

Typographical Biases, or the Noise of the Utterance*

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Davide Panagia
Canada Research Chair in Cultural Studies
Centre for the Study of Theory, Culture, and Politics
Trent University
Peterborough, ON
Canada - K9H 7B8
davidepanagia@trentu.ca

Abstract:

In the paper I question the typographical bias of post-Austinian approaches to critical theory and the history of ideas. By attending to the argumentative features of historical authors, thinkers like Quentin Skinner treat the utterance as if it were simply a written text whose purpose it is to present a cognitive claim. In doing so, they overlook the materiality of the reading experience, including the aurality of the utterance. I introduce a theory of the utterance attentive to those qualities that extend beyond its semantic and grammatical boundaries.

Democratic politics, I suggest, is a politics of discordant noise. Though a political utterance may be retroactively tuned and made to sound like a reasonable expression of interests (i.e., a moral claim), its first pitch is an interruptive noise that designates a space of political interlocution. I want to know what this noise sounds like. Relying on the work of Jacques Rancière, Michel de Certeau, Wassily Kandinsky, and Mikhail Bakhtin, I argue that by paying closer attention to an aural history of democratic political culture, and more specifically to the ‘durational’ dimension of the utterance, we arrive at a more nuanced and expansive appreciation of what it means to ‘make a political claim.’

In the concluding sections I examine the role of the Italian piazza as a documentary source for an inquiry into the noise of the utterance. The piazza, I sustain, is an architectural structure that does not direct movement, although within the piazza there are trajectories and vectors of body and sound motility. An attentiveness to such features of the diurnal life of a demos provides access to a democratic form of non-sense which is not absent sense or meaninglessness but a practice of articulation that stands outside of the shared lexicon of deliberation.

As to why I appear today in this unaccustomed garb, you shall now hear, if only you will not begrudge lending your ears to my discourse – not those ears, to be sure, which you carry to sermons, but those for which you are accustomed to prick up for mountebanks in the marketplace, for clowns and jesters, the ears which, in the old days, our friend Midas inclined to the god Pan.

- Desiderius Erasmus - ⁱ

From the clamor of voices overrunning and breaking up the field of statements comes a mumble that escapes the control of speakers and that violates the supposed division between speaking individuals.

- Michel de Certeau - ⁱⁱ

In March of 2000, thousands of chocolatiers took to the piazzas of Italy to showcase their chocolate. It was an odd scene because it could have been easily confused with one of many commercial endeavors. In this case, however, the public preparation of chocolate was meant as a protest against new standards instituted by the European Chocolate Directive enacted on March 15, 2000. The European Commission wanted to alter the composition of chocolate, something many independent Continental European chocolatiers couldn't swallow. The Directive re-baptized chocolate; it stated that any form of chocolate with five per cent vegetable fat could still be called chocolate despite the fact that most European chocolatiers made chocolate primarily out of cocoa and cocoa butter. The introduction of vegetable fats as a substitute for cocoa butter – as in the case of a Mars bars and other mass produced chocolate flavored snacks – would not only significantly alter the economy of developing regions (a quoted loss of about 800 million dollars in Africa and South America, the largest producers of cocoa in the world) but

would also force people to alter their conception of what counted and tasted like chocolate.ⁱⁱⁱ Not to mention the fact that this would cause the price of cocoa to increase, they argued, making ‘pre-Directive chocolate’ a luxury item. So the chocolatiers occupied the piazzas with their pots, pans and camping stoves, creating an impromptu chocolate taste test to, as it were, ‘prove their point.’

What can be said of such forms of civil unrest? Can the preparation of pre-Directive chocolate in the piazzas of Italy be considered a political utterance? If so, what kind of utterance is it and how are we to attend to it? The problem with addressing such forms of political expression, it seems, lies in the fact that our tools of political reflection are contoured by the shape of the signified and by a linguistic model of communication based exclusively on semantic exchange. But is a political utterance - what we still recognize as the basis of deliberation, communication, and free speech laws – reducible to the contours of a signified or is there something in an utterance that extends beyond its stenographic shape?

With broad strokes I will address some of these questions by broaching the possibility of an aural history of democratic culture. But why? Why should the aurality of an utterance matter to anyone interested in the ethical dimensions of democratic life? One possible answer lies in the fact that democratic cultures are noisy and disorderly things, that the institution and functioning of democratic structures of government differ dramatically from democratic politics as a practice and that in order to better grasp the intentions, hopes, and motivations of emerging democratic movements, we need to be

attuned not only to what people want but to the modes of acknowledgment^{iv} people invoke to transmit their intentions.^v

The growing tendency to export democratic principles of government to regions where these are said to be absent presumes that human needs and wants not only are the same throughout the world but, more importantly, that they are expressed and understood in the same manner regardless of geography, faith, or language. Simply put, democracy is viewed exclusively as a set of principles of government that, like the grammar of a language, can be delineated, taught, and applied so that when uttered, they will sound the same regardless of habits of reading or listening. This trend towards grammatical and linguistic cohesion also finds expression in theoretical debates about normativity and deontology in democratic deliberation. These debates reduce our appreciation of political utterances to the shape of the moral statement, making it the most reasonable mode of political exchange.

But there is a second factor at work here: the adoption of philosophical approach to language when studying political theory. Over the past several decades political theorists, ethicists, literary scholars and historians alike have developed a rich program of study for the analysis of the conceptual issues that make up our political imaginaries. Much of this research is grounded on the principles of linguistic analysis outlined by Ferdinand de Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics. But this is only half the story. A cursory re-examination of Saussure's writings points to a fundamental lacuna in much of this research. The conceptual top-heaviness of a philosophy of language approach to the study of democratic deliberation (whether at the level of speech act theory,

communicative action, or normative proceduralism) has sacrificed the flip side of the Janus-faced coin of Saussurian linguistics: the phoneme or sound-image that sources our sensory impressions.^{vi} In other words, debates in democratic deliberation about signification (i.e., the signified) overshadow the equally important role of the linguistic signifier, or the noise of the utterance.

“Unaware of our typographic cultural bias,” explains Marshall McLuhan, “our (I.Q.) testers assume that uniform and continuous habits are a sign of intelligence, thus eliminating the ear man and the tactile man.”^{vii} Such lacunae result in a *de facto* partition between those who can and those who cannot speak, between appropriate and inappropriate forms of speech, between those who have the authority of the word, and those whose speech is unofficial. With such divisions in place, modes of expression like the baking of pure chocolate are treated as mere blabber or worst, as cultural extravagances. But it seems worthwhile to ask ourselves whether only one mode of address should be given normative priority in political communication given the mutability of democratic life? That is, could it not be the case that when we treat the noise of an utterance as babble something politically relevant is lost? It may be that when we utter something that isn’t semantically significant (by which I mean either meaningful or useful) it is nonetheless valuable because it asks us to reinvent the requisite conditions of legibility, intelligibility, and acknowledgment.^{viii} And, after all, is this not the poetic task of democratic equality: to break the supposed divisions between those who can and cannot speak by inventing the means by which what is available to sense perception is, indeed, perceptible?

In what follows, I introduce a theory of the utterance attentive to those qualities that extend beyond its semantic texture and grammatical boundaries. Democratic politics, I suggest, is first and foremost a politics of noise to the extent that it is a politics of discordance. Though a political utterance may be retroactively tuned and made to sound like a reasonable expression of interests, its first pitch is an interruptive noise that designates the space of political interlocution. I want to know what this noise sounds like: What is the noise of the utterance?

I begin by looking at the utterance as a tool of historiographical analysis as deployed by historians of political thought. Theorized as an instance of meaningful communication, the utterance grounds a history of philosophical exchange that situates the terms of political discourse within a context of a reasonable language which is the history of political thought. The precariousness of this history rests on the foundational idea that when speaking, individuals are saying something and that it is the task of the historian as the raconteur of the ‘what was said’ to explicate the meaning of these statements. Relying on the eyes of the historian who resuscitates a discourse of the dead, we recognize political speech as meaningful speech. The result, as Michael Warner explains, is that “the poetic or textual qualities of an utterance are disregarded in favor of sense.”^{ix} And, I will add, so are its vocal and aural qualities.

After exploring the possibility of an aural history of the utterance, I shift my attention to the Italian piazza. The piazza is as close as one can get to a document of the noise of the utterance. Relying on its architecture and role in popular culture, I suggest that the piazza creates a space of convergence between forms of participation that involve

multiple levels of sense experience. The kinds of exchanges that take place within this space are never simply limited to what can be seen, read, or argued. Rather, the piazza is a space where disjunctive vectors of movement create enunciative possibilities that extend well beyond the linguistic limits of the signified. I conclude by showcasing a recent renovation project in Piazza Garibaldi in Casalmaggiore - a small, northern Italian town that lies on the Po River bordering Lombardy and Emilia Romagna.

A – A History in the Subjunctive

A word is sound and sense. ‘There is no neutral voice,’ Roland Barthes explains when speaking of the grain of the voice.^x The same can be said of the historical text: the written word has a ‘grain’ that our reading habits, reduced to the silence of the eyes hovering over the page, overlook. Roger Chartier – operating within the same register as Barthes - argues that “reading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play.”^{xi} Indeed, the distinction between the literate and the illiterate worlds, the high and low cultures of history, is insufficient to understanding the aural qualities of the reading operation. Recall Carlo Ginzburg’s *Menocchio*, a figure whose literary competencies were limited and unsanctioned but who nonetheless was able to create an entire cosmology that challenged the Friuli religious authorities of his day to the point of enlisting inquisitorial persecution.^{xii}

The historian interested in the utterance as a departure point of political thought, then, must consider the varieties of readers, their communities and habits of reading, but also the possibility that what we understand by reading has not always been the same kind of operation. No text exists independent of its physical support and, despite the literary

and hermeneutic ideal of a text whose meaning is sustained notwithstanding the differences in forms of expression or material apparatus, the book remains a material object. It does not simply contain words that constitute meaning but, as object, it interacts with the body in ways that go well beyond the ocular scan. Using only our eyes to understand the meaning of an historical utterance is to censor ourselves and those whom we read to only one reading habit: namely, our own.^{xiii}

John Locke, attuned to the nuances of the materiality of the text, reminds us of the nauseous effects of introducing duration – i.e., a ‘breathing space’ - into sacred literature: by breaking up the Bible with headings, paragraphs, and numbered passages, one divides the word of god, he argued.^{xiv} As a consequence, every sect and anybody who could read would be able to use scripture to justify their own insights and legitimate their beliefs. What John Rawls called the ‘historical origin of political liberalism’^{xv} is, according to Locke, the result of a reconfiguration of the materiality of the reading page that makes god’s words available to anyone living in a post-Gutenberg galaxy.

The materiality of the book is one place, amongst many, where we may begin an investigation into the noise of the utterance. What Chartier calls “the silent production that is the activity of reading” is both the problem and the condition of our current understandings of democratic deliberation. What exists outside of this ‘silent production’ becomes – almost automatically – relegated to the domain of the unintelligible thus creating one of the most extreme forms of presentism in contemporary historiography. “History,” explains Jacques Rancière, “can become a science only through a poetic detour ... It doesn’t give this to itself in the form of an explicit philosophical thesis, but in the

very texture of narrative, in the modes of interpretation, but also in the style of the sentence, the tense and person of the verb, the plays of the literary and the figurative.”^{xvi} The spoken utterance, whose sense is unavailable to literary forms of representation, is thus no literary text at all; it cannot receive proper historical attention because its conditions of legibility and intelligibility can only be surmised. Hence, the noise of the utterance – the tone, pitch, and sound that the murmurings of a people could be imagined to make – must belong to a conjectural history of unintelligibility that remains at once without documents and undocumented.

“Such is history,” states Michel de Certeau:

A play of life and death is sought in the calm telling of a tale, in the resurgence and denial of the origin, the unfolding of a dead past and result of a permanent practice. It reiterates, under another rule, the myths built upon a murder of an originary death and fashions out of language the forever-remnant trace of a beginning that is as impossible to recover as to forget.^{xvii}

The interstitial space where the dead word is brought to life through the tranquil narrativizing operation of the historian is also the locus of that which cannot have a place in history. Through the writing of history, de Certeau tells us, the past is made present not only because it is retold but because it is told through the gaze of the historian who reads the past in the same manner, and with the same purpose, as one reading in the present. The operation of writing a past, then, omits what was said and heard because the noise of the utterance cannot be read. The writing of history is a credentialing institution

that “forms the collection of documents [by] exil[ing] them from practice in order to confer onto them the status of abstract objects of knowledge.”^{xviii}

Carlo Ginzburg notes that the culture of popular classes is largely oral but, as we have just noted, any historical analysis that attends to the at once oral and aural elements of a culture might be subject to suspicion or regarded simply as conjectural. Thus, we are warned, we must pay attention to written documents because only these can provide us with an accurate taxonomy of the past. But this approach seems undemocratic. Attending only to the written word to ground a history of democratic culture disrespects the “residue of unintelligibility”^{xix} in those clamorous elements that resist typographic specificity. Moreover, we must admit that the kind of tact that comes with an appreciation of the moderated word, bound by the stenographic margins of the written page, or illustrated by the familiar linguist’s diagram of two heads exchanging meaning, is not a democratic quality at all: Tact, as Nancy Struever’s work on Renaissance rhetoric shows, is “an essential ingredient of courtliness”^{xx} and thus an aristocratic virtue of restraint that has little to do with the tumults of democratic insurrection. Indeed, the tactful word involves the kind of discipline that one finds in Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier^{xxi} - a handbook of courtliness that stands in sharp contrast to, say, Machiavelli’s defense of republican tumults in the Discorsi.^{xxii}

The anchoring of a past through the narrativization of archival documentation is, I submit, a problem for histories of democracy interested in its aural culture. What such histories require is a shift in historiographical mood. Rather than expository, the recounting of noise invokes the subjunctive: An aural history of democratic culture is a

history in the subjunctive; it is speculative and imagined but, like most histories, at once possible and perhaps even probable.

B - The Clamor of Voices

Democracies are noisy creatures born of what Hannah Arendt refers to as the “unquiet” (*askholia*) of the *vita activa*.^{xxiii} There are no adequate testimonies to this noise; yet, we can assume that democracy and noise go hand in hand. I imagine that there has never been a quiet democratic movement, like there has never been a peaceful democratic uprising. “Political interlocution,” Jacques Rancière tells us, “has always mixed up language games and rules of expression... The problem,” he continues,

is not for people speaking “different languages,” literally or figuratively, to understand each other, any more than it is for “linguistic breakdowns” to be overcome by the invention of new languages. The problem is knowing whether the subjects who count in the interlocution “are” or “are not,” whether they are speaking or just making noise.^{xxiv}

The fantasy of a common language for deliberation is unveiled when we realize that at every moment when there is an interruption in the logic of ‘rule,’ it is advanced not by an unreasonable comprehensive doctrine but by the utterances made by those whose language is not common. In studies on human development, the distinction between speaking and making noise differentiates the adult from the infant; likewise, such a distinction, as Rancière suggests, differentiates semantics from mere blabber, from those who have the authority of the word, and those who are “just making noise.”^{xxv}

To better explain this distinction it is worthwhile to consider the founding metaphor that grounds many accounts of deliberation in contemporary democratic theory: the economic metaphor of exchange. Denoting the transfer of signification between speaking subjects, at the heart of this founding trope lies the connotative imperative that all verbal exchange must be oriented to the production of meaning. Grounded by an ideal of a barter economy this metaphor requires a balanced distribution of (in this case ‘semantic’) goods resulting in common understanding. Thus, despite the oft-invoked Wittgensteinian metaphor of ‘the language game’ intended to explain the procedural aspects of deliberation, what gets overlooked is the notion of unproductive loss implicit in the practice of games.

The loss of energy expended in the participation of a competition, however, has no end other than the game itself. Consider the huge sums of moneys spent on the salaries of baseball players or on sports betting. Consider also the moneys spent on the construction of stadiums, training, maintenance, and (in our day) sponsorship: the *telos* is the intangible pleasure derived from the consumption of the spectator (either through watching the game or participating in betting or through the purchase of products endorsed by sports stars). Yet such pleasure is pure loss since, once the game is finished, all that is left is a used and expired ticket. To be sure, I am not suggesting that sporting events are not worthwhile. But I am suggesting that within the contours of the logic of a barter economy, they are entirely useless. And yet, they are nonetheless crucial to the functioning of a well-ordered society. Georges Bataille calls this element of pure loss ‘non-productive expenditure’ and finds exemplary expression for it in such forms of primitive

exchange as *potlatch* and in such modern institutions as games (gambling, athletics, etc.), cults/religions (through sacrifice), and art (his example is poetry).^{xxvi}

This element is curtailed in descriptions of democratic deliberation that concentrate on semantic production and overlook the non-productive expenditure of noise. Intersubjective exchange of the kind described by theorists and historians of deliberation eschews the element of play in language games by grounding communication in a barter economy where the energy expelled must, in the last resort, always be productive (i.e., ‘meaningful’). Simply put, the connotation of a “balanced account” (or consensus) that grounds the deliberative scenario is intended to assuage the fear of ‘not wasting one’s breath’ when talking. Such an imperative sacrifices noise as an active element in communication because, after all, noise is nothing other than wasted breath.

Consider, in this regard, the following: “To understand any serious utterance,” Quentin Skinner tells us, “we need to grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but at the same time the intended force with which the utterance is issued. We need to grasp what people are saying but also what they are doing in saying it.”^{xxvii} Skinner’s classic formulation is the methodological basis for much work in the history of ideas. Skinner began his groundbreaking studies defending the core notion that “the concept of truth is irrelevant to the enterprise of explaining beliefs.”^{xxviii} In so doing, he forwarded a procedure for the analysis of historical texts based on the Austinian distinction between an utterance’s meaning and its illocutionary force. To gather the illocutionary force of an author’s statement, Skinner argued, we must first and foremost gather an understanding of the context within which the utterance is made: whom is the author addressing in

writing and to whom is she responding? So, it is not simply the meaning of the sentence that matters - the 'what was said' – but also the 'what was meant in saying what was said?'

Importantly, this differs from the truth of the intended meaning of the author, as if it is possible to get inside an historical author's head, as it were, from the documents she or he left behind. Skinner distinguishes sharply between the philosophical meaning of a statement and its intended meaning; in this respect, he argues, we cannot stop at the meaning of the statement itself and assume that our rules of interpretation – whether grammatical, philosophical, linguistic, etc. – are universally valid. Rather, what we need to do as historians of ideas – the office occupied by anyone who reads historical texts – is to get at the stakes involved in making those statements and for this, we need to be able to appreciate the historical context within which the author is writing.

The crucial corollary to Skinner's argument is, by now, a familiar one: the performative aspect of an utterance – what an author was doing in saying – is accompanied by the equally important realization that "any act of communication will always constitute the taking up of some determinate position in relation to some pre-existing conversation or argument."^{xxix} Thus the history of ideas which Skinner defends is a history of "moves in an argument;"^{xxx} it is a history of rhetoric that imagines that what an author is doing in making utterances is arguing and that in doing so, they are expressing their beliefs. Skinner's key contribution, with the introduction of an Austinian philosophy of language into the methodological debates in historiography, is to reconstitute our perception of historical statements from the idea that statements express a linguistic truth to the idea that they express an author's belief, and that the best that we

can do as readers of texts is to get at what a statement means by arriving at an understanding of an author's beliefs.

Thus, Skinner argues, historians must abandon the worship of the "incontrovertible fact:"^{xxxix} the task of the historian is not the elucidation of truth, it is the demarcation of an author's beliefs that make their statements comprehensible. "The aim," he asserts, "is to use our ancestor's utterances as a guide to the identification of their beliefs."^{xxxix} The primary task of the historian, he continues, "must be that of trying to recover a very precise context of presuppositions and other beliefs, a context that serves to exhibit the utterance in which we are interested as one that was rational for that particular agent, in those particular circumstances, to have held to be true."^{xxxix} The ability to decipher coherence and to establish a narrative thread of argumentative continuity is the key literary competency an historian must possess when reading historical authors. This not only provides an accurate account of meaning, it also legitimizes the historian's own reading and, indeed, writing operation.

The "serious utterance"^{xxxix} is thus the basic unit of historical analysis. For an utterance to count as 'serious' it must be consistent with other utterances the author makes because if the author "displays no concern for consistency, if they employ no recognizable modes of inference, we shall have no means of marking off which of their utterances are to be classed as instances of the speech acts of stating or affirming or defending their beliefs."^{xxxix} The "law of non-contradiction"^{xxxix} becomes Skinner's standard for designating the difference between a serious and a frivolous utterance. If an author's statements don't seem to make sense, Skinner continues, we need to rethink our own

reading strategy and assume that we have either misunderstood or mistranslated the series of propositions we are considering.^{xxxvii} In short, the task of a history of ideas must be to collect and classify “serious utterances,” to confer upon these the status of objects of knowledge so as to create a totalizing taxonomy of possible beliefs. The historian’s eyes have an editorial function that enable the hand’s narrativizing gesture: With “the gesture of setting aside”^{xxxviii} the serious from the frivolous utterance, history can begin.

There is much to praise in Skinner’s approach and for the purposes of this study, I am indebted to his insights. There are, however, some limitations to his methodological observations. Though Skinner defends the importance of beliefs over truths in the study of history, his desire to privilege the “serious utterance” betrays a commitment to ‘true beliefs.’ In other words, Skinner’s “more historically minded approach to the history of ideas”^{xxxix} that wants to situate historical texts in their intellectual context in order to make sense of what the author was doing in writing substitutes, with the introduction of the law of non-contradiction as the standard for political expression and historical analysis, the concept of truth with the concept of a ‘true belief.’ Thus, though it may be true that “the concept of truth is irrelevant to the enterprise of explaining beliefs,”^{xl} for Skinner the concept of a ‘true belief’ certainly is not irrelevant and the difference between a true belief and a false one is the difference between a serious and a frivolous utterance: To wit, the difference is one between making sense by not contradicting one’s self and being senseless, between saying something and making noise.

The idea that there is a common sensical language that allows us to determine the difference between a true and false belief (by relying on universal standards like the law of

non-contradiction) risks falling prey to precisely the same kind of astute criticism that Skinner poses to those committed to studying ‘historical truths.’ Moreover, that ‘comprehension’ is the objective of the study of history is not as obvious as Skinner makes it out to be; ‘comprehension’ is an aesthetic value that carries with it a commitment to narrative continuity, mimesis, and the hermeneutic hope that all expression is meaningful expression.^{xli} Perhaps, then, a point of departure that would help extend Skinner’s appreciation of historical context all the while resisting his commitment to the “serious utterance” might ask if all utterances or speech acts pronounced must be examined through an hermeneutic lens where the obligation (both moral and methodological) is comprehension?

C – From Point and Line to Utterance

“The sentence,” Wassily Kandinsky tells us, “is silence.”^{xlii} The sentence not only ends with a point - i.e., the period - as a complete unit of linguistic analysis, it is said to have and make a point as well; it is, within Kandinsky’s taxonomy, the linguistic corollary to the figurative point in art. Its colors are blue, its texture is hard, it stands in stark contrast to the geometric line that is, in its turn, an invisible thing whose track is made by the moving point.^{xliii} The line, in short, has energy: “it is created by movement specifically through the destruction of the intense, self-contained repose of the point. There the leap out of the static into the dynamic occurs.”^{xliiv} The difference between a point and a line is the duration introduced by movement; the dynamic leap of the line made by the moving point infuses temporality into something that would otherwise remain still.

It should be noted that Kandinsky's distinction between 'point' and 'line' echoes Saussure's original division of the sign as 'concept' and 'sound-image.' Recall the Course in General Linguistics when, in detailing the general principles of linguistics in the opening pages of Part One, Saussure specifies the dualist structure of the sign and, before ever giving this duality its semiotic names, he explains how the linguistic sign unites "not a thing and a name" (as those committed to ostension might declare), "but a concept and a sound-image."^{xlv} The linguistic sign, then, is a "two-sided psychological entity" that has at once a cognitive *and* material component: it is an arbitrary relationship between idea and sound and "the two elements are intimately united and each recalls the other."^{xlvi} A few paragraphs later, Saussure will re-baptize the sign's component features as signified (i.e., concept) and signifier (i.e., sound-image) and will conclude his introductory remarks by establishing the temporal quality of the signifier: "the signifier, being auditory, is unfolded solely in time from which it gets the following characteristics: (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable in a single dimension; it is a line."^{xlvii}

The importance of point and line are as evident in Kandinsky's masterpieces as they are to Saussurean linguistics. [Illustration 1] As we saw with Skinner's 'serious utterance,' the argumentative point is also important to a history of ideas. But by relying on a deliberative norm like the law of non-contradiction as a standard for 'punctuality,' the noise of the utterance is transformed into the silence of the sentence thus losing its at once temporal and dynamic qualities. Yet, like Kandinsky and Saussure before him, it is worthwhile to recall the simultaneity of the signifier and signified in the creation of the sign, however arbitrary that simultaneity might be: There is a tension between a concept

and sound-image that parallels the tensions between a point and a line - and that tension is born of the signifier's 'duration.'^{xlviii}

"The utterance," asserts Mikhail Bakhtin, "is an exceptionally important node of problems."^{xlix} For Bakhtin, there is a problem with the graphic representations of communicative exchange found in linguistic manuals: It creates a fictitious image of communication as 'unified speech flow' invested in a 'speaker/listener relationship.' Such an image attributes a passive role to the listener such that "the active role of the other in the process of speech communication is thus reduced to a minimum."^l In contrast Bakhtin shifts analytic attention away from a kind of linguistic formalism rooted in the normativity of grammar (and hence, to meaning as a telos of all intentional communication), towards an inquiry into modes of responsiveness: that is, he shifts from a spatial metaphor where language possesses an horizon of meaning to a temporal one that focuses on the duration of the utterance.

In contrast to the reductive tendency of treating the entire utterance as if it were only signified, Bakhtin looks to an 'actively responsive attitude' that transforms the listener/speaker relationship thusly: Always at the cusp of responsiveness, the active listener attends not necessarily (or only) to the meaning of what is said but to the pauses and interruptions in the breathing space of exchange. These pauses indicate the duration of an utterance; they are "the boundaries of each concrete utterance [and] as a unit of speech communication [they] are determined by a change of speaking subjects, that is, a change of speakers."^{li} He continues:

This change of speaking subjects, which creates clear-cut boundaries of the utterance, varies in nature and acquires different forms in the heterogeneous spheres of human activity and life, depending on the functions of language and on the conditions and situations of communication.^{lii}

The silence of the period does not determine the beginning or end of the utterance; rather, it is the sound of breathed pauses between the noise of the words that renders completion to the utterance. The utterance thus has no point. This, of course, does not mean that it is meaningless; rather, meaning is a result of a retroactive operation that has little to do with the creation of an utterance per se. Or, to put the matter as Bakhtin does, “a sentence, having become an entire utterance, acquires a special semantic fullness of value” that, on its own, as an instance of language or as a grammatical unit, it does not possess. Semantics has a role to play in communication but its role is *a posteriori* to the creation of the utterance. Hence the possibility of an utterance being as long as a novel or as short as a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ reply: Its duration is determined by the pauses between the noises, not by its comprehensiveness as a semantic unit.

In order to work, this account of the utterance requires a reorientation of our organs of apprehension and our grammatical mood of analysis. Our appreciation of an other’s speech requires the subjunctive. Consider, in this regard, the tentative nature of Bakhtin’s account: We “guess” the genre of the utterance, we “predict” its duration, we “foresee” its end, we “have a sense of the speech whole which is only later differentiated during the speech process.”^{liii} Such methodological hesitation is not due to Bakhtin’s imprecision but is the result of a form of speech whose identity results from its duration

rather than its grapheme. Certainty comes in knowing that the utterance is not framed by the unit of semantic exchange – by the point of what is being communicated, the meaningful kernel of knowledge – but by the change of speaking subjects. And this comes after the fact, after responsiveness occurs.

The utterance is noise moving through space. It exists because of the shift in speaking subjects and its duration is as varied as the number of possible hearers/listeners. Because it is premised on our ability to intuit its completion, no one utterance can sound or seem the same to everybody; indeed, what seems like the end of one utterance and the beginning of another might, to someone else, count as an interruption of a unified speech flow. The point is that Bakhtin's theory of the utterance allows for the possibility of interruption to count as a significant element in communication precisely because it is not considered a mistaken moment of exchange; interruption, rather, marks the shift in speaking subjects, the duration of the utterance. In other words, rather than rude, base, or tactless, interruption is a condition of responsiveness. The moment when one reader interrupts her reading to think about what she read, for instance, is as valid as any other moment and the same holds true for the speaking scenario: The moment when one responds to a speaking subject is as valid as any other, though it may inevitably appear as a tactless intrusion from the perspective of one who does not attend to the noise of the utterance.

D – Republics of Noise

Democratic peoples are noisy creatures. The word 'person' – derived from the Latin *per sonare* (meaning to make sound) – refers to an actor's mask which had "a broad

opening at the place of the mouth through which the individual undisguised word of the actor could sound.”^{liv} The culture of democratic iteration thus begins with a kind of ‘*trompe l’oreille*,’ with a making of a noise that sounds like a familiar word or language but whose context denies it the possibility of such familiarity. Indeed, the voice of the other – which is the noise of democracy – always sounds senseless.

The senselessness of which I speak, however, is not synonymous with an absence of intention or meaning, nor is it reducible to unintelligibility.^{lv} Rather, it refers to a field of iteration that operates on registers other than the ones available for sense-making. There is, then, a category of speech – a speech genre, if you will – identifiable as democratic non-sense (or babble); such a category does not refer to the content of that speech but rather, to its status within the lexicon of a common language of deliberation. The *trompe l’oreille* of democratic non-sense refers to the unauthorized words of those who speak but whose account is unaccounted for.^{lvi} Thus we must not confuse the ‘non’ of non-sense with unintelligibility or meaninglessness. Or rather, we can only confuse it as such when listening to it from a position of authorized discourse.^{lvii} The non-sense of democratic noise is neither empty nor meaningless; it possesses a semantic fullness that, as Michel de Certeau explains, “introduces schism and dissent into the harmony between sound and sense.”^{lviii}

The fiction of a common language of deliberation, like the fiction of a common sense that moderates disagreement, appears after the noise of the utterance has moved through the public space of iteration. The supposed harmony between sound and sense is what we must overlook in order to appreciate the noise of the utterance. Such noise

counts as an instance of what Michel de Certeau calls *glossalia*: a form of speech that, like the Bakhtinian utterance, organizes a space of responsiveness “where the possibility of speaking is deployed for itself.”^{lix} In this space meaning is anticipated while duration does the work of anticipation: “Glossalia postulates that somewhere there is speech, [whereas] interpretation supposes that somewhere there must be meaning.”^{lx}

Theorists of democratic deliberation treat speech like the Freudian analyst does the unconscious: ‘we know that there is something meaningful there’ they assert with obstinacy; ‘and your inability to generate meaning only proves the point further because when speaking, meaning is either present or hidden in the crepuscules of the “not knowing how to say something”.’ By championing the cause of liberating meaning from the depths of insignification, the deliberative democratic thus derives a competency to institute meaningful speech from “their capacity to organize a checkerboard of positions that at once authorizes and limits verbal circulation, divides and controls it.”^{lxi} But the decomposition of speech into babble, the repetition of elementary sounds that combine syllables and consonants, creates a space of interlocution that stands outside a pre-ordained topos of signification.

The relationship between speech and dominion is an old one. The term babble originates with the tower of Babel, the second major biblical episode of hubris after the fall. Genesis (11: 1-10) tells the story of a people who settled in a plain in Babylonia, learned how to make “hard bricks,” and used them to create “a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered all over the earth.”^{lxii} Afraid that these “one people” with “one language” would usurp god’s rule, god came down from

heaven and bestowed upon them multiple languages to create division and confusion.

Hence the term ‘babel’ or ‘babylon’ from the Hebrew word meaning ‘mixed up.’^{lxiii}

This, of course, is a simple story that takes up all of ten sentences in the Bible but its relevance is not to be overlooked. The point of the story is that division is the just punishment for the hubris of a people who desires *arche* [rule]. Indeed, the Babel story is a second fall that further disperses the work of naming done by Adam. The fiction of unity that organizes all the species in the world because they were named by the one created by the word of god (logos/spirit/breath) is dissolved by the fiction of dispersal that results from a desire to establish a human *arche* that challenges the rule of god.^{lxiv} Meaning literally ‘to babble,’^{lxv} glossalia recalls this fictional moment of a divided unity resulting from a challenge to an absolute *arche*. At once, babble recalls that second fall; it is the noise of a people who seek their own form of rule.

Relevant for my immediate purposes is the architecture of this scene of division. In the Babel story there is a tower, there is an open space designated as a ‘plain in Babylonia,’ there are a people and there is division brought about by a multiplicity of discordant utterances. This, in short, is the architectural layout of the Italian piazza:^{lxvi} there is a central clock tower, an open, directionless space, and a multiplicity of utterances in an equally varied number of dialects. This architectural document – which, to be sure, differs in material form from a stenographic one – is a palimpsest of footsteps and voices where a poesis of space incessantly recalls the demonic interruption that fissured the symbolic organization of *arche* in Genesis.

The piazza is a space but not a place.^{lxvii} It has a name but lacks an address. The difference is a notable one. The piazza does not direct movement, although within the piazza there are trajectories and vectors of body and sound motility. The piazza is “composed of intersections of mobile elements:”^{lxviii} It can be at once a market, a theatre, a political rally, a coffee house. Unlike the striations of a patterned grid, it does not impose a distribution of bodies. Nonetheless it is a “punto di ritrovo” [literally: “point of rediscovery”] where one rediscovers old and new friends alike. Walking through a populated Italian piazza on any given evening one witnesses small groups of people gathered variously throughout. Each group is a ‘compagnia’ [company in the sense of ‘someone with whom you keep company’] composed of one’s peers. [Illustration 2] From these groupings, rivalries rooted in everything from political to athletic to familial differences form.

The most famous festival recalling such rivalries is the Palio in Siena: At once a pageant and an equestrian competition, it claims a history that dates back to the 13th Century and takes place twice a year, on July 2nd and August 16th, in Siena’s “Piazza del Campo.” [Illustration 3] Each neighborhood in Siena, called a *contrada*, is represented in the Palio and is designated by specific vestments, colors, and flags worn by the residents and jockeys. The primary rule of the Palio is that the riders must ride without a saddle and though it doesn’t matter if the rider does not make it across the finish line, it does matter that the horse cross. The Palio thus becomes a kind of republican tribunal that plays out the tensions of competing neighborhoods. Though today’s Palio might be purely a folkloric spectacle, it still recalls the paradox of the piazza: it is a space that, though

lacking direction and unity, creates a surface of disjunctive synthesis between differentiable elements.^{lxix}

Developed in Italy in the 13th century, the piazza was created specifically to generate and amplify a '*senso civico*' [civic sense].^{lxx} Its ideal was the Roman Forum that was, throughout the centuries, re-proposed in every town as either the piazza of the cathedral, the civic piazza, and the marketplace piazza. "In that sinuous, open-air interior that is the Roman Forum," explains Mario Isnenghi, "one would enter what seemed like a safe space, surrounded by columns and temple walls, in order to be a citizen and devout person, to converse and engage in commerce, to encounter others and be seen."^{lxxi} More than just an architectural innovation, Isnenghi explains further, "the piazza is an empty space" that collects its identity from the colors, shapes, structures and occupants that inhabit it; it is a space that occasions the coincidence of "form and event, permanence and contingency."^{lxxii}

The architecture of the piazza plays host to certain structures that repeat themselves. The most obvious of these is the clock tower whose role it is to set the rhythms of the day for those working outside the immediate walls of the city or, indeed, within the neighborhood where the tower reigns. The tower not only self-consciously recalls the tower of Babel,^{lxxiii} the striking of its bells set the somatic habits of a people: they signal when eating should start, when sleep begins, when to wake, pray, and so forth. Being the centre of much folklore these structures become characters of popular urban myths; like the bell tower of St. Mary Major in Rome famous for setting Rome's other clocks because geographically closest to the meridian of Santa Maria Degli Angeli (built

in 1702). Before the firing of a cannon became the standard for Rome's clocks, each tower's time was slightly different the farther one moved from St. Mary Major as each clock tower would set itself to the sounds of the one most neighboring. A kind of antique Greenwich mean time, the clock tower of Rome's St. Mary Major held the power of both earthly and divine time.

The struggle to possess time is also played out by the competition between piazzas within towns. Isnenghi correctly notes the trinity of the political, religious, and marketplace piazza in every Italian city. The piazza of town hall has its bell tower that is always set differently from the duomo's bell tower. Here, the tension between mundane power and heavenly power are played out on an hourly basis and the aural resonances tell an Augustinian story of competition between earthly death over eternal life, temporal finitude versus divine eternity.^{lxxiv}

It wasn't until the period between the 8th and 9th centuries that church towers became resonant with bells. This innovation derived from the belief that the noise of a bell would warn away evil spirits.^{lxxv} To this day, bell towers ring in the piazzas of Italy when storms (traditionally considered manifestations of the devil) are on the horizon; and the '*campanaro*' – the one entrusted to ring the bells – protects the town from evil spirits. Thus, between the designation of time and the protection from evil, the bell tower creates a "spatio-temporal aggregate"^{lxxvi} of sanctuary that speaks to the diurnal and mundane culture of the piazza.

But the bell tower not only resonates outward through the sound waves of the bells, it also casts its shadow unto the surface of the piazza; it is, in itself, a meridian that

designates a spatial arch where bodies appear to pray, converse, barter and dispute.

Following the path set by the shadow of the tower there is an empty space of “game and commerce, of work and leisure, of official rule and popular power, of conflict and memory.”^{lxxvii}

Within the many spectacles that play themselves out upon the surface of the piazza is also the spectacle of death. To this day, at the edge of each piazza there are posted obituaries of the recently passed townsfolk. Here, people come to pay their respects, dispute the sources of the death, and remember those who have passed on. The piazza, however, is also where the condemned come to die. Piazzale Loreto in downtown Milano is a case in point. As far as Piazzas go, Loreto is not attractive for its architecture but it is an important node of major roads that connect downtown Milano and the massive Centrale train station to the rest of the city and its periphery. At the end of the second world war Piazzale Loreto played host to two major scenes of execution: the first, (between August 10, 1944 and April 28, 1945), witnessed the martyrdom of fifteen antifascist Partigiani. Once Milano was liberated, the piazza was renamed the Piazza dei XV Martiri [Piazza of Fifteen Martyrs] and though the name never stuck, the plaque indicating the event survives.

The second great execution in Piazzale Loreto was on Sunday, April 29, 1945; a day that would guarantee the maximum amount of spectators. At three o'clock in the morning, the truck carrying the carcasses of the dead Fascist leaders arrived. Amongst the body of the dead were that of Mussolini and his mistress [Illustration 4] who, having been hung in effigy before, this day's surreal display couldn't help but seem grotesquely

theatrical.^{lxxviii} Indeed, the theatricality of the exposition of the dead is underscored by the fact that these bodies were hung upside down, extending the classic images of inversion of highs and lows characteristic of popular festive forms.^{lxxix} Here we have an exaggeration of grotesque realism not only theorized by Bakhtin but, in fact, intended by the Resistance with the added distinction that in this liminal scene of life, death and carnival each passer by is permitted to inflict on the cadavers whatever form of posthumous punishment they wish. The ire of the people who came to pay their sentiments to the dead is encased in an aura of vindication for the betrayal committed by Mussolini's regime. It is not simply a scene of vengeance, but a scene of transgression that purported restitution for the country's dead in the war.^{lxxx} Word of mouth testimony remembers this day where one woman arrived on the scene, pulled out a gun from her purse, and shot Mussolini's carcass four times; not to be outdone, another elderly lady who, remembering the loss of her son during the war, whipped the Duce's body while uttering the word 'porcun' (meaning pig in Milanese dialect) under her breath.^{lxxxii}

Gruesome though this scene may be, it is exemplary of the kind of role that the piazza plays in Italian popular culture: To wit, everything occurs in the piazza from the most tranquil of meetings to share a cup of coffee or an *aperitivo* before supper, to the most violent of events that display life and death, festival and tragedy: "a monstrous tragicomic scene" as Edmund Burke might say, where "the most opposite passions necessarily succeed, and sometimes mix with each other in the mind; and alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror."^{lxxxii}

The piazza is the center of Italian civic life – political, commercial, religious – and is the source of the utterances [the mother’s ‘porcun’] whose noises resonate along with those of the bell tower, the pitter-patter of footsteps, and so forth. Here the sounds that emerge may be forms of argument but they are also forms of expression that have very little to do with a deliberative model of communication. These are popular sounds that exist and resonate before they can be classified and documented. They can be febrile sounds because barely audible, as well as futile because as intangible as the breath used to utter them. These sounds, however, still play a crucial role in public life despite the fact that they are not kernels of argument or, indeed, do not possess the grammatical and hermeneutic structure of the ‘serious utterance.’

E – Piazza Garibaldi, Casalmaggiore

I want to end my introduction to the Italian piazza by showcasing one piazza in particular: Piazza Garibaldi in Casalmaggiore, Italy [Illustration 5]. Founded in the first century, A.D. as a Roman outpost (as *Castra Major*), Casalmaggiore is located on the shore of the Po River in the Padania agricultural region. It is equidistant to Parma, Cremona, Mantua, and Reggio Emilia. It is, in short, a border town on the shores of the river that divides the two northern regions of Lombardy and Emilia Romagna.

This particular piazza is notable amongst the thousands of other piazzas in Italy because of recent renovation work done to its *edicola*, or news stand.^{lxxxiii} [Illustration 6] The *edicola*’s role in the popular culture of the piazza is relatively recent (first installed in 1899) and due to the massive increases in periodicals and diurnal papers, it was abandoned in the 1970s and removed and put to rest in the mid 1980s. In the late

1990s, Marco Orlandi – a local art restorer and citizen of Casalmaggiore – petitioned the town council to have the edicola restored and re-placed to where it once stood.^{lxxxiv} In July of 2003, the edicola returned to its original location and its purpose now is to showcase the work of young regional artists, what one local reporter referred to as “the world’s smallest modern art museum.”^{lxxxv}

This particular cultural icon is amongst the most notable of its kind because of its unique style.^{lxxxvi} It is a ‘Liberty’ design (taking its name from the art nouveau style inaugurated by the London fashion house of Arthur Lasenby Liberty, popular throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century). **[Illustration 7]** As Orlandi remarked in a recent interview, the Casalmaggiore edicola is especially relevant because designed with certain distinct Liberty features like the minaret-like arches and the bulbous dome; but these are done in style with the construction designs of Casalmaggiore’s town hall in front of which it sits. Thus, though a new structure to the area in 1899 when it was first installed, the edicola in Casalmaggiore repeats the stylistic themes of the town hall all the while retaining its characteristic art nouveau qualities. Notably, Orlandi explains further, his restoration project was done with this exact purpose in mind: to respect the dialogic overtones between one structure and the other. Thus with the return of the Liberty edicola of Casalmaggiore, we have “the re-installation of an object whose value is entirely aesthetic so that you have an instance of art occupying a public space.”^{lxxxvii} The symmetry between town hall and the restored edicola thus creates a connection between aesthetic value and political value which, according to Orlandi, “recalls how this particular object closely followed for an entire century the most significant events of our city and, from its

privileged perch, witnessed the most intense corals of thought, ideological conflict, and the hardships of our citizens.”^{lxxxviii}

Prior to its status as a renovated art object, the edicola had a very specific function: it was the storehouse and mediator of information for the entire town. It was at the edicola that people converged to purchase their daily news and it was on the windows of the edicola, displaying the news of the day, that people came to read. Those who couldn't read would take advantage of the conversations, comments and remarks circulating around the kiosk. There was an entirely responsive reading experience that relied on the aural tones emitting from others who read out loud. With the edicola, reading becomes a public event; it creates a space for reading in public where, as one local writer notes, “the secular morning prayer was uttered amongst the passers by who read the daily papers hanging on its windows, allowing the individual reader to become a citizen of the great piazza of the world.”^{lxxxix}

“The act of walking,” explains de Certeau, “is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to statements uttered.”^{xc} With this, de Certeau suggests that the textuality of the urban experience – the zig-zag of walking, the pitter-patter of footsteps, and the composition of paths (*tourner un parcours*) – creates a poesis of space that differs from the idea of a location that one owns or can even call one's own. As a vector of images, sounds and space, the edicola stands as a kind of political icon that composes trajectories of movement. It is at once a point of convergence and dissemination, it guides the eyes of the reader and occasions the sound of moving lips, read words, and moving bodies. As a source of daily news, Orlandi notes, the edicola “was the physical locus of

diurnal information *par excellence* for at least three generations.”^{xci} And to this we might add that it stood witness to the public events that define the cultural life of a polity from the proclamation of the Italian Republic in 1946 [Illustration 8] to the various Po floods that invaded the banks of Casalmaggiore. The edicola is, in short, a document of the noise of utterance.

When Roger Chartier states that “reading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play,”^{xcii} we are reminded of how the edicola must have contributed to this play of bodies in the reading life of the town of Casalmaggiore. As a newsstand it is a source of information; but to leave it at that would be to overlook all other forms of experience that this structure occasions: it is a source of conversation, a source of bodily convergence, a source for polemics – in short, a historical and socio-cultural node of public life. With the edicola and the piazza on which it stands we find an object that documents the stories of a culture whose reading practices are as diverse and clamorous as the individuals who read.

In the division between text and reader, between speaker and listener, we find the materiality of the reading/talking experience that has physical objects like the book, the piazza, and the edicola as its source. This is not to say that without such structures, utterances would be silent; nor is it to say that these are the only objects that occasion noise. It is to say, however, that by extending our conceptions of what counts as sources for political disputes beyond the grammatical and hermeneutic limits of the semantic statement and the deliberative limits of the philosophical argument, we discover modes of political expression that don't simply rely on the need to communicate sense but

nonetheless generate noise, like the baking of pre-Directive chocolate. The edicola - its shape, position and status as news stand - creates an 'espace lisible' of what de Certeau refers to as 'the art of nonsense;' "the art of beginning or re-beginning to speak by saying."^{xciii}

To practice this art involves something much more complex than what our thinking intellect has to offer; it beckons a reconsideration of the phonetic aspects of the utterance. The art of nonsense thus finds punctual expression in the noise of the utterance by introducing dissent in the supposed unity between harmony and sense. Like Kandinsky's line, or de Certeau's walker, this speech genre traces vectors of movement that interrupt diurnal rhythms. With this aural dimension of speech in mind, the familiar norms of deliberation – tact, politesse, consensus, and so on – become insufficient to the complexity of democratic noise. A theoretical enterprise that basis itself on the stability of the written word as a source of political thought must limit its analytic acumen to the stenographic representation of democratic culture. This inevitably results in the setting aside of a series of other sounds, noises and moving traces that, because non-graphic, cannot be counted within the lexicon of political discourse.

A history of political thought interested in the public life of democratic culture must leave open the possibility that there is an other side to sense – a democratic non-sense – that counts as a politically relevant moment of enunciation. To register such sounds, we must turn our attention to those forms of 'observational evidence' that retain the aural traces of the noise of the utterance:^{xciv} to architectural structures like piazzas, edicolas, and other monuments that help recall the noises people make when saying before

stating, when enunciating before making sense. This Babelian moment of saying before stating is, I believe, the democratic moment par excellence: it is the moment when voice encounters experience; it is, in short, a fleeting instant that calls us to be responsive to the presence of others in the world.

Endnotes:

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ⁱ Desiderius Erasmus, Praise of Folly, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), 7.

ⁱⁱ Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossalias," Representations (Autumn 1996) 30.

ⁱⁱⁱ Niccolo Sarno, "EU Chocolate Vote Threatens Cocoa Producers," Third World Network, <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/vote.htm>.

^{iv} I revert to the language of 'acknowledgement' rather than 'recognition' in light of Patchen Markell's excellent study Bound by Recognition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) in which he shows the limits of the language and identity-politics of recognition and articulates, instead, a conception of justice rooted in the acknowledgment of human finitude in the face of an uncertain future.

^v For this distinction between the practice and the institution of democratic politics I rely here (and throughout) on Jacques Rancière's "Ten Theses on Politics" in theory&event (5.3, 2001).

^{vi} Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1966), 66.

^{vii} Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Toronto: Signet Books, 1966), 32. McLuhan's observations regarding the literary bias of our culture still ring true today as John Guillory's recent "The Memo and Modernity" (*Critical Inquiry*, Fall 2004) clearly shows. In these pages, Guillory provides a fascinating account of "the generic features of informational writing by focusing on a single genre – the memorandum – the humblest yet perhaps the most ubiquitous genre of writing in the modern world."

^{viii} Consider, as an example, how utterly senseless it must have been for French aristocrats to here common people referring to themselves as '*citoyens*' – a new word inserted within a political reality that was still to come. Or, for that matter, how entirely babelian St. Paul's letters that spoke of a redeeming Christ, human divinity, and the sacred body of the Church must have sounded on the ears of the Corinthians.

^{ix} Michael Warner, Publics and Counter Publics, 114.

^x Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice" Image, Music, Text (pp. 179-189). The grain of the voice for Barthes refers to the "very precise space of the encounter between a language and a voice." (181)

^{xi} Roger Chartier, The Order of Books, 8.

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- ^{xii} Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- ^{xiii} A recent study on the history of marginalia shows the extent to which reading implies a physical as well as cognitive encounter with the materiality of the book that transforms the reader into a writer. (See H.J. Jackson, Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002.)
- ^{xiv} Roger Chartier, 12.
- ^{xv} John Rawls, Political Liberalism, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), xxiv.
- ^{xvi} Jacques Rancière, The Names of History, 89.
- ^{xvii} Michel de Certeau, The Writing of History, 47.
- ^{xviii} Michel de Certeau, The Writing of History, 73.
- ^{xix} Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms, xxvi.
- ^{xx} Nancy Struever, Theory as Practice, 168.
- ^{xxi} See Olga Pugliese's excellent discussion of dialogism in Castiglione in O. Z. Pugliese, "L'evoluzione della struttura dialogica nel Libro del cortegiano," in Il sapere delle parole: Studi sul dialogo latino e italiano del Rinascimento, Ed. Walter Geerts, Annick Paternoster, Franco Pignatti (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001), 59-68.
- ^{xxii} Struever, 175.
- ^{xxiii} Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 15.
- ^{xxiv} Jacques Rancière, Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 50.
- ^{xxv} Jacques Rancière, Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy, 6.

^{xxvi} See Georges Bataille's "The Notion of Expenditure" in The Bataille Reader (167-181) as well as his more extensive treatment of the idea of non-productive expenditure in his The Accursed Share: Volume 1. For a detailed anthropology of *potlatch*, see Marcel Mauss's The Gift.

^{xxvii} Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" in Visions of Politics: Volume 1 – Regarding Method (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 82. NB – Hereafter, all citations from Skinner will be from Visions of Politics citing the page number but not the specific essay whence they are extracted.

^{xxviii} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 2.

^{xxix} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 115.

^{xxx} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 115.

^{xxxi} See "The Practice of History and the Cult of the Fact" in Visions of Politics, *passim*.

^{xxxii} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 54.

^{xxxiii} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 42.

^{xxxiv} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 82.

^{xxxv} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 54.

^{xxxvi} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 55.

^{xxxvii} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 55.

^{xxxviii} Michel de Certeau, The Writing of History, 72.

^{xxxix} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 3.

^{xl} Skinner, Visions of Politics, 2.

^{xli} This, in turn, ties into a tradition of rhetoric that distinguishes between the serious and authoritative voice of knowledge and the mad and frivolous babble of folly, as the Erasmus epigraph suggests.

^{xlii} Wassily Kandinsky, Point and Line to Plane, 101.

^{xliii} Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, *passim* but especially the chapter on colors.

^{xliv} Wassily Kandinsky, Point and Line to Plane, 57.

^{xlv} Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, 66.

^{xlvi} Saussure, 66.

^{xlvii} Saussure, 70.

^{xlviii} With this I want to suggest that Skinner's slippage into a history of 'true beliefs' is, in large part, a result of treating historical texts as static objects. In this regard I want to suggest further that though Skinner is right in his observations about the performative character of speech acts and the importance of context in historical analysis, he is mistaken in reducing all utterances to instances of the signified.

^{xlix} Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres" in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 63.

^l Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 69.

^{li} Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 71.

^{lii} Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 72.

^{liii} Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 79.

^{liv} Hannah Arendt, Responsibility and Judgment, 12.

^{lv} In The Shape of the Signifier (Princeton, 2004) Walter Benn Michaels notes how ‘glossolalia’ (or glossalia) is a recurrent theme in much 1990’s American science fiction writing and states that this appeal is a way of talking about a language “while bypassing meaning.” (83) His treatment of this phenomenon is noteworthy because the book is an attack on post-structural theories of politics and specifically an a materialist view of language and textuality and how such appeals are interested in experiences of texts and not interpretations of them. Thus, Michaels conflates a de Manian “materialist vision” of the text with a pluralist account of meaning. So, he claims, the difference between experience and interpretation is the difference between identity and belief which is the difference between ‘difference-as-such’ and disagreement. In the end, post-structural accounts of politics make disagreement impossible. Though there is much to admire and disagree with in Michaels compelling work, I want to specify that I am not arguing in favor “meaningless speech;” nor, do I think, is de Certeau in his treatment of glossalia. Rather, what I want to suggest is that from the ideological position of an authoritative discursive regime, other modes of speaking will sound like babble or noise. It is a question not of meaninglessness *per se* but of who gets to decide what meaninglessness sounds like.

^{lvi} See Jacques Rancière’s *Thesis 5* in “Ten Theses on Politics,” theory&event (5.3) http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/toc/archive.html#5.3

^{lvii} The issue of authorized and unauthorized loci of interpretation has received substantive attention in the writings of contemporary literary critics, most notably those of Stanley Fish. For this purpose, I want to specify that I am not arguing that the noise of the utterance exists outside the domains of an interpretive community. On the contrary, as

noise, it constitutes an aural field that stands in contrast with a form of speech whose meaning is immediately available to those who reside within the boundaries of that field. Thus, it is precisely because democratic politics is composed of authorized and unauthorized communities of speakers and listeners that the noise of the utterance can count as a politically relevant moment of interruption. This is also why the right of free speech seems irrelevant to debates about democratic deliberation. It's not a question of what one says that actually matters but rather, it is a question of how one says what one wants to say.

^{lviii} Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossalias," 40.

^{lix} Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossalias," 30.

^{lx} Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossalias," 34.

^{lxi} Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossalias," 39.

^{lxii} The Good News Bible, Book of Geneisis, 11:4.

^{lxiii} The Good News Bible, Book of Geneisis, 11:4 (ff.).

^{lxiv} Importantly, within the Christian tradition, the undoing of this curse is remembered on Pentecostal Sunday - the feast which recalls a day, after Christ's ascension, when the apostles were given the gift of the holy spirit and learned to speak in tongues – a glossalia that allowed them to be heard preaching in whatever native language the listener enjoyed: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak." (The Good News Bible, Acts of the Apostles, 2: 1-5.)

^{lxv} Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossalias," 30.

^{lxvi} Glauco Sanga, "Campane e Campanili" in I luoghi della memoria: Simboli e miti dell'Italia unita, Mario Isnenghi, ed. (Milano: Editori Laterza, 1996) 38.

^{lxvii} Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 117. “A space,” de Certeau states, “exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables... On this view, in relation to place, space is like a word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization.”

^{lxviii} Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 117.

^{lxix} On the idea of a disjunctive synthesis, see Gilles Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition and Logic of Sense.

^{lxx} Marco Romano, “Le piazze e i cittadini” in Corriere della Sera, July 4, 2003.

^{lxxi} Mario Isnenghi, L’Italia in Piazza (Milano: Arnold Mondadori Editori, 1994), 3. All translations of this and other Italian texts are my own.

^{lxxii} Mario Isnenghi, L’Italia in Piazza, 5.

^{lxxiii} Glauco Sanga, “Campane e Campanili” 48.

^{lxxiv} One of the best illustrations of this tension is found the 1951 Italian film “Don Camillo” (Dir. Julien Duvivier). Based on Giovanni Guareschi’s novel “Il piccolo mondo di Don Camillo” the movie recounts the story of the clash between the recently elected communist mayor of Brescello (in the Po River Valley of Northern Italy), “Peppone” (and played by Gino Cervi), and the town’s parish priest, Don Camillo (played by the French actor, Fernandel). The scene opens with the narrator’s voice-over (in the dubbed English version Orson Welles is the narrator) setting the stage: the ‘piccolo mondo’ (small world) is a microcosm of the struggles that emerge in Italian politics after the formation of the Republic (1946).

A crane shot lands on the central town piazza. The scene is the acceptance speech of the recently elected Peppone who will introduce his ‘comrade’ from the big city and

who, in his turn, proceeds to orate on the struggle of the workers against the established autocracy of church and capitalist. Don Camillo, pacing furiously inside the church and already scandalized by the fact that the band playing the “Internazionale” is composed of those same students to whom he had taught music, expresses his outrage to the church’s main crucifix (with whom he has a vivid dialogue throughout the movie). Suddenly, upon being reprimanded by the talking Jesus and told that what happens ‘out there’ (in the piazza) is not his domain, Don Camillo disappears behind a large wooden door and is next seen atop of the duomo’s bell tower (still his domain), feverishly ringing the bells under the hot summer sun. The shot pans between the electronic microphone speakers on the orator’s stage and the swinging of the moving bells, all the while showing the swaying of the spectator’s heads between the two poles. Though comic, the poignancy of this scene lies in the anachronistic nexus established between the noise of the amplified microphone – a new media – and that of the bell – the more ancient call. The locus of that nexus where the two noises collide is the piazza itself. Barely bearing this cacophony, the crowd is understandably confused not only because both sounds are incomprehensible (the orator’s speech is completely overshadowed by the bells and the bells are being played out of time, out of sych, and out of tune) but also because, in that piazza, they stand at the juncture (both historical and geographic) between church and state and the birth of Italian secularism.

^{lxxv} Glauco Sanga, “Campane e Campanili” 40.

^{lxxvi} Glauco Sanga, “Campane e Campanili” 40.

^{lxxvii} Mario Isnenghi, L’Italia in Piazza, 18.

^{lxxviii} Marco Dondi, “Piazzale Loreto” in I luoghi della memoria, 493.

^{lxxxix} Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, *passim*.

^{lxxx} Marco Dondi, “Piazzale Loreto” in I luoghi della memoria, 495.

^{lxxxix} Marco Dondi, “Piazzale Loreto” in I luoghi della memoria, 495.

^{lxxxii} Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, 92-93.

^{lxxxiii} The ‘edicola’ has a longer history than its modern status as a news stand. Originally, ‘edicolas’ were small carvings in buildings or street corners where the faithful would install relics of saints, or religious icons, which would then stand as markers of devotional prayer. These earlier ‘edicolas’ exist to this day in Italy.

^{lxxxiv} The story of the funding for this restoration project recounted in interviews I conducted with Orlandi (in February of 2004) is too long to discuss in this context. However, there is ample editorial documentation in the local papers as it was a topic of attention throughout the restoration process.

^{lxxxv} Marco Bazzani, “Un mini-museo d’arte” in La Cronaca di Cremona (February, 2004).

^{lxxxvi} Raffaella Bassi, “Chioschi: Appunti di Storia e di Quotidianità” in Arredo&Città (No. 2, September, 1988), 29.

^{lxxxvii} Interview with Marco Orlandi, February 22, 2004.

^{lxxxviii} Marco Orlandi, Edicola nel Tempo, (I Quaderni del Battello Ebro, 2003), 2.

^{lxxxix} Franco Giuseppe Bolsi, “Acanto,” in Il Grande Fiume (summer, 2003), 12.

^{xc} Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 97.

^{xc} Marco Orlandi, Edicola nel Tempo, 2.

^{xcii} Roger Chartier, The Order of Books, 8.

^{xciii} Michel de Certeau, “Vocal Utopias: Glossalias,” 41.

^{xciv} The expression ‘observational evidence’ is Hillary Putnam’s (Reason, Truth, and History) and is quoted by Skinner (Visions of Politics, 41).