landscape, this fraught character of the Heideggerian voice allows it to do the opposite. To substantiate this claim, I draw on critiques by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, who identify the figure of the voice in Heidegger as a site that makes his thought vulnerable to the ideology of National Socialism but also debate whether this particular fate of Heidegger’s thought means that all attempts to think difference are destined to speculative capture. Their debate constitutes a critical moment in *The Scene of the Voice*, for it shows, contra the presuppositions of the affective and aesthetic turns, that what connects language and affect and what makes their severability from each other untenable is a contestation around mimesis. Not mimesis defined as imitation but mimesis as the name for radical, dissimulating difference. The opposition between language and affect that drives the affective and aesthetic turns is thus not a matter of which has access to “the really Real” (language or affect) but is instead a contest over which can name the relation to difference. Where the debate between Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe indicates an awareness of this fact by post-Heideggerian thinkers of the voice and especially the dangers of specular capture that hover around it, proponents of the affective and aesthetic turns miss the fact of the contestation over mimesis altogether. As I go on to argue, this allows these turns to succumb to their own specular capture, both in the form of an artificial separation of language from affect (resulting in a reifying figuration of the latter) and in uncritical mimetic identifications with—and indeed, unconscious, affective investments in—various disciplinary voices that tend to be given authoritative deference in certain provinces of American academia, most immediately those of “Philosophy” and “Theory.”

The debate between Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe turns out to be critical for *The Scene of the Voice* because not only does it lay bare the social-political and ethical stakes of the opposition between language and affect but also delineates at least two paths that I argue post-Heideggerian

thought follows in its reception of the Heideggerian voice. Two thinkers who I identify as following these paths are Maurice Blanchot and Gilles Deleuze. By analyzing the respective efforts Blanchot and Deleuze undertook to respond to and reconceive the problem of the voice in Heidegger's text, specifically with respect to the issues Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's debate exposes regarding the voice's scenic/figural dimension, *The Scene of the Voice* demonstrates the need to invent new engagements with language in the form of new modes of writing in order to honor the fundamental relation to the sense/meaning of Being while also guarding against the dangers of specular capture. As such, *The Scene of the Voice* also indicates untapped resources in Continental reflections on language for addressing contradictions at work in contemporary theories of affect and the aesthetic, which, in their respective drives to capture the really Real, end up only capturing their own self-fascination with their figurations of sensibility.

Before I outline the analysis I undertake here in *The Scene of the Voice*, I would like to map out the assumptions and contradictions that I see operating in the affective turn and the return to the aesthetic. Although it is not the purpose of this book to engage with the writings making up these movements directly, I do want to devote some space to delineating what I see are the lacunae present in them in order to illustrate what is at stake in taking up again the question of language in Heidegger and post-Heideggerian thought. For the purposes of this introduction, I will focus on those two trends that presently occupy the theoretical imaginary involving affect and the aesthetic, particularly as they intersect with each other. I have chosen to leave to the side the movements of new materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology previously noted. Although, as I have suggested, all these turns and movements share some basic assumptions about materiality and a desire for freedom,⁷ speculative realism and object-oriented ontology especially involve a quite specialist debate with the legacy of post-Kantian Continental philosophy. New materialism calls for a rehearsal of the so-called older materialisms of Marxism and particularly Marxist-feminism. Tarrying with the complexities of those debates, I feel, would take us too far afield when my main goal is to provide a more general critical horizon that reaches across the humanities and interpretive social sciences, one whose expanse I would like readers to see *The Scene of the Voice* as questioning.⁸

The following section gives a thumbnail sketch of the affective turn, the return to the aesthetic, and their intersection. While I refrain from a critical assessment of them, I outline the contours of these turns in such

a way as to stress what, to my ears, are specific resonances they share with Heidegger's work. Of particular note are regular evocations of such Heideggerian themes as sensibility, world, and dwelling, which, for Heidegger, coalesce in the question of language. Remarkably, Heidegger's name almost never accompanies these evocations; yet they appear frequently enough that it is possible to wonder whether there is not a simultaneous reliance upon and repression of Heidegger's *texte* in the construction of these turns. In any case, I will maintain that a recovery of these subterranean "Heideggerianisms" is called for, for they reveal the reality of the desire animating these recent turns across the contemporary theoretical horizon and thus point the way for these turns to, in spite of themselves, actually think the object they seek.

The Turn to Affect and the Return of the Aesthetic

From the viewpoint of its proponents, the affective turn announces an involvement with the body and a promise to correct the body's exclusion from the history of thought. Because of its materiality and contingency, the body has been considered an unreliable basis upon which to ground philosophical truth, which, since Plato, has been projected as unchanging and transcendent. Since the affective turn has appeared relatively recently on the critical scene, we are led to believe that the history of the body's exclusion runs right up to the twentieth century and includes those intellectual movements that have immediately preceded the turn to affect. In his foreword to *The Affective Turn*, a collection of essays edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley, Michael Hardt refers to these prior movements as the linguistic and cultural turns. Although he does not identify specific thinkers with these movements, his characterization of the affective turn as "introduc[ing] an important shift" in research that "refer[s] equally to the body and the mind" stakes out the basic antagonism between the current attention to affect and those previous academic concerns; while those previous turns were caught up exclusively with reason, the affective turn corrects that imbalance.⁹ Furthermore, by involving both "reason and the passions" in the Spinozist sense, affect, says Hardt, allows us to (finally) enter the "realm of causality" (ix). Implied with this statement, then, is the idea that the linguistic and cultural turns' preoccupation with representation and ideology sequesters us in the imaginary, where nothing is really real and from within which we are unable to affect the world.

For Clough, the challenge is to think of affect in active rather than passive terms. In her introduction to the volume, Clough mirrors Hardt's characterization of the affective turn, although she goes into greater detail contextualizing it as a development from previous theoretical pursuits. One of these pursuits is the psychoanalytic treatment of trauma that was ubiquitous in academic discourse in the 1990s. For Clough, this treatment represents an early occupation with affect, but in her estimation, it suffered from a number of fatal oversights. The first of these oversights was in working with a conception of the body as something individualized, contained, and discrete (11); the second has to do with a self-imposed limitation on how psychoanalysis can talk about (i.e., represent) trauma. Since its conception of the body insists on a fixed distinction between nature (as body) and culture, or, in other words, between matter and form, psychoanalysis can only understand trauma as an experience that repeatedly happens to the body, which the body is unable to overcome (7–8). Thus, according to Clough, the psychoanalytically conceived traumatic body is trapped in a fatal affect, which can only yield a form of expression that retreads without end a traumatic wounding, providing no opening for transformation or change. All attempts at writing about trauma from the basis of this exclusively passive psychoanalytic conception of the body can only reproduce a form of testimony (or perhaps a kind of voice) afflicted by absence and loss (4–5).

Against this supposedly mistaken view adopted by psychoanalysis, Clough invokes the Deleuzian conception of the body (from his readings of Bergson and Spinoza, and from his collaborations with Félix Guattari) as a “machinic assemblage” composed of a concentration of forces and relations that includes the inhuman as much as the human, the inorganic as much as the organic (1–4). The Deleuzian body is not a rationalized, atomic unit, but a networked site open to being affected as much as it affects other bodies, a site of relation with and between other bodies as well as their environments. Unlike the supposed solely passive body of psychoanalysis, the Deleuzian body is active. With the Deleuzian body, trauma is no longer a final interruption of the body but a moment in the body's process of perpetual becoming (11). Following Keith Ansell Pearson's reconstruction of Deleuze's critique of Freud, and particularly his outline of Deleuze's “biophilosophy,” Clough submits that the Deleuzian body and the affective relations it presupposes entail a radical reconceptualization of matter, which includes information and reveals the body as “better understood as a machinic assemblage,” “neither organic nor mechanical,” and, quoting Pearson, “approaching a ‘techno-ontological threshold’” (12).¹⁰ For

Clough, then, it is not the case that psychoanalysis has no conception of affect; rather, as the Freudian conception of trauma shows, its conception is inadequate to a thought of becoming (and therefore freedom) and what she claims, again, following Pearson, is the emergence of a “postbiological” human evolution (12).

According to Clough, this postbiological emergence can be gleaned from the fact that, within “the social” today, “a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter” requires critical theory to respond differently than it has in the past, to “shift . . . from privileging the organic body to exploring non-organic life” (2). If the Deleuzian conception of the body allows for a more complex understanding of affect, one that exceeds the individual human body and includes the human body’s nonhierarchical, networked interface with other bodies, human and nonhuman alike, then we must see the body as a product of social-political forces, not something we can separate from history at our choosing. These forces include those of capitalism and information technologies, Clough maintains, which have produced a body whose affective capacities they exploit in order to train the body for work, as well as consumption (16–17). This is the body of global capitalism and neoliberalism, showing that, though affect promotes an image of open becoming, the becoming that results is not always the desired kind. It is a most perplexing contradiction given the freedom attributed to affect by theorists of the affective turn. But without a theorization of affect, Clough submits, it will not be possible to confront the social as it is currently configured and modulated through these manipulations, and we will hamper our abilities to act effectively within it as a consequence (20).

Another collection dedicated to marking out a space for affect studies is *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Published two years after Clough’s volume, *The Affect Theory Reader* is similarly based in a Deleuzian-Spinozist approach to affect, even though it curiously features well-known affect theorists (most notably, Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant) who do not adhere to that particular conception of affect. Nonetheless, in their introduction, Gregg and Seigworth invoke the phrase from Spinoza’s *Ethics* made famous by Deleuze and elaborated by Deleuzian affect theorists such as Brian Massumi: “No one has yet determined what the body can do.”¹¹ Gregg and Seigworth’s invocation is intended as much as a comment on the open-endedness of affect as on the status of affect studies itself. Spinoza’s theorization of affect as pertaining to an infinite capacity for the body to be affected and to affect other bodies serves as the basis upon which Gregg and Seigworth submit affect as both

an opening on to difference as well as a concept of existence that resists any final conceptualization. “There is no single, generalizable theory of affect,” they write, “not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be” (3). Because of its infinite openness, affect is characterized as a perpetual “*inbetween-ness*,” and as such, is a name for “those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement” (1). “Indeed,” Gregg and Seigworth say, “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (1). Like Hardt’s and Clough’s remarks in *The Affective Turn*, Gregg and Seigworth cast affect as anchoring the human in (nonlinear) causality and processes of becoming but in a way that cannot be captured by the supposed lawlike structures of consciousness and rationality. Here again, affect means contingency, possibility of the new, and ultimately, freedom.

In contrast to *The Affective Turn*, which assembles a particular set of papers written by Clough’s students that amounts to a very specific approach to affect, *The Affect Theory Reader* offers a wider survey of the turn to affect across the disciplines composing the humanities and interpretive social sciences. Nonetheless, a few themes remain consistent between the two collections: in addition to the association of affect with the noncognitive and its identification with becoming and freedom, the idea that the turn to affect constitutes a simultaneous turn away from the linguistic turn “and its attendant social constructionisms” appears in Gregg and Seigworth’s introduction as well (7). Like Clough, who has an essay in *The Affect Theory Reader* also, Gregg and Seigworth maintain that affect promises the possibility of fashioning “a much wider definition for the social and cultural” (presumably less deterministic) than what was allowed under the linguistic turn (8). This is one of the claims *The Scene of the Voice* will test in its attention to Heidegger’s conception of language. As I will show through his figuring of the voice, Heidegger’s relation to language is decidedly not deterministic; the relation to language is instead a condition for any possibility of freedom.

Like the affective turn, the return to the aesthetic also imagines a more expansive social and political sphere. The name most associated with this return is that of Jacques Rancière, whose *Disagreement* (1999 [*La Mésentente* (1995)]) and *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004 [*Le Partage du sensible* (2000)]) redirect philosophical research back to the concern with aesthetics and the senses that characterized much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European thought. Rancière enacts this return, however, in order to provoke a

consideration of what he describes as a fundamental connection between aesthetics and politics, putting forth the claim that all politics are grounded in an aesthetic contestation, or in what he calls “the distribution of the sensible.”¹² Although Rancière does not construct his position as a response to the linguistic turn, he does characterize post-Heideggerian approaches to theorizing the political as wrongheaded and can thus be seen as seeking to correct those approaches (or, as he says, as attempting to “save” us from them).¹³ As with the affective turn, there have been attempts to capture the idea of the return to the aesthetic in various edited collections. Taking their inspiration from Rancière’s interventions, they align with affect theorists in their regard of the social as governed by a structure of shared sensibility.¹⁴

Before enumerating the ways that the voice exposes lacunae in the above conceptions of affect and the aesthetic, I want to discuss some critiques of the affective turn, which I believe touch also on the return to the aesthetic. Especially noteworthy is the critique Clare Hemmings puts forth, analyzing in particular claims made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi in their respective theorizations of affect.¹⁵ This approach in itself is interesting, for they each represent quite different theoretical positions vis-à-vis affect: Sedgwick, a pioneer of queer theory, pursues a path staked out by Silvan Tomkins and crafts her approach to affect in close dialogue with Melanie Klein. By contrast, Massumi is a well-known interpreter of Deleuze and of Deleuze’s collaborations with Guattari, and so elaborates a conception of affect from out of their engagement with Spinoza. Despite this stark difference, their writings consistently appear as guiding texts in the work of affect theorists, and Hemmings is able to demonstrate how these two paths taken by Sedgwick and Massumi toward affect share some common theoretical assumptions and tendencies.

As Hemmings notes, in addition to reversing the mind-body hierarchy (but still retaining the hierarchy), the affective turn works with an unquestioned ontology of affect. It conceives affect as essentially disruptive and good, and as essentially good because it is disruptive (549–51). Confirming also that this valuation of affect takes place as a response to what is felt as the domineering and nihilistic critique of poststructuralist theory, particularly deconstruction, Hemmings questions the idiosyncratic character of the causal freedom affect is taken to manifest. With respect to Sedgwick, Hemmings questions her characterization of affect as that which escapes linear causality. She is equally suspicious of Massumi’s description of affect as autonomous, showing how these conceptions betray “an attitude or faith in something other than the social and cultural . . . [a] *trust that* there is

something outside culture” (563; original emphasis). Although she does not give a name to this faith or trust, we might recognize it as the reappearance of the Kantian belief in noumenal causality. Such a reappearance should not be welcomed by critical discourse, it should seem, as it cordons off human freedom into a space of the ineffable and the mystical and invites an epistemological quietism.

In her critique of the affective turn, Ruth Leys also questions the characterization of affect as nonrational, asignifying, and prepersonal, saying that this expresses a metaphysical assumption regarding the mind’s separation from the body, as well as “a false dichotomy between mind and matter.”¹⁶ However, she then builds further on Hemmings’s observation of affect theorists’ automatic equation of affect with newness and “the Real,” particularly as the real site of politics and locus of political transformation (451). As I previously noted, this assumption leads to a contradiction, which Hemmings touches on as well in her analysis, and that is seemingly unknowingly articulated by Clough in her introduction to *The Affective Turn*—namely, that affect names both the possibility of the new and also the terrain upon which social manipulation and control are exerted (460–61).¹⁷

It is with affect’s contradictory status that we might see another intersection between affect studies and the return to the aesthetic. Rancière’s theorization of the aesthetic ground of the political provides a possible explanation of how affect can be a force of both homogenization and revolutionary newness, of identity and difference. Any distribution of the sensible requires, according to Rancière, a demarcation between those who are identified as capable of receiving that particular partition of sense (the sense, for example, of belonging to a given community) and those who are identified as incapable of (and ineligible to) receive that partition. Rancière points to Aristotle’s explanation for why the slave is ineligible to participate in political life as an exemplar of the distribution of the sensible. The contradiction, of course, lies in the fact that the slave is both inside and outside the given distribution. Although he lacks the capacity to comprehend the given distribution of sensibility, thereby excluding him from it, he must still be able to understand enough within this distribution in order to obey commands from those who have been identified as belonging to that distribution.¹⁸

What Rancière himself takes for granted, however, is the very fact of this “sharing-distribution” (*partage*) of sense, of the sensible’s “distributability,” which then renders the assumptions he makes in his theorization of the political’s aesthetic ground in league with the assumptions animating the affective turn. For both the affective turn and the return to the aesthetic

presume a fundamental “shareability” of affect and sense, but they do not explain how this is possible or what accounts for it. When we search for such an explanation, we might find ourselves thrown from Rancière back to affect theory’s description of “the world” as that which mediates the transmission and sharing of affect and sense. “Indeed,” write Gregg and Seigworth, “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (1). However, this merely pushes the search further, for their conception of world is not an empirical one. In the very same passage, they will refer to affect as that which “circulate[s] about, between, and sometimes stick[s] to bodies and *worlds*” (1; emphasis added). What is “world” for them, then? Apparently, a shared sensibility.

I have demonstrated elsewhere that the sense of “sense” informing Rancière’s conception of *partage* possesses a Heideggerian valence, which he takes great efforts to suppress.¹⁹ In this way, Rancière shares with affect theory what Hemmings describes as a willful misreading of the poststructuralist tradition as part of the process of constructing their critical positions.²⁰ Both presuppose sense as something shared and transmitted among bodies, but neither provide an explanation for its shared character other than to define it as such. And although Rancière may limit any other “Heideggerianisms” from slipping into his discourse, the texts associated with affect theory have been less vigilant. In addition to “world,” one finds repeated invocations of “dwelling” with decidedly existential intonations.²¹ I contend that these invocations remain conceptually vague absent any contestation with Heidegger’s thought, and especially without any engagement with the Heideggerian voice, which figures the relation to finitude connoted by the concepts of “world” and “dwelling.”

As I explained previously, my intention in pointing out these lacunae is not to dismiss either the affective turn or the return to the aesthetic. As I hope to show, I have a deep allegiance with these projects’ theoretical and political commitments. If I have a complaint, it concerns the ways these projects establish their critical positions in opposition to post-Heideggerian thought on language even as their work makes use of its major concepts.

Rather than diminish these scholars’ aims, an explicit elaboration of Heidegger’s conceptualization of the voice can actually enhance them and help them achieve what I argue is being expressed by their drive to theorize affect and the aesthetic: namely, a desire to encounter existence as an experience of difference. Yet, by identifying language strictly with “conscious knowing” and rationality, the affective turn robs itself of the opportunity

to capitalize on Heidegger's theorization of language as an experience that exceeds signifying communication and representation. Relatedly, by overlooking Heidegger's reflections on human finitude as an originary relation to the sense/meaning of Being, the notion of sensibility invoked by both the affective turn and the return to the aesthetic remains merely that—a notion, if not altogether an empty abstraction. Heidegger's conceptualization of the voice, I argue, reveals that the sensibility to which the affective and the aesthetic turns appeal is grounded first in a relation to language as a gathering of the sense/meaning of Being—and not the other way around.

Furthermore, Heidegger's stress on the scenic dimension of the voice provides a way to address the contradictions that confront the affective turn. Specifically, his emphasis that it is through the voice that human beings confirm their understanding of the sense of existence and have that understanding reflected back to them in and through the figure helps explain how the sensibility that affect names can be alternately both an experience of freedom as well as a site of manipulation. Indeed, as Heidegger's French readers have shown, this inextricable scenic dimension of the voice accounts for his own infamous capture by the ideology of National Socialism, even as he offered it as an opening to “destructure” Western metaphysics. Their critical assessment of how the voice can equally serve as an affective vehicle not only for repeating a speculative longing endemic to the very tradition that Heidegger sought to dismantle but also for allowing oneself to be captured by the metaphysics of presence to which fascist politics subscribes makes it clear that the voice—as figure, scene, and screen—delineates a site with which any thought attending to the political grounds of social existence must contend. Despite succumbing to specular capture himself, Heidegger's theorization of the voice (and the question of language it harbors) nonetheless reveals this hazard of figuration, and as *The Scene of the Voice* shows, it also maps approaches for negotiating this hazard. By eschewing the questions of language, the affective turn and the return to the aesthetic effectively block themselves from appreciating their own trade in figuration and ultimately from reaching the realms of affect and the aesthetic to which they lay claim.

From Finitude's Scenic Dimension to (Un)writing the Figure

“World,” “dwelling,” “inbetweenness,” “*partage*,” even “body”—in addition to carrying Heideggerian inflections, these concepts that populate the dis-

courses of the affective turn and the return to the aesthetic are unquestionably figures through which these discourses attempt to get at the social ground of existence. However, unlike Heidegger's figuration of the shared sense of Being in the voice, the employment of these terms by affect theorists and the new aestheticians lacks a self-awareness of these terms' figural character. For even if affect escapes rationalization, the thought of such an escape must pass through and appear in language. This simple fact seems to continue to be overlooked. What marks the voice in Heidegger as singular is the fact that by testifying to the human being's fundamental understanding of the sense/meaning of Being, the voice serves as a figure of human finitude. It is an event of human finitude appearing to itself; it is a figure for finitude's figuration, in a movement Heidegger names "facticity." The voice thus testifies to the fact that human finitude and its (self-)figuration are inseparable. "Affect" is simply another name for a thought of human finitude—of being in the world from an understanding of the sense/meaning of Being. As such, we will see that "affect" cannot shed either its participation in the sense/meaning of Being or its accompanying figural dimension.

The Scene of the Voice argues in fact that it is precisely finitude's figuration in and as a relation to language that underlies the sense of existence as an affective and aesthetic event—not the other way around. Throughout this study, I examine how Heidegger establishes the voice as the figuration of finitude, and I explore how this figuration is based in a fundamental experience of language. But it is an experience of language conceived not in a derivative mode of representation or signification, to which theorists of the affective turn and the return to the aesthetic reduce language. It is an experience of language as Heidegger shows is revealed in the voice—as a relation to the fundamental (i.e., originary) sense/meaning of Being that is the condition for existence. This examination of Heidegger's theorization of the voice as an experience of language organizes the book's first three chapters, which move from the voice's appearance in *Being and Time* (1927) to what I argue are its reappearances and transformations in "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935–36, published 1950 and 1960), *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935, published 1953), and *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* (1942, published 1984).

After establishing the ways Heidegger figures the voice as the intersection of language and finitude in these works, I then go on to examine how thinkers of the post-Heideggerian Continental tradition engage with the social-political implications of Heidegger's theorization of the voice. The question animating the second half of the book is the following: if part

of being human means having our finitude appear before us in the voice, then does this mean human existence requires a figure—or scene—in order to appear? An affirmative answer to this question underscores the centrality of sensible presentation to human existence. However, as indicated earlier, dangerous implications arise from this possibility, most immediately, the problem of specular, affective capture by the figure—or what Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have called “myth.” This threat of figural capture, which Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe view as subtending mythic structures of community, such as the kind promulgated by National Socialism and the one that Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe argue appears in Heidegger’s conception of the voice, outlines a fundamental tension between the necessity of figuration to human existence and the possibility (or perhaps inevitability) of a specular fascination that masquerades as an encounter with existence and difference.

As also noted previously, however, this tension Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe uncover and debate in their analysis of the Heideggerian voice reveals most immediately that what is actually at stake in the opposition of language and affect is the question of mimesis. Language, affect, figure, voice, human finitude, and community all meet in the question of how to respond to the demand of mimesis, which Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe’s debate shows is the demand of difference as such—specifically, how to think and affirm difference without attempting to master it through the figure. This question of mimesis thus serves as a frame through which *The Scene of the Voice* then explores how other thinkers within the post-Heideggerian Continental tradition have received the Heideggerian problematic of the voice and devised new modes of writing to navigate the hazards of figuration. Between Maurice Blanchot and Gilles Deleuze, we encounter two modes of writing that reconfigure the Heideggerian voice and respond to the problem of the figure and the demand of mimesis: for Blanchot, the writing known as literature is a scene for the figure’s effacement through the dissimulating force of what he names “the narrative voice,” while for Deleuze, writing is a way to solicit the voice as the univocity of Being, which he theorizes as a process of becoming that gives rise to ever more figures. In the last two chapters of the book, I consider the ways Blanchot’s and Deleuze’s respective responses to Heidegger uphold his conception of the centrality of figuration and affectivity in the experience of finitude while also critically revising the configuration of voice, language, affect, and finitude.

Chapter 1 establishes the figurative and affective dimensions of the voice through a reading of its appearance in *Being and Time* as the call of

conscience. Existing commentaries tend to focus on Heidegger's description of the voice of conscience as a call that comes from Dasein addressed to itself, which they interpret as aligning with commonplace conceptions of conscience as an ideal, interior monologue. However, as I show in my reconstruction of the role the call of conscience plays in the structure of Dasein's finitude, which I analyze through Heidegger's concept of "finite transcendence," the voice possesses an essential affective and figurative character that cannot be separated from the way Heidegger contends it shocks the human Dasein back to the fact of its existence and from its forgetting of the fact that it always-already has an understanding of the sense/meaning of Being. By highlighting the connection between Heidegger's conceptualization of *die Stimmung* (mood or attunement) and the voice as *die Stimme* in *Being and Time*, chapter 1 draws attention to a thought of affect in Heidegger as a relation that exceeds the individual subject but that also shows the inextricable relationship of sense and sensibility at the heart of the human Dasein's understanding of the sense/meaning of Being. The connection between *die Stimmung* and *die Stimme* also underscores the voice as an affective, figurative echo and return of human finitude to itself, one that points to a fundamental relation to the question of language.

Staying with *Being and Time*, chapter 2 expands the analysis of the first chapter by bringing out the ways Heidegger's aesthetic figuration of the voice strikes a critical distinction between an instrumental, communicative conception of language (voice as mere speech or *phonē*) and a relation to language as an affective experience of finitude (voice as *logos*). This "antagonism of language," as I name it in this chapter, performs two tasks in Heidegger's conceptualization of the voice: First, it uncovers an existential "speaking" of language by opening onto an experience with language as a site of the sensible presentation of finitude, an experience of language as an affective scene of the human being's relation to the sense/meaning of Being, where language exceeds its conventional role as a tool of communication or representation. Secondly, this antagonism stresses the relational dimension of language, emphasizing the voice as an opening of finitude that is shared with the other human being, an emphasis I draw out with the aid of Jean-Luc Nancy's *Le Partage des voix* (1982) [which was translated into English as a long essay entitled "Sharing Voices" (1990)]. Together, the book's first two chapters demonstrate how the Heideggerian voice figures a fundamental relation between language and existence that reveals an image of Heideggerian affect that precedes the meaningfulness and shared quality of affect as it is presupposed in the affective and aesthetic turns of contemporary

thought. The incorporation of Nancy's intervention on the shared scene of human finitude also shows that the Heideggerian voice is not an internal psychic event but an externally directed, collective experience.

Once we begin to see the essential role the aesthetic figure of the voice plays in the shared experience of human finitude, a number of questions emerge: How does the voice's aesthetic character relate to Heidegger's more explicit reflections on aesthetics, specifically to his conception of the work of art? And does the voice appear in his reflections on the work of art, or does the figure of the voice recede as Heidegger's thought develops? If the voice can be said to appear in Heidegger's conceptualization of the work of art, then in what ways, if any, might those appearances constitute a transformation in Heidegger's theorization of the voice?

Chapter 3 investigates these questions through a reading of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" and his interpretations of Sophocles's *Antigone* in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* In "The Origin of the Work of Art," we find Heidegger arguing explicitly for the centrality of figuration to human finitude, and we witness the voice reappear through the figuration of the "strife" between world and earth, for which the artwork provides a stage or scene. Following Heidegger's contention in "The Origin of the Work of Art" that poetry is the art form par excellence, I then trace the voice's travel to Heidegger's interpretations of tragedy, specifically in terms of his sustained engagement with *Antigone*. It is in this travel from *An Introduction to Metaphysics* to *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* that we view two transformations of the voice emerge in Heidegger's thinking: the first is an image of the voice as a historical saying of a people (in this case, that of the Greek Dasein), and the second is an image built upon a possible merging of the voice with the feminine in the character of Antigone herself.

In addition to connecting to Nancy's elaboration of the voice in Heidegger as a collective sharing and as giving rise to ever new figures, both of these transformations will revitalize questions about the place of the voice in the Western metaphysical tradition and the social and political implications that unfold from this, which the chapters that follow pursue more directly. Against the backdrop of those questions, however, this third chapter shows how the voice's persistence in Heidegger's conception of the work of art mobilizes what Heidegger describes as the artwork's dissimulating or "altheiac" force and its staging of human finitude. Ultimately, I argue in this chapter that, for Heidegger, the work of art makes sensible the necessity of presentation in the human being's experience of finitude. In other words, the

artwork serves as a scene *of the scene* of the human relation to the sense/meaning of Being—a scene *of the scene* of the voice.

After the first three chapters analyze Heidegger's conception of the voice, and the inextricable connection among language, affect, finitude, and figuration it expresses, chapter 4 turns to an examination of the voice's critical reception by Heidegger's French readers. It focuses on the meta-physical hazards of figuration and their social and political implications as revealed in Jean-Luc Nancy's and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's engagement with Heidegger and the question of the relationship of his thought to his involvement with National Socialism. Given what appears to be the necessity of figuration (or what Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe debate as the scenic) to human existence, a question arises as to the extent to which philosophical thought can resist specular capture. Nancy names such capture "myth," particularly in terms of an identification with the myth of community, and Lacoue-Labarthe describes it in terms of the impulse to master Being by fixing it in a figure, a drive Lacoue-Labarthe names "onto-typology."

As previously noted, Nancy's and Lacoue-Labarthe's respective positions regarding the problem of the scenic in Heidegger, and in philosophy more generally, do not align; in fact, their respective positions form the basis of a decades-long debate that they sustain concerning the ability of critical thought to guard against the threat of specular capture. While Nancy acknowledges Heidegger's apparent subscription to onto-typology as a serious issue, particularly as it informs Heidegger's apparent projection of the human being's destiny in an image of community, he approaches the matter as a question of mythic writing that requires repeated interruption and the rewriting of community, what we will see him refer to as a kind of "ontological mimesis." As also previously stated, Nancy's position will suggest that at the heart of his disagreement with Lacoue-Labarthe lies the problem of mimesis, or rather, the problem of the problem of mimesis—the history of mimesis as a problem (or threat) of difference that "Philosophy" regards itself as authorized to resolve via prohibition and control but particularly through the mastery supposedly afforded through figuration. Thus, from that standpoint, Lacoue-Labarthe is much more skeptical than Nancy regarding the ability of philosophical thought to ever be rid of figuration and therefore remain free of specular capture and the social-political and ethical implications that follow: the most immediate of which is the possibility that by creating figures through which to encounter and welcome difference, philosophical thought ends up consolidating its domination of it. To the extent that the debate between Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe reveals

that the problem of mimesis is *the* problem at stake in the question of language, affect, finitude, and figuration, what reason is there to suspect that the embrace of affect and the aesthetic by the (speculative) turns of contemporary thought are not also unwittingly implicated in the problem of mimesis?

Chapter 4 thus constitutes a pivotal moment in *The Scene of the Voice* and delineates the lines of thought it pursues in its final two chapters, as well as the epilogue that closes the book. As we will see, the debate between Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe offers two competing views on how to respond to the problem of figuration while still honoring the desire to encounter difference as *différance* and Heidegger's original intuition that the relation to difference—of Being, of the other human being—appears in the intersection of language and finitude. Both views rest on conceiving new images of writing: on the one hand, as mentioned, Nancy proffers a conception of writing (and of community) as perpetual interruption. From Lacoue-Labarthe, we receive the imperative to write as a mode of effacement, one that casts suspicion on all forms of mythic belonging by undoing the figure and achieving a “caesura of the speculative,” a notion Lacoue-Labarthe adopts from Friedrich Hölderlin in order to promote a suspension of onto-typology. These two positions delineated by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe provide coordinates to approach the work of Blanchot and Deleuze in the final two chapters of the study, making it possible to view them as not only critical readers of the Heideggerian voice but also to regard them as each realizing new forms of writing that align with the opposing imperatives staked out by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to examining Blanchot's pursuit of the question of literature as both a reconfiguration of the Heideggerian voice and as an instance of the writing of effacement which Lacoue-Labarthe calls for in his debate with Nancy. With Blanchot, we see an intensification of the thought of the experience with language that Heidegger opens up in his work. Literature, for Blanchot, is a site of exposure so severe that it refuses the human being access to language as a refuge for subjectivity. Through the movement of what Blanchot calls “unworking” (*désœuvrement*), which is also a link to Nancy, literature exiles the human subject to what he describes as the “night” of “the outside,” denying the human being any claim to experience as such, much less to thinking. In contrast to the Heideggerian voice, which for Heidegger ultimately returns to the human being as a form of self-address, Blanchot clears a space for what he names the “narrative voice” of literature, which leaves the human being bereft of language, and