Young-Girls in Echoland

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2. Orality

Attention should particularly be paid to ways of reading that have been obliterated in our contemporary world: for example reading out loud in its double function—communicating that which is written to those who do not know how to decipher it, and binding together the interconnected forms of sociability which are all figures of the private sphere (the intimacy of the family, the conviviality of social life, the cooperation of scholars [connivence lettré [sic]])

—Roger Chartier, “Laborers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader”

One types the correct incantation on a keyboard, and a display screen comes to life, showing things that never were nor could be.

—Frederick P. Brooks Jr., The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering

Reading with a Tone

As we’ve already heard, Megan Arlett considers Tiqqun’s “the Young-Girl X, the Young-Girl Y, the Young-Girl Z” to be “a kind of chant.”1 Chant is etymologically related to the Old French chanter, or “to sing,” which is itself likely related to the Latin cantus, or “song”; like the words incantation and enchantment (as well as cock

and *hen)*, *chant* is probably derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *kan-*, which means “to sing.”² Wiktionary defines *chant* as “a repetitive song, typically an incantation or part of a ritual,” and *incantation* as a “formula of words” used to produce “magical results.”³ A network of etymological affiliations ties together *chant*, enchanting, incantation, and *cant* (jargon, secret language, insincere talk, “the whining or singsong tone of a beggar”).⁴ Eighteenth-century elocutionists were particularly averse to a “chanting or sing-song voice” known as “reading with a tone.”⁵ Tough shit, folks.

Jennifer Boyd ends her essay on the Strange-Girl with what she calls an “incantation.”⁶ She instructs us to repeat it after her. It includes the following:

*The Strange-Girl is a burnt tongue.*

*She is too hot to handle (a menace).*

*She is the rattle of a cage, an asteroid entering the atmosphere.*

*She is scorched earth.*⁷

We say: She is ___. She is ___. She is ___. Iteration within repetition. Repeat it. Tiqqun’s voice of Narcissus is really another Echo.

Michael Jackson wrote a manifesto. He did. “I will,” he repeats throughout. “I will.” “I will do no interviews/I will be magic./I will

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⁷. Boyd.
be a perfectionist/a researcher a trainer/a Masterer/I will be Better than every great/actor roped in one.”

For Boyd and for Tiqquon, the philosophical incantation is a provocation to mimesis. Some pedagogical activities can likewise be considered to be attempts to goad listeners, students, in this case, into imitation, although these exercises are not generally understood as magical. Rote recitation of multiplication tables (“Repeat after me, class, five times five is twenty-five”), pronunciation drills, and the dreaded French dictée (an old-fashioned but still employed French exercise requiring students to transcribe words spoken aloud by the teacher without spelling or grammar mistakes) all demand that students imitate the performance of an authority, directly or with the added challenge of altering the modality, as in the dictée. While the difference between a witchy incantation that invites participation through sensuous entreaty and a school chanting exercise, let’s say, at first seems stark, it may not actually be, as the affective, bodily, and social dimensions of group chanting are exactly what are instrumentalized for educational aims. The dictée admittedly functions differently; it takes the sociality of collective mimetic enunciation and transforms it into competition, as this kind of writing, like most writing, is a solo affair, and students are assessed on an individual basis. For us, though, as young American students of French (one of us renamed Odile, the other Delphine), the pleasure in the dictée arose not from the accuracy of our transcription but from the rhythmic sound of group writing, a collective attack dissolving into noise only to cohere for a moment when a critical mass of small hands moved pencils across paper in almost unison. There is no song in the dictée, but there is sometimes a little bit of music (then again, who really likes a dictée?).

*Preliminary Materials* weaponizes the sonorous demands of the incantation for rhetorical and educational purposes. As Jen

Kennedy notes but does not develop in detail, by describing the operation of the Young-Girl in “textual and sonic terms, Tiqqun disrupt the hegemony of vision in the ‘Spectacle,’ detaching the Young-Girl from her most prized possession: her image.”\(^9\) While we do not understand Tiqqun’s project of remediation as, ultimately, enabling, we do want to pick up where Kennedy leaves off in her astute identification of sound—and, by extension, orality—as an instrumental modality of Preliminary Materials.

Tiqqun’s political strategy mobilizes some hallmarks of orality, such as “heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions,” to borrow the oft-cited words of Walter Ong.\(^10\) Ong’s theory of orality and literacy famously distinguishes between primary and secondary orality, with the former as “the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print” and the latter as “a new orality [that] is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print.”\(^11\) This new orality “has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas.”\(^12\) Although secondary orality has been used to describe networked typographic communication, Ong clarifies in a 1996 interview that secondary literacy is a more accurate term, as secondary orality refers literally to technologized spoken modes of communication, while secondary literacy is applied to written communication with the “temporal immediacy of oral exchange.”\(^13\)

11. Ong, 11.
12. Ong, 133.
Literacy, and Vulnerability in Academic Twitter” (2016) makes excellent use of the distinction, providing a potential framework for considering much of networked typographic communication. She argues that the “rhetorical, repetitive uses of language” Ong associates with orality “are evident in phenomena such as internet memes, wherein oral, visual, and textual forms of humor are repeated and circulated.” Addressing Twitter, the primary subject of her study, she claims that the platform “increasingly collapses oral and written norms of communication, creating a space wherein the immediate, dialogic exchange of orality is meshed with what boyd calls the persistent, replicable, scalable and searchable qualities of digital content.” Preliminary Materials, with its iterative, formulaic, and often conversational style, has an oral sensibility at home on platforms of secondary literacy such as Twitter, Reddit, and Facebook, facilitating the manifesto’s success on social media.

This erosion of the boundary between writing and word of mouth in the age of networked communication also puts pressure on understandings of spoken language. To clarify, as we argue in “Gossip Girl Goes to the Gallery,” “the early adoption of text messaging and chat technologies by many young people has generated a new stereotype of teen language as improperly visual” and of improperly visual speech as adolescent. We continue, specifically, the shorthand used in Instant Messaging (IM) (such as FML and LMAO) and social networking has entered spoken language. Such locutions play a powerful role in vernacular definitions of girl talk as vacuous, mockable yet discomfiting, always-already shared (and thus failing to index autonomous subjectivity) and in-

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15. Stewart, 64.
herently digitextual. Words like OMG, although they are used by both men and women in response to a juicy bit of information, have come to stand for girl talk writ large and are convenient symbols of girls’ linguistic impressionability.  

Par for the course is the “sksksksk” that dominates the speech of VSCO girls, a teen persona strongly associated with “a language, created from viral memes and internet expressions.” The alternation of “s” and “k,” originally a kind of keyboard smash likely first used on Black Twitter (a debt to Black vernacular that should be acknowledged across memetic internet culture), indicates a reaction of heightened emotion and is similar to OMG or “I can’t even.” VSCO girls are derisively identified by their love of big T-shirts, scrunchies, saving the turtles, and vocalizing this typographic response in everyday oral conversation. Numerous caricatures of VSCO girls can be viewed on YouTube and TikTok in which their “sksksksk” is repeated to absurdity. VSCO girls could be the daughters of former Valley Girls, whose Valspeak sociolect included Zlint, the phonetic pronunciation of Xlnt, an abbreviation used in print classified ads. If the oral textuality of social media is often dismissed as the feminized and juvenilized blather of “global village gossip,” to borrow a phrase from Giselle Bastin, the typographic orality of textspeak also has a strong association with adolescence and

femininity. Like consumption, a practice of all genders and nearly all ages that has historically been understood vis-à-vis discursive constructions of femininity and adolescence, the collapse of oral and written norms of communication is often *girled*.

More specific to our point, *Preliminary Materials*’s integration of orality and literacy is directly related to its critique of the feminized consumption of commodities, especially in consideration of the text’s quotations from women’s fashion and beauty periodicals. These magazines tend to hail their readers through the aurality of words, following conventions established in advertising prior to Web 2.0. To wit, this “advertising style” is a hallmark of the globalized *Cosmopolitan* magazine franchise, according to David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen’s analysis of the “linguistic style” of articles from forty-four versions of *Cosmo* in 2001, including U.S., Dutch, Spanish, Indian, and Chinese publications (here style is not its political attributes or the characteristic voice, tone, and form of an author’s work but the standardized house style of a particular publication). The authors conclude that the *Cosmo* brand’s globalized style of writing is an aggregate that includes an imitation of “advertising style,” with its “direct address,” “ear catching language,” and “use of rhyme and alliteration.” *Preliminary Materials* incorporates the rhythmic, sonorous entreaty of the language of advertising through quotations from magazines (and actual advertisements), while also using advertising style as an operation performed on other parts of the text. The self-professed trashiness of the theory is related not only to its disjointed rhetoric but also to its reperformance of the oral-aural literacy of advertising.


Some respondents to *Preliminary Materials* investigate the collapse of oral and written norms of communication by presenting the Young-Girl as a zone of conflict between linguistic modes. For example, take the Bureau de L'APA's theatrical rejoinder to *Preliminary Materials, Death and the Jeune-Fille* (*La Jeune-Fille et la Mort*, 2010), which premiered in Québec City, Canada, and has since been performed at EMPAC at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, and the Espace Libre theater in Montréal.\(^{23}\) Billed as “Based on Tiqqun” (“D'Après Tiqqun”), *Death and the Jeune-Fille* puts *Preliminary Materials* into relation with Franz Schubert’s prior invocation of female youth, the 1817 song known in English as “Death and the Maiden” (called “La Jeune-Fille et la Mort” in French), the theme of which he recycled for the second movement of his String Quartet no. 14 in D Minor seven years later.\(^{24}\) Following *Preliminary Materials*, which makes multiple references to death (for a cute illustration, check this out: “she is the slut who *demands* respect, death roiling in itself, she is the law and the police at the same time”), the Bureau de L'APA cross-reference mortality and capitalism by interweaving a performance of this quartet with excerpts from *Preliminary Materials* voiced by actors.\(^{25}\) Speaking of mortality and capitalism: a manifesto from the Angry Brigade, written to claim responsibility for the 1971 bombing of a Biba boutique in London (no injuries or deaths), proclaims, “If you are not busy being born you are busy buying.”\(^{26}\) An address to the ear, the black-est of humor, a serious joke. As part of their critique of capitalism,


the Angry Brigade complain that shop girls were forced by Biba branding in 1971 to wear lewks suggesting the 1940s, for “capitalism can only go backwards—they’ve got nowhere to go—they’re dead.”

In the “trash dramaturgy” of *Death and the Jeune-Fille*, Tiqqun’s theory serves as an unconventional playtext delivered piecemeal—spoken aloud (sometimes by one actor ventriloquizing another), projected on an upstage scrim, written on the bodies of performers in black marker and on paper grocery bags worn on their heads. Fragments of *Preliminary Materials* are included in a booklet given to audience members at the top of the show. The performers, as well as the projection, direct the audience to specific page numbers so readers can participate in what is framed as a lesson about the Young-Girl. The conceptual persona of the Young-Girl emerges between multiple modalities: between projected typography, printed text, handwritten words, and spoken language; between the book on the audience’s laps and the text exhibited onstage; between reading and listening; between the meaning of words and their sound. Better yet, the Young-Girl of the play is born of the repeated collapse of different modes of communication. Although the scenography suggests a schoolhouse from the early or mid-twentieth century, the show’s obsession with an uncomfortable confrontation of orality and literacy (reading the book on one’s lap makes following the action on stage difficult, for example) allows for the secondary literacy of both *Preliminary Materials* and communication over social media to be felt, deeply, without obvious markers of youth, girliness, or the World Wide Web.

As we argue in this chapter, the “outlouding” of theories of the Young-Girl onstage, onscreen, and in galleries activates a relationship between femininitude, youthitude, and sound latent in *Preliminary Materials*. The Young-Girl is animated in these per-

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27. Brigade.
29. aqnb, “YGRG’s Outlouding of Words + Intimacy in 14x Performance ‘Reading with a Single Hand’ at Baltic Triennial,” December 8,
formances as a fraught interface between orality and literacy in the age of “communicative capitalism” and the networked media on which it relies. Jodi Dean identifies communicative capitalism as a political, economic, and social formation in which “communication has become a primary means for capitalist expropriation and exploitation” and networked participation magics users into “feel[ing] that action online is a way of getting their voice heard, a way of making a contribution.” While Dean is using voice to mean an individual’s point of view, the various vocalizations of the Young-Girl we discuss in this chapter mobilize both metaphorical and literal understandings of voice to ask questions about action, agency, commodification, and the nature of networked communication. Many of these artists and other creators have more hope for the political value of the voice on social media than Dean’s argument affords, and yet communicative capitalism remains a useful reference point for theories of the Young-Girl writ large.

As will later become clear, the Young-Girl's voice provides an opportunity to hear the capacity of voices to become technologies of both enabling and disempowering modes of political subjectivity. Let’s take seriously the fact that “the human voice” was recently named technology of the year by MIT Sloan Management Review in an article that considers the rise of digital assistants, text-to-speech conversion, and podcasting. When the voice, or, rather, voices of the Young-Girl become audible—sometimes mocked, sometimes inscrutable, sometimes contagious, sometimes looped, sometimes


rejected, sometimes shared, sometimes hesitant, sometimes in your face, sometimes, let’s say, Britney, sometimes Kardashian, sometimes even queer—a political subject can be heard.

Notably, the voice that opens *Death and the Jeune-Fille* does not sound Britney, Kardashian, or queer. This is the voice of a character identified in the program as the Professor, an older, white, patriarchal authority. At the top of the show, he calls himself “your teacher of French as a foreign language,” stands in front of the audience, and gestures for them to write while he speaks, to do a *dictée*. The audience in the video documentation of the performance instead orally repeats what he says; they aren’t given time to get out pens, or maybe they missed the actor’s brief hand gesture. There is a single sentence in the recitation: “The Young-Girl is not there, period” (“La Jeune-Fille n’est pas là, point final”; là means “here” or “there,” although the version of the show performed in New York translated it only as “there”). The audience chants, incants together, this formula of words. With each repetition, the Professor replaces more words in the sentence with là. “La Jeune-Fille n’est là là là là là.” The làs are laid over replaced words, and by the end of the run, it’s nothing but sung la la la lalalas, a cartoonish onomatopoeia for singing, articulated with roughly the same rhythm as before—bafflegab said with patriarchal conviction. From the rhythm of his speech, a melody soon emerges, blending with the eponymous Schubertian melody picked up by the string quartet throughout the show. In solfège, a method for ear training for musicians, “A” is “La.” This is part of the joke.

The Professor’s statement loses meaning as the exercise proceeds. It devolves into lalalalaland. This unraveling is suggestive of popular complaints regarding product iteration. Relentless versioning can sometimes result in a series of downgrades in product performance, a process that the urban dictionary gives the apt name “shiteration.”\(^\text{32}\) The professor shiterates the fuck out of that

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sentence—semantically, that is, because while speech loses force by degrees, voice continues to perform the lesson, empowered. The Professor walks offstage, still singing. He directs his melody toward the sitting string quartet on his way out, as if to prompt them to respond musically.

In this scene, the decomposition of meaning (and of the disciplinary power of pedagogy) transforms his professorial lecture into a musical composition. However, we do not hear this strategy as one of liberation. Instead, *Death and the Jeune-Fille* repeatedly swaps one kind of power over subjects with another, staging and restaging, obsessively, a shift between disciplinary societies and societies of control. In Gilles Deleuze’s “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1990), he distinguishes between the power to “mol[d]” subjects in disciplinary societies of the eighteenth through twentieth centuries and the power to “modulat[e]” subjects continuously in the societies of control that had begun to replace them.33 We might consider the outmoded classroom we see onstage in *Death and the Jeune-Fille*, with its wooden flip-top children’s desks and attached chairs, as a reference to the school as a model space of enclosure in the theory of disciplinary societies Deleuze borrows from Michel Foucault. In a remarkable moment of the play, a hidden mechanism is activated that motorizes the flip-tops of the wooden desks, turning the furniture into idiophonic percussion instruments collectively banging out a rhythm. Here the archetypical architecture of enclosure loses its function to shape and organize bodies logically and efficiently. The schoolhouse loses, turns into something other than itself (as the Professor loses), but it also gains: it gains rhythm, musicality. It loses the ability to mold and gains the ability to modulate. Modulation is particularly resonant in our context, as it can refer to three kinds of change—the modification of an element of music (usually key, but

possibly timbre or pitch), the variation of the musical qualities of the voice, and the fluctuation of an electromagnetic signal.

The concept of the Young-Girl, which the performers attempt to teach audiences throughout the play using different tactics, is a kind of machinic relay between different modalities of power. Indeed, we could understand the play’s use of the Young-Girl as challenging any idea that the process of substituting control for discipline became a done deal sometime between the 1990s, when Deleuze’s “Postscript” and Tiqqun’s *Preliminary Materials* were first published, and the Bureau’s production. In *Death and the Jeune-Fille*, this shift between old school and new school (between authoritative patriarchal speech and the euphony of song, between furniture and percussion instrument, between handwriting words and projecting typography) happens again and again throughout the course of the play. *Death and the Jeune-Fille* is a theory of subjectivity haunted by a past that will not stay dead and driven by the musicalized, modulated, and remediated rhythms of uncanny repetition.

The Bureau de L'APA’s production considers issues of subjectivation alongside those of communication. As the relay between discipline and control, the Young-Girl is neither one nor the other. She is also not in speech or writing, not in the writing that should have been (the audience’s failure to do the dictée) or the writing that is (on actor’s bodies), not then or now, here or there, but in our destabilizing efforts to connect the here and there of orality and literacy and our conflicting desire to decouple them, to reverse the collapse. In this way, *Death and the Jeune-Fille* is more doggedly focused on communicative capitalism than is its textual inspiration. *Death and the Jeune-Fille* is also about what McLuhan calls the “Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations” possible in acoustic space, and the function of *Preliminary Materials* as an acoustic political text that activates those possibilities, as anxious and/or enabling as they are.34 Indeed, *Preliminary Materials* is a vicious playground

for Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations, and one of its greatest or most troubling successes, depending on your assessment of its misogyny, is its politicization of the game of secondary literacy that many of us know so well.

**WTF, Robo-Hamster?**

She may not ultimately be there, period ("point final," says the Professor in *Death and the Jeune-Fille*), but the urge to speak of and as the Young-Girl is very strong. A number of video responses to *Preliminary Materials* vocalize text taken from the manifesto, such as YouTube user Carlos’s “Introduction to a Theory of the Young Girl” (2009), which emphasizes the gendered and aged attributes of the model citizen-consumer by alternating the deep, stereotypically masculine voice of a narrator speaking quotations from the manifesto with the seemingly semi-improvised chitchat of a blonde Young-Girl vapidly expositing on clothing and boyfriend choices.35 The narrator’s voice functions as a film “commentator-acousmêtre” as identified by Michel Chion; the narrator is the all-powerful voice without a visible body, the voice of knowledge and authority, “he who never shows himself but who has no personal stake in the image.”36 This voice performs in stark contrast to the one attached to the visible body of the Young-Girl, whose body has a personal stake in the image because it is a *body-as-image*. While the narrator is everywhere and nowhere, the Young-Girl is fixed within the

36. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 21. Elsewhere in the book, Chion contradicts himself by saying that this kind of voice-over narration is not an acousmêtre, which requires that the speaker in question, “even if only slightly, have one foot in the image, in the space of the film.” Nonetheless, the description of the power of the disembodied voice of the narrator of “Introduction to a Theory of the Young Girl” still holds (24).
frame, usually doubly confined within the tight domestic spaces of her bedroom and living room, where she is shown prattling away (as we are asked to judge her girl talk). When the Young-Girl is momentarily silent, she is either typing on her laptop or scrolling on her phone, a remediation of her irritating vocal profligacy into digital textuo-gesturality.

A more literal speaking aloud of *Preliminary Materials* is YouTube user Ned Ludd’s video audiobook, broken into eleven parts, each with a still image as a visual placeholder paired with Ludd’s low-pitched speaking voice. Ludd’s collection of video audiobooks was all uploaded in 2015. His channel features the eleven-part *Preliminary Materials* as well as the three-part *Desert* (2011), written by an anonymous anarchist, and a mocking rendition of anarchist John Zerzan’s essay “Why I Hate Star Trek” (2002). Ludd’s reading of *Preliminary Materials* is interesting to us in the modesty of its claims: not an interpretation or even introduction but a transduction of modality from text to speech. The simplicity of this approach allows us to apprehend aspects of the orality of a Young-Girl theory in its most bare form.

Ludd takes his pseudonym from the storied leader of the Luddites, early nineteenth-century protesters of exploitative labor practices in Britain. Smashing the textile machines they operated as a way of battling their oppressive employers (and not out of a general resistance to technology, as is usually designated by current usage of the moniker), many Luddites wrote letters, manifestos, and songs signed with the name of Ned Ludd, protecting the true identity of the authors while embracing the shared persona of a Robin Hood–type folk hero. Ned Ludd is what Marco Deseriis calls “an

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38. Those interested in the songs, letters, and other writings attributed to Ludd and the name’s iterations, such as General Ludd, Edward Ludd, King Ludd, and Eliza Ludd, should check out Kevin Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
improper name,” “the adoption of the same alias by organized collectives, affinity groups, and individual authors.”39 “Tiqqun” can also be considered an improper name; it performs “the shielding effect of any pseudonym” while acting “as an open multiplicity that can hardly be disambiguated and assigned a discrete referent.”40 The improper name establishes this indiscrete referent as neither the collective enunciator of the We (as in “We the People”) nor the individual utterer of the I but both, “recombin[ing] the I and the We in a highly unstable, elusive assemblage.”41 Deseriis proposes an isomorphic relationship between the impropriety of such names and “the impropriety of Internet memes—such as catchphrases, image macros, viral videos, and Web celebrities.” “Situated at the intersection of the collective imagination” and “authorless yet discrete” “iterations,” memes are the products of, for the most part, anonymous and pseudonymous internet users.42 Although there are obvious differences between the Luddites’ “collective bargaining by riot,” the original publication of Preliminary Materials, and this YouTube user’s recordings of texts associated with anarchism, what joins these three utterances and historical moments is the performance of political subjectivity as a faceless but not voiceless articulation.43

As Ludd explains his YouTube oeuvre, “I read in my monotone voice. . . . Ask youself [sic] now, what the hell am I doing here, watching this boyo’s videos? That’s for you to decide, fellow anomie.”44

41. Deseriis, “Introduction.”
42. Deseriis, “Introduction.”
43. E. J. Hobsbawm, “The Machine Breakers,” Past and Present 1, no. 1 (1952): 66. While Ludd’s YouTube channel has a profile pic of a face, a thumbnail rendered in hypercolor with a green percentage sign on the bottom edge, this is not necessarily his own face, given the profile pic conventions of YouTube, nor is the face very legible. Regardless, the audiobook videos do not have visuals of Ludd reading. The reader remains in the dark.
44. Ned Ludd, “About,” YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCScm9u8imX-988B0QGlNUtw/about.
The voice in these videos is fairly monotonous, for the most part, except when he reacts to stumbling over a word—undoubtedly accidental, but with the effect of reminding the listener that Ludd is reading words, and words that are not his own—and when the persona of the Young-Girl intervenes in the staid narration. Those Tiqqun quotations pulled from fashion magazines and advertising are read differently than the rest of the text: in a high, digitally pitch-shifted voice sped up to the point of near-complete unintelligibility (a techno-amphetamine shot that disorders the speaker’s poorly put-on Valley Girl rhythms and broad pitch variations as a parody of girl talk). “Since the Young-Girl is a horrifying sociological construct,” Ludd clarifies in a comment on one of the videos, “I decided to make it sound as inhuman as possible, in order to reveal the true voice of the Spectacle that speaks through human beings.”

This Young-Girl—Ludd, himself, we assume, with an altered voice, but it’s impossible to know for sure—sounds a bit like a kidnapper, terrorist, or hacker using a voice-disguising application on a telephone call. The rough, off-rhythm digital insertion of these sequences into the recording exaggerates the Young-Girl’s criminal effect, as if she’d forced herself into the private space of the boyo’s narration. In cahoots with the voice’s machinic timbre and speed, such shoddy digital cut and paste makes audible the “Young-Girlist formatting” Tiqqun decry as a weapon and effect of late capitalism.

Following the logic of the typical audiobook, we wager that the anthropotechnical squawk of the Young-Girl is indeed Ludd’s voice transformed past the point of identification. Thus, by producing what could be called the oral-aural sound of irony, Ludd solves the “problem” of having the masculine voice of authority vocalize girly exhortations from magazines and advertisements. Perhaps he also


just couldn’t say “Because I’m worth it!” with a straight face, unlike Inga Copeland. Regardless, the very ridiculousness and artificiality of that speech denaturalize the Young-Girl (compare Ludd’s choice to what we hear in Carlos’s video, in which the chirpy Young-Girl is played by an actress in her late teens or twenties). Of course, Tiqqun insist that the Young-Girl is not the same as young girls and that qualities of femininity and youth have been dislodged from the sexed and aged bodies of young women and transmitted across populations. The Young-Girl is not a gendered concept, and she is not a natural-born killer. OK. However, the attributes of the Young-Girl are clearly gendered forces, and the gendering of those forces is bodied forth in the text through overdetermined references to fashion, makeup, magazines, consumption, eating disorders, narcissism, and other things strongly associated with discursive constructions of young women. In the case of Ludd’s Young-Girl voice, whatever forces that have transformed it are so alien that they obscure Ludd’s lackadaisical attempt at performing the vocal rhythms of the Valley Girl stereotype. The Young-Girl is heard, but not as young or as a girl.

Moreover, what is utterly clear in these sound bites on the page—after all, advertising generally aims to be a direct and memorable form of address, and Tiqqun have not chosen quotations that veer away from this trend—is magicked into something weird and disruptive in its audio form. Although we might understand this voice’s lack of girliness and youth as simply an attempt to materialize Tiqqun’s statement that, for the Young-Girl, “what is most ‘natural’ is most feigned, what is most ‘human’ is most machine-like” (an understanding supported by Ludd’s explanation), at the same time, Ludd’s manipulated voice is so unclassifiable and illegible as to obscure, almost completely, the provenance of those quotations, especially for those who haven’t already read them on the page.47

We played this audiobook for our partners, and they said “what was that?” every time the robo-hamster hacked into the narration (we

47. Tiqqun, 26.
chose the hamster out of all rodents because of its presence in the Anglophone and Francophone manosphere as a symbol of women’s stupidity and self-delusion). We, who know the book so well, were forced to pause the video and translate. Whose (or what’s) voice are we hearing, and WTF is it saying?

The question of whether to own, disown, or disavow the voice of the Young-Girl is a deeply political one, especially considering the broad metonymic understanding of voice as an “instrument or medium of expression,” “wish, choice, or opinion openly or formally expressed,” and “influential power” in public discourse. Canadian video artist Madelyne Beckles has a provocative response: let’s disidentify. In Beckles’s *Theory of the Young-Girl* (2017), a kind of winking “PSA about feminist theory” inspired by growing up during the heyday of “Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton,” the artist articulates the Young-Girl’s textual exhortations as if they were her own. However, she simultaneously distances herself from the Young-Girl’s vacuity by performing the quotations with half-assed actorly conviction and exaggerated vocal fry—the Kardashian grumble heard when the voice descends into its lowest register, often at the end of an utterance. More specifically, Beckles gives us a vocal performance that disidentifies. José Esteban Muñoz defines disidentification as a strategy for minoritarian subjects (like Beckles) who reperform and rework received representations through neither capitulation nor rejection. Certain kinds of parodic performance can mobilize a “disidentificatory desire for this once toxic representation”—in our case, the Young-Girl.


A speech artifact strongly associated with young North American and British women and other feminized people (even though it can be heard from cis het men as well), vocal fry is worth discussing at greater length. Naomi Wolf describes the sound as “that guttural growl at the back of the throat, as a Valley girl might sound as if she had been shouting herself hoarse at a rave all night” in a clutch-the-pearls op-ed that accuses an entire generation of women of “disowning [their] power.” The “non-committalness” of this sound is heard in contrast, by implication, to the alleged strength, confidence, and commitment of the voices of “older feminists” like Wolf.51 Wolf’s screed was published during a period of collective Home-Alone-face (so many palms on cheeks) following the publication of a study that claims that young women with vocal fry are less hirable as well as a general backlash against the increasing variation of speaking voices heard on the radio. The voice of authority supposedly speaks with “maturity and confidence”—white, male, and without classed regional affiliations, according to the archetype (#PubRadioVoice), or at the very least an older white woman like Wolf.52

The girly sound of vocal fry is extended to typographic communication in the article “How to Tweet Like a Girl,” which claims that “expressive lengthening” of words by female Twitter users remediates the “decidedly feminine tic of draaaaagging words out in the back of your throaaawuttt.”53 Although author Kat Stoeffel relishes the squandering of letters, it is likely that girlphobic Twitter users would perceive the same irritating noncommittalness in vocal fry’s written counterpart (not to mention the erosion of orality

and literacy characteristic of VSCO girls). Before explaining that Valspeak Rs are slurred, rolled off the tongue, Moon Unit Zappa demonstrates the gum chewing of a Valley Girl as first a stretching of the wad, next a wrapping of it around her finger, and then finally a bite and a drawing of her finger away from her mouth.54

The discursive relation between girly voices and insecurity is very strong, recalling the work of Gilles Châtelet, one of Tiqqun’s Francophone anticapitalist brethren. Châtelet’s incendiary political manifesto To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies (1998) has its own version of the Young-Girl, the gendered conceptual persona of the “Bécassine,” whose “unseemly, confused stammering” indexes capitulation to exploitation by market democracies.55 Châtelet’s Bécassine is based on an instantly recognizable caricature in French and Franco-Belgian culture that originated in 1905 as an illustration in the young girls’ magazine La Semaine de Suzette: a provincial young nanny from Brittany named Bécassine (after the French bécasse, slang for “silly fool” or “stupid woman”).56 Soon after her debut, she becomes the protagonist of a comic strip that runs until 1962 and the inspiration for frequent adaptations.57 Châtelet reincarnates Bécassine for

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54. Thompson, “Moon Unit Zappa Full Show.”
the turn of the century as Bécassine Turbo-Diesel (Turbo-Bécassine, or Neo-Bécassine, for short). This new Bécassine—in a dizzying line of reasoning, identified as the product of petroleum extractivism, automobility and its privatization of public space, the “ludic cyber-melting-pot of money, the city and democracy,” and a ridiculous obsession with “fluidity and networks”—rejects the radical politics of her mother, whom Châtelet dubs Bécassine Pétroleuse. However, Bécassine Pétroleuse and other revolutionaries of 1968 are also at the receiving end of Châtelet’s unrelenting ire, which takes aim at the Left’s role in “the slow putrefaction of liberatory optimism into libertarian cynicism.” The thing both generations of Bécassines share, Châtelet explains, is their inability to stand for anything without a qualifying hesitation, expressed through a verbal tic. What is given to us as a Valley Girl “y’know, like” in Robin Mackay’s English translation is better translated as “well . . .


58. Bécassine Turbo-Diesel has a partner in crime as she party-hardies for the free market: Cyber-Gideon (also called Gideon Cyber-Plus), named after a noodle-necked cartoon duck from the 1970s exported from France to the United Kingdom. In fact, Turbo-Bécassine usually appears in Châtelet’s screed with her male partner, who is equally condemnable. It is here that To Live and Think Like Pigs deviates from its contemporary relative, Preliminary Materials. Despite a similar commitment to the gesture of personification and to a freewheeling, affectively oriented writing style, To Live and Think Like Pigs directs its rhetoric at more than one conceptual persona. In other words, while Châtelet does gender his antagonists, he does not situate danger neatly within the feminized. Châtelet, To Live and Think Like Pigs, 99–112.


60. Châtelet, 3.
I mean . . .”61 Yes, the Bécassines might say, but then they quickly sputter into “well . . . I mean . . . ,” unable to commit to anything, let alone true political action. Here not even the “older feminists” Wolf might associate with vocal confidence escape critique. Their quavering female voices betray an inner turpitude. Fuck ’em all, Châtelet shouts into a foul wind.

The aesthetic affinity between the “unseemly, confused stammering” of Châtelet’s Bécassines and the rumbling, hyperbolic vocal fry of Beckles’s Young-Girl can be felt in a video response to Preliminary Materials by Solarist Projects.62 Here quotations from Tiqqun’s manifesto overlay a mashup of two viral videos of different groups lip-synching to Carly Rae Jepsen’s global megahit “Call Me Maybe” (2012).63 An unofficial music video of female cheerleaders mouthing the words to Jepsen’s track and a reenactment video of male, often shirtless soldiers imitating the cheerleaders are edited together in disorienting oscillation. While the original call-and-response viral exchange is supposed to be funny—men stationed in Afghanistan ape the come-hither gestures of bikini-clad Miami Dolphins cheerleaders—Solarist Projects’s mashup is nauseating. As a sonic analogue to the rapid-fire flashing effect created by alternating between brief shots of cheerleaders and brief corresponding shots of soldiers, Jepsen’s once sweet voice is given a grating staccato techno-stutter dra-a-a-a-a-gg-ing out the song. This new “Call Me Maybe” sonifies the qualifying hesitation of the song’s title and lyrics—Jepsen repeatedly insists that a hottie should call her . . .


maybe (a “well . . . I mean . . .” if we’ve ever heard one) — and grossly exaggerates the irritating noncommittalness Wolf hears in vocal fry. It transforms a well-oiled melody into glitchy disjointed phrases through a poiesis and rhetoric of fragmentation, reminding us that “communicative capitalism fragments thought into ever smaller bits,” a process generally masked by metaphorical understandings of voice as coherent self-expression.64 Jepsen’s voice is now sliced, diced, deep fried . . . and we can’t even dance to it.

The mashup also fries its source videos, moving so quickly between the original call and the soldiers’ response that the supposedly clear distinctions between hot babe and military man, bikini and fatigues, dance squad and martial squad, pool patio and tank, ball pit and sand dune, no longer hold. “Seduction as war,” the video explains, quoting Tiqqun through textual overlays, “the magazine of my body.” Its tempo may have slowed, but the instrumental rhythm of the song marches on, while image and voice, both quavering, both sputtering, both rumbling, are made to tic. Recall that, at the time of her runaway hit single, Jepsen was a twenty-eight-year-old dead ringer for a high school frosh, and was certainly marketed that way. Solarist Projects does not so much defile the “utopian purity” of her sound (in the manner of Tiqqun, who use metaphors to equate critique with acts of violation) as it pushes Jepsen’s “pre-sexual chirpiness” to the point of actual warbling.65 Rendered almost tuneless, Jepsen’s new voice is an anxious trilling, her Bécassinian “well . . . I mean . . .” intervening repeatedly midword. “Permanent insecurity,” the video declares, again quoting Tiqqun.

Let’s return now to the issue of what to do with the voice of the Young-Girl: mash it up and fry it; own, disown, or disavow it; or maybe just fuck ’em all? While Châtelet rejects the girly voice,

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Beckles disidentifies with it, and Solarist Projects makes it glitch, *Death and the Jeune-Fille* gives us something different: it stages the question and not the answer. The play is an embodied inquiry into the ownership and dissemination of voices as a fraught process of political subjectivation. In a vertiginous array of operations, actors ventriloquize and parrot each other; repeat each other’s lines, but in a staggered loop; interrupt each other and sing in choral harmonies; perform in virtuosic rhythmic synchrony for an exhausting duration; read statements off cards, pointing to each word one by one, but then saying the wrong word; beatbox in rhythm and get overwhelmed by loud music. If the Young-Girl is an embattled interface between orality and literacy, as we argue earlier in this chapter, then this face at the border between mediums allows political subjects to emerge and also drowns them out.

In the Bureau de L’APA’s production, the Young-Girl interface can operate as a *pharmakon*, that is, both toxin and cure, actualizing powers and dangers of the voice that exist in their potential form within *Preliminary Materials*. This function resonates with Marco Deseriis’s understanding of the human mic, a practice from leftist protest movements that works “as remedy and poison on direct democracy” by amplifying the voice of the individual in the public sphere (remedy) regardless of the meaning or value of the individual’s ideas (poison).\(^66\) Otherwise known as the people’s mic and the human microphone, the human mic was practiced by the Occupy movement (2011–12) to contend with laws in New York City preventing the use of amplification in public space. Instead of employing microphones or megaphones to expand the reach of the voice, protesters systematically repeat the words of a speaker in unison. Speeches are broken into small segments for ease of repetition, and usually, each segment is repeated by smaller groups, which vocalize the utterance in waves that ripple across the large

audience. Unlike other kinds of chanting in protests, which focus on short, punchy statements shouted over and over for maximum force and unified energy (consider the call of “no justice!” and the response of “no peace!” repeated for an extended period of time), the human mic is designed to allow entire monologues to be heard, albeit ones that are fragmented and distributed across an audience in stages to facilitate transmission. The human mic gives an individual the volume of a crowd, a political speech the sensuous entreaty of a group chant, and a chorus the imperative to repeat words they as individuals may oppose. This final point is central to the ethics of the human mic.

Deseriis explains the human mic in the same terms as his description of the behavior of the improper name: “the Mic is a con-dividual or trans-individual assemblage of enunciation whereby individual and collective enunciations are intertwined rather than set in opposition to one another.” The Bureau de L’APA’s peculiar orchestration of speech in *Death and the Jeune-Fille*, though not as formulaic as the human mic (the simplicity of the latter procedure allows it to be performed in a multitude of situations by untrained individuals), likewise productively intertwines individual and collective enunciations. At the same time (and also like the human mic), *Death and the Jeune-Fille* transforms humans into a technology for amplifying the voices of others. Put more positively, we could consider this technology an “instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention.” This is Gayatri Spivak’s description of Echo, that once chatty mountain nymph we discussed in the introduction.

Deseriis’s claim that “the embodied, slow-paced and choral nature of the Mic can be seen as an antidote to the speedy and fragmentary nature of online communication” is provocative.

67. Deseriis, 46.
69. Deseriis, “People’s Mic as a Medium in Its Own Right,” 42.
However, following his argument about the *pharmakon*, we might consider these attributes of the human mic to catalyze a cure *and* poison already present in networked culture. Articulating a lengthy speech via the human mic is a painfully slow process, as the speaker must fragment an enunciation into segments that can be repeated by the crowd. It can also be considered speedy, though, as the crowd’s response to any one of those fragments comes directly after the speaker’s call. Thus speech conveyed through the human mic is embodied, slow paced, and choral *as well as* speedy and fragmentary, transforming aspects of networked communication into low-tech, face-to-face address.

The Bureau de L’APA’s literalization of *Preliminary Materials* as an acoustic space likewise turns aspects of networked media into face-to-face communication. The power of the play lies in its rhythmic musicalization of the theory of the Young-Girl, recalling Rossana Reguillo’s description of the speaker’s role in the human mic as that of a “DJ whose art is not just to deliver a musical discourse, but also to know how to interpret the rhythm, the spirit, and the emotions that emanate and that are co-produced by the relationship between the DJ and the people before him or her.”

Although, at first listen, *Death and the Jeune-Fille*’s approach to musicalization seems more disordered than we hear with the human mic, it rather proposes that the noise of the Young-Girl is simply a more complex and uncomfortable form of order, with the performers’ staggered, layered, and often polyrhythmic speech suggesting a collective orchestration of affects. Such organization is maintained not by a conductor but by the performers themselves, with the aid of the Young-Girl interface.

Although *something important happens* when theories of the Young-Girl are spoken aloud, we do not characterize the literalization of the book’s acoustic patterning as necessarily subverting

or resisting the source text. There is no indication that *Death and the Jeune-Fille*, Carlos’s video introduction, or Ludd’s audiobook intends to critique *Preliminary Materials* at all. Indeed, an examination of the paratextual elements available suggests that these were created in support of Tiqqun’s war against the girly face of capitalism (as were Alex McQuilkin’s video discussed at the beginning of the book and the “Call Me Maybe” mashup). And Beckles’s video may give a sly side-eye to *Preliminary Materials*, but her work does not come off as clearly and entirely against it. Regardless, and most importantly, all four of these outloudings of *Preliminary Materials* respond to a call from within the text that asks for an oral-aural response in return. These responses are not predetermined, although they are made possible by the affordances of *Preliminary Materials* and participate, in varying degrees, in the text’s ear-catching, vibratory style. Even the least transformative of these three actions, Ludd’s simple shift in modality from a written text to a spoken one, brings something new into being through the decision to divide the text between the voice of advertising and the voice of philosophy.

When we write that *something important happens* in the vocalization of theories of the Young-Girl, what do we mean? Here let’s turn to Maurizio Lazzarato’s analysis of “The Micro-Politics of Voice and Gesture” from his book *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Relying on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, whom Lazzarato praises for “hear[ing] voices” as opposed to “see[ing] differential relations between signs or between signifiers,” Lazzarato identifies the function of the voice in organizing power dynamics. Before speech is concretized into words and sound transmuted into meaning, intonation materializes an “affective and ethico-political” address to the listener. “Only when the voice penetrates and appropriates words and propositions do these

71. Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Semiotext(e), 2014), 182.
72. Lazzarato, 182.
73. Lazzarato, 183.
latter lose their linguistic potential and transform into an expression that appeals to friends and wards off enemies, that threatens or flatters, repels or pleases, opening to the risk and indetermination of enunciation.”\textsuperscript{74} The outloudings of \textit{Preliminary Materials} draw the written text into a bold affective and ethico-political stance—\textit{Death and the Jeune-Fille}, for example, through its virtuosic manipulation of vocal rhythms across speech and music, and the audiobook through its surprising choice to alter the voice past ready intelligibility. Both of these theories of the Young-Girl use the paralinguistic aspects of speech to penetrate and appropriate the words and propositions of \textit{Preliminary Materials}.

Importantly, Lazzarato is not lauding this “affective and ethico-political” stance as politically enabling and ethically empowering. Not necessarily. His argument grows out of an analysis of a racist and xenophobic statement made by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2005 in which the presidential hopeful offered to get rid of “scum” (\textit{racaille}), young suburban Parisians, many immigrants of color, who were rioting as a response to police brutality and economic inequities.\textsuperscript{75} In his highly politicized impromptu speeches during visits to the Parisian suburbs, Sarkozy referred to cleaning up the \textit{cités} with a pressurized hose—a strategically incendiary allusion to the U.S. police history of hosing antisegregation protesters—and equated the presence of the \textit{racaille} with the graffiti marring the historic white stone of Parisian buildings. As we outline in our article on slam poet Grand Corps Malade’s first album \textit{Midi 20} (2006), the term \textit{racaille} comes from the Latin \textit{rasicare}, \textit{racler}, \textit{radere}, which evoke the verbs “to scratch” and “to scrape.”\textsuperscript{76} Laurent Greilsamer links this etymological connection to how the taggers and graffiti artists

\textsuperscript{74} Lazzarato, 184.


reappropriated the space by scratching in marks of their belonging. The “affective and ethico-political” posture, as Lazzarato puts it, of Sarkozy’s condemnation “mobilized [the young residents of the projects] as rebellious, insubordinate, based precisely on their refusal to accept the assignation ‘scum.’”

Lazzarato’s claims regarding the force of paralinguistics are leveraged in a broader argument challenging the centrality of the speech act to theories of political subjectivity. Although the notion of the performative was a necessary intervention in the field of linguistics, it should not be as widely applied, Lazzarato insists, as performatives bring scripted actions into being and cannot adequately account for political change. Alternatively, the micropolitics of intonation turn an utterance into a truly dialogic and responsive oral-aural event embodying the political potential, for better or for worse, of hearing voices.

**Mic Check**

Although the human mic was not invented by the Occupy movement, it quickly made the practice its own. What started as a way for people to be heard outdoors without microphones or megaphones soon took on an additional function: the disruption of speeches by politicians and other leaders. The exclamation “mic check!” that begins the process of call-and-response for all enactions of the human mic was repurposed as an interruption by guerrilla protesters distributed throughout an audience gathered to hear an official speaker. The Verbi-Voco-Visual performance generally proceeds as

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78. Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, 183, 175.

follows: When one protester yells out “mic check!” others answer the call with a “mic check!” in response; this exchange is usually repeated. Then a speech is made, part by part, transmitted and amplified via the bodies of the human mic. While other types of human mic favor unscripted speech (or the appearance thereof) broken into short fragments expressed in direct language, thereby easing the process of transmission, the disruptive version of the practice is more open to written text, which allows longer and more complex segments of political speech to be articulated by reading off the page and ensures that if any single caller is removed from the venue, another can take her place and deliver the message. Americans Karl Rove, Newt Gingrich, Barack Obama, Michele Bachmann, and Scott Walker and French former managing director of the International Monetary Fund Christine Lagarde (among others) have all been mic checked, with video documentation circulating on YouTube. The interventionist mic check has expanded beyond the Occupy movement proper, with recent actions by Extinction Rebellion Denver (in an antifracking demonstration), Hydropunk and Take Back the Bronx (at an event in the Bronx hosted by the New Museum), and University of Michigan Law students (at a recruiting event for an international law firm representing ExxonMobil).

Reading off the page while speaking aloud, speaking while listening to others, for a face-to-face audience as well as one watching

80. For example, check out IOccupyFor, “Gov. Scott Walker Gets Checked, Mic Checked!,” YouTube video, 3:45, November 4, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oHRdiklTlU.
via social media, does something to texts. It transforms the intimate act of reading into collective experiences; opens the private inner voice into public space; transforms subvocal speech into laryngeal phonation, which interacts acoustically with architecture, ambient sound, and other voices; and disassembles and then reassembles voices, in new forms, to be heard from phones and computers, sometimes desynchronized from the movement of mouths due to video playback issues. In the case of the human mic, the intertwinement of individual and collective enunciations is generated, in large part, by the caller/DJ, who sets the rhythm for the crowd as much as she responds to it. Intertwinement here is a back-and-forth call-and-response and a defined rhythmic synchrony, an ordering of voices that operates synecdochally to demonstrate the solidarity and organization of the protesting group.

Rhythmic synchronization is also foregrounded in karaoke videos, which have subtitles that highlight lyrics word by word as the songs unfold so singer-readers can keep time with the music. An artist going by the name of Omsk Social Club feat. PUNK IS DADA makes good use of such subtitles in Meat Space # My Girlfriend Is the Revolution (2014), a mesmerizing dance video in which a synthesized masculine voice speaks aloud quotations from Preliminary Materials, with the viewer-listener-reader invited to follow the typography on-screen as each word turns from white to magenta, karaoke style. The soundtrack is a dance version of Alphaville’s “Forever Young” (1984), slowed down as in chopped-and-screwed remixes, but without the corresponding lowered pitch. As a girlsquad dances in time to the loping 4/4 beat and the crude techno-voice speaks as Tiqqun, the viewer-listener-reader, at least these viewer-listener-readers, taps a foot and synchronizes the voice in her head to the highlighted typography. One of us, a karaoke champ, “sung” along.

For Michel de Certeau, bodily entrainment is the primary problem with all reading aloud, the dominant (though not exclusive, as he wrongly assumes) mode of reading prior to the nineteenth century:

To read without uttering the words aloud or at least mumbling them is a “modern” experience, unknown for millennia. In earlier times, the reader interiorized the text; he made his voice the body of the other; he was its actor. Today, the text no longer imposes its own rhythm on the subject, it no longer manifests itself through the reader’s voice. 83

Silent reading liberates the “actor” from the rhythmic thrall of the text, claims de Certeau, with clear political implications.

While all language is political, the stakes of our discussion are higher in regard to speech and text that aim to make the reader and listener aware of the dynamics of power (however that power is understood), as liberation, silencing, collective empowerment, individual freedom, bodily agency, and “having a voice” are often determining concepts in discourses of political subjectivation. The presence of the voice in the printed text and the clear articulation of the text through the voice were especially important to publisher and polymath Benjamin Franklin, perhaps because of the function of tone in political satire. Bemoaning the reprinting of his anonymously authored “An Edict of the King of Prussia,” following then new typographic conventions, Franklin grumbles to his politician son in 1773 that it was “stripped of all the capitalling and italicing, that intimate the allusions and marks [sic] the emphasis of written discourses, to bring them as near as possible to those spoken.” 84

Sixteen years later, he’s still fuming about contemporary printed texts, which hinder the reader’s ability “to order the modulation

of the voice” appropriately when reading aloud. Franklin makes an interesting case for authorship as an anonymous, faceless, but highly vocal enterprise that turns a reader into a kind of “actor.” The question is whether this theatricalization is an invitation to political action or, as de Certeau would hear it, the individual’s entrainment to the coercive rhythm of another.

A nostalgia piece from 1921 (“an age of haste,” the author sighs dramatically) offers an explicitly depoliticized explanation of the rhythmical “magic of reading aloud.” Muriel Harris attempts to revive the Victorian bourgeois practice of reading aloud, especially within the home. “Leisureliness has a measure, a rhythm, while haste stumbles and wastes. . . . And reading aloud had of all things to be leisurely—as leisurely as a patchwork quilt or curtains of the finest netting.” Harris credits reading aloud with one’s family in the evenings as the primary education for bourgeois women. The association between vocalized reading and feminine domesticity is so strong as to motivate Harris to tout “the transformation of the school into something more like home” as a benefit of the practice in pedagogical settings. Here the haste of silent reading—which de Certeau understands as a kind of freedom—is destructive to rhythm itself, its individualized nature a corruption of the feel-good sociality of the drawing room. Harris’s understanding of the kind of homey collectivity engendered through reading aloud is in contrast to another nineteenth-century British textual practice, reading radical periodicals aloud at taprooms and political gatherings. We wonder if any of Harris’s Dickens fangirls squee-ing in rapt attention to his latest installment were able to go to bars.

Recalling several modes of collective listening to text, from the overtly political to the nostalgically cozy, YGRG, another response

85. Franklin, “To Noah Webster, Esq.,” in Works of Benjamin Franklin, 6:238.
87. Harris, 348.
88. Harris, 351.
to *Preliminary Materials*, stages events in which performers read books aloud. A performance series created by Polish artist Dorota Gawęda and Lithuanian artist Eglė Kulbokaitė, YGRG began in 2013 in Berlin as a weekly reading group, for which the first text was Reines’s translation of *Preliminary Materials*. Since, Gawęda and Kulbokaitė have mounted numerous performances riffing on the format of the reading group in increasing complexity, in galleries in London; in Brooklyn, New York; in Rio de Janeiro; and throughout Eastern and Western Europe, especially in Germany. A press release, most likely written by the artists themselves, describes the series in the following manner:

Young Girl Reading Group investigates the act of reading as intimate experience, holding the potentiality to become public through the “outlouding” of words, otherwise under-emphasized. In correspondence with Tiqqun’s *Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young-Girl*, organized around feminist thought both historical and contemporary, and inspired by theory and fiction, YGRG provides an intimate discursive space within the experience of collective reading. 89

Prioritizing feminist and queer theory as well as science fiction, YGRG has outlouded texts by Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti, Octavia Butler, Sylvia Federici, Zakiya Hanafi, Donna Haraway, Luce Irigaray, Hao Jinfang, Ursula K. Le Guin, Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, Paul B. Preciado, and many others. “The individuated texts we choose become filaments of infinitely tangled webs,” the artists explain. 90

The current format of the events involves performers of all genders adopting a series of poses, positioned in an art installation involving flat-screen monitors or video projections and other elements (sometimes quite involved, such as piles of rotting grass or

hundreds of pounds of rust-brown powder arranged in mounds), while reading sections of texts aloud, usually off cell phones (in a performance in London in 2016, “zip-ties were used to fix digital reading devices onto performer’s [sic] bodies and also onto the bodies of some audience members,” writes Hannah Nussbaum). The events are simultaneously live streamed. “The performers lounge around reading from their phones, transmitting performances through Instagram stories—just like us in our bedrooms,” as critic Anastasiia Fedorova describes. YGRG also runs an active Facebook page, currently comprising more than thirty-seven hundred members, on which the artists post invitations to their performances, calls for submissions for art exhibitions, and news articles about environmental issues, human rights violations, and the activism of feminists of color around the world, among other topics.

Gawęda and Kulbokaitė frequently frame their practice as playing with the boundary between the private and the public. They use cell phones in their performances because “the phone gives you a feeling of safety and familiarity,” like the bourgeois drawing room as Harris experienced it, we might add. “It makes you feel like you are in your own space, although actually, it’s the opposite.” Semi-reclining and propped up on elbows, leaning wanly against each other, or lying on stomachs with legs in the air, performers read aloud in postures suggestive of teenage slumber parties, reminding us of Tiqqun’s insistence that “the supposed liberation of women did not consist in their emancipation from the domestic sphere, but rather in the total extension of the domestic into all of society.” Indeed, although the artists often explain their work as turning the


93. Gawęda qtd. in Fedorova.

94. Tiqqun, Preliminary Materials, 43.
private into the public, we could also understand it as turning the public into the private. More specifically, the choreography recalls bodies chilling in the private space of the “boudoir” (“a space which enclosed both female reading and female sexuality,” as Gawęda puts it), boudoirizing the gallery, while the collective outlouding of texts reanimates Harris’s homey, classed vision of girls’ educational experiences in the nineteenth-century drawing room, but as a newly politicized and self-aware form of leisure.95

Gawęda and Kulbokaitė have an admittedly “uneasy relation” with the Young-Girl whose girl power, McKenzie Wark explains, has turned “life in the overdeveloped world” into “a social boudoir.”96 Their discomfort “triggers the need to commit to YGRG as a space for conversation.”97 This articulation of the goal of YGRG is from a 2015 email interview in which the artists adopt the now familiar practice of aping aspects of Preliminary Materials, in this case, the manifesto’s epigraph from Hamlet and the first three chapter titles. Their “manifesto” interweaves quotations from Preliminary Materials with quotations from critiques of Preliminary Materials and references to other works of theory, incorporating into the fragmented body of the text the tools of its own undoing.98 Out of “a hyperlink-heavy selection of quotes, references, aphorisms and assertions, which at times read like concrete poetry, at others, a comment feed on social media,” as interviewer River Young describes it, emerges the artists’ assertion that “the Young-Girl here is the one who’s acting.”99

What does it mean for the Young-Girl to act? In the case of YGRG, it is “about listening to each other—while reading.”100 YGRG explicitly configure the aurality of their performances as the largest part of

95. Gawęda qtd. in Fedorova, “Young Girl Reading Group.”
97. Qtd. in Young, “Manifesting Young-Girl Reading Group.”
98. Young.
99. Young.
a broader feminist enterprise to reorganize the senses without the patriarchal dominance of vision, empowering hearing, touch, and even smell. Sometimes YGRG works with signature scents, such as for the performance YGRG154: Body Heat at the Amanda Wilkinson Gallery in London, featuring sections from Richard Sennett’s *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (1994), among other texts. “Throughout the performance and exhibition an aroma-diffuser releases a scent that the artists commissioned from the parfumier Caroline Dumur at IFF Inc. Her brief was to create a smell that embodies the concept of the Young-Girl.” The effect of the perfume and its intermingling with the smell of bodies was likely amplified by heat lamps positioned over the readers. YGRG aim to create total experiences; McLuhan, whose book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is referenced in an interview with YGRG, explains that “oral means ‘total’ primarily, ‘spoken’ accidentally.”

Another response to *Preliminary Materials* also aims to reorient our sensory experience, turning away from an ocularcentric understanding of the Young-Girl as either object or subject of the gaze and instead foregrounding the affective charge created by the convergence of sense perception. *Bubble Boom, the Jeune-Fille said: a bit of bubble and a little bit of boom* by Lopez and René-Worms has a live element in addition to the poetry we previously discussed. For the performance, spectators milled about, drank special cocktails, and smelled “an acidulous and repellent perfume” (a sister scent, perhaps, of the Young-Girl/Man-Child’s rotting butter, discussed in the previous chapter), while performers whispered quotations from *Preliminary Materials* into their ears, chewed pink gum, and blew bubbles. The intimate proximity of the whispering perform-

ers to the bodies of the audience extended the sensorial reach of quiet speech; we assume that the hot breath of the speaker could be felt by the listener. The sweet smell of the gum mixed with the offensive perfume and the performers’ personal scent, no doubt (gum and perfume also feature prominently in Beckles’s *Theory of the Young Girl*).

Lopez and René-Worms’s remixed theory of the Young-Girl moved through the crowd like a pathogen (language is a virus, sings Laurie Anderson after Burroughs, though not after COVID-19). It spread through a cloud of intoxication and sweet acridity, like small-town gossip, like salacious social media chitchat. The circulatory behavior of this theory mediatized performers and audience in the convergence culture of the gallery space, recalling Henry Jenkins’s argument regarding “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.”

“Bubble gum is whispered and penetrates the body / Perfume and bitterness,” explains the poem. Lopez and René-Worms’s performance emphasized the synaesthetic possibilities of the age of bell(es). The Young-Girl is an oral fixation that simultaneously fascinates and offends, and the gallery public was invited to become what Grant McCracken calls, not consumers, but “multipliers,” participants who spread the word.

Gum chewing has long been associated with youthful loitering and boredom. Moon Unit Zappa’s older male interviewer finds the wad of gum pressing against the inside of the Valley Girl’s cheek uncomfortably funny, while the Young-Girl’s gum chewing would


105. “Bubble Boom.”

106. Grant McCracken, “‘Consumers’ or ‘Multipliers,’” *Spreadable Media*, https://spreadablemedia.org/essays/mccracken/index.html#.XyOZfiiHPzOQ.
certainly annoy and affront Tiqqun.\footnote{Thompson, “Moon Unit Zappa Full Show.”} Just as chewing gum is performing an essential task without producing its original effect—we usually masticate to break down our food better for the extraction of nutrients—the language that Tiqqun attribute to the Young-Girl “is not made to talk with, but rather to please and to repeat.”\footnote{Tiqqun, \textit{Preliminary Materials}, 25.} If the Young-Girl’s language is more like filling a chewable substance with air than creating meaning through the semantic, it has nevertheless figured out affective and paralinguistic ways to assure its spread. “I have come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass, and I’m all out of bubblegum.” So goes the iconic one-liner from John Carpenter’s anticapitalist opus \textit{They Live} (1988).\footnote{Movieclips, “They Live (1988)—Here to Chew Bubblegum and Kick Ass Scene (4/10) Movieclips,” YouTube video, 2:16, August 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Du5YK5FnyF4.} The Young-Girl always has gum and is never allowed to kick ass, although she is, like the last name of \textit{They Live}’s hero, Nada. There’s an old wives’ tale that swallowed gum stays lodged inside the body for seven years.

\textit{Bubble Boom, the Jeune-Fille said} exploits multiple modes of bodily infiltration through taste, smell, touch, and sound. YGRG events also use the total sensory experience, reconfigured through the dehierarchizing power of orality, to produce a situation that amplifies an awareness of the permeability of bodies. Olfaction is important because smell is, for them, “\textit{a performative play on the molecular level that highlights the breaking boundaries between us, the other and nature, flowing through and across humans and machines, life-forms and non-life-forms.}”\footnote{Ella Plevin, “Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė at Futura,” \textit{Art Viewer}, October 28, 2019, https://artviewer.org/dorota-gaweda-and-egl-e-kulbokaita-at-futura/.}

This “vulnerable hyperbody” generated through their performances is one of “particles and molecules that circulate within,” they write, as well as “prefaces,” “citations,” and “appendices.”\footnote{Gawęda et al., “Young-Girl Reading Group.”}
Their theory of the Young-Girl gives text a material granularity and smell a citational force in the read-writing of collective bodies. The artists insist that “the porosity of a queer reading enables us to observe the constellations of history as engulfed in capital and governed by an invisible grid of regulated spaces, actual and virtual like.”¹¹² Perhaps surprisingly, their critique of capitalism comes alongside an embrace of the commodity form: the perfume used for YGRG 154: Body Heat was sold at a YGRG Outlet alongside branded clothing as part of the exhibition YGRG 14X: reading with a single hand at Cell Project Space in London. According to the press release for the YGRG Outlet, “the store represents a branded material collapse of production into a gesture of social performativity using their recently patented fragrance BODY AI, newly commissioned limited editions and sportswear line. In the same way as the artists’ social media interventions, their branded unisex YGRG T-shirts and sweatshirts orientate their activities around collectivity and peer-to-peer circulation.”¹¹³ It is unclear if this is irony. We recall Julian Hanna’s words on the form of the manifesto: “the manifesto, which has long borrowed from advertising, has itself been coopted as a business-friendly genre. It has of late become tame, even cute: an untroubling, unironic, fully digested meme for the attention deficient.”¹¹⁴ If, indeed, “the Young-Girl here is the one who’s acting,” then whose rhythms is she performing, who is the desired audience, and who, if anyone, is winking?¹¹⁵ A network of etymological affil-
iations ties together chant, enchanting, secret language, insincere talk, “the whining or singsong tone of a beggar.”

Through performances of reading and writing—YGRG write extensively about their own practice, actively constructing the critical context for their production—Gawęda and Kulbokaitė purvey “intimate publicity” from within the perfumed boudoir of the Young-Girl. They have an “uneasy relation” with her, although she “gives the name to our project and opens up to the problematic networks of ideas to be discussed.” YGRG poses several compelling questions, questions with which we have an uneasy relation. How can we engage the powerful feelings of totality and integration that pervade digitally enabled acoustic space? How can we simultaneously reject the totalizing and integrative power of the Spectacle (“oral means ‘total’ primarily, ‘spoken’ accidentally”)? How can we resist the multisensuous demands of communicative capitalism, given the vulnerability of our bodies? At the same time, how can we commit to that resistance without losing vulnerability itself as an embodied communicative capacity?

117. Heublein, “Permeable Screens.”
118. Qtd. in Young, “Manifesting Young-Girl Reading Group.”
119. McLuhan, “Brainstorming.”