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Abstract for *Political Animals*

**Thinking ‘Outside the Vox’[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*[…] shofar is the voice independent of the vocalization of the signifier.*

*- Dolar, 55.*

This chapter will attend to a cluster of historical yet persistently ongoing problems in how we think of the voice especially as a category opposed to that of speech (the legacy of Aristotle’s *Politics*). Ultimately the chapter will argue for the political urgency of the deconstruction of this opposition (in light of a range of texts by Jacques Derrida, from *Voice and Phenomenon,* 2010,to *Sovereignties in Question,* 2005). Thus this will not be a matter of simply arguing for the inclusion of animals within the realm from which they have been conceptually excluded. Rather in revising the voice – speech relation, politics itself will undergo modification. En route it will examine a contemporary discourse that manifests a particular resistance to changing the grounds by which the notion of ‘political animals’ might be radically reconfigured such that the term no longer bespeaks human exceptionalism. The discourse in question is the post-Lacanian psychoanalysis of Mladen Dolar (*A Voice and Nothing More,* 2006).

The peculiar signature of Dolar’s influential book lies in the way in which - while acknowledging the Aristotelian tradition – voice now accrues to the human. In so doing voice, conceptualized after Lacan as the silent ‘voice-object,’ blocks any engagement with the sounds of voices whether made by humans or other animals (and thus blocks any possibility of taking sounds made by animals as significant). Seeking to remedy at least the acoustic dimension of this problem, John Mowitt (‘Like a Whisper’ 2011) has recently turned to the framing of sound in psychoanalysis as an explicitly political problem that rests on ‘the excision of the animal in the political animal’ (186). While ‘whispering’, in Mowitt’s analysis, departs from merely hushed speech to indeed remain *like* a whisper, incorporating a variety of acoustic phenomena including the sound of the wind or rustle of leaves, since it is also embedded in the discourse of trauma, a field dominated by psychoanalysis, it is difficult to see what transformation could occur.

The sound of the shofar in Yom Kippur shows up in Dolar – again in deference to Lacan – as the sound of the dying Father’s voice in explicit reminiscence of the totemic destruction of the father in simultaneity with the commencement of his Law. In tune with the reduction of totemism in Freudian legend to the conduit of patriarchy, human breath passing through the ram’s horn sounds of anything but an animal. Indeed for Dolar the only ‘sound’ of note is that of the ‘voice object,’ which here is understood as the cleavage between the commanding presence of the Father and the ambiguous alterity of the feminine. This chapter will allow the shofar to resound in light of Derrida’s discussion of ‘the thought of the world’ as the carrying of the other - an other not preordained as human (‘Rams’ in *Sovereignties*).

**Bio**

Lynn Turner is the editor of *The Animal Question in Deconstruction* (2013) and co-author of *Visual Cultures As… Recollection* (2013, with Astrid Schmetterling). She is currently editing *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (2016, with Undine Sellbach and Ron Broglio). She is one of the assistant editors of *Derrida Today* and arts editor of *parallax*. She is Senior Lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

1. John Mowitt, *Radio: Essays in Bad Reception*, California University Press, 2011, p.46. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)