**Voice**

it is this *faculty of supplementarity* which is the true ‘origin’-or nonorigin-of languages: articulation in general […].[[1]](#endnote-1)

‘Articulation, wherever one finds it, is indeed articulation: that of the members and the organs, différance (in the) (self-same) (*propre*) body.’[[2]](#endnote-2)

**Prelude**

Speculating on cetacean intelligence in 1967, American neuroscientist John C. Lilly wondered what humans would have to do in order to ‘excite the most respect’ from whales.[[3]](#endnote-3) He suggested that ‘a full symphony orchestra playing a symphony’ would do the trick.[[4]](#endnote-4) This would contrast markedly with their other reference point for human beings, he notes, as ‘in-concert murderers of whales’.[[5]](#endnote-5) In 2009, Ben Walsh, the executive director of M & C Saatchi in Sydney echoed Lilly in the form of an advertisement for Australian telecommunications company, Optus. Through the contemporary safety net of CGI and strategic editing, the company asked if

it would be possible to emulate a male humpback: to write our own love song and then play it, using the instruments of an orchestra? Could we serenade a humpback ourselves? Then imagine what could happen if the whales were to hear our song. We thought that would prove that when it comes to communication, anything is possible.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The likelihood of advertising executives reading Lilly’s *The Mind of the Dolphin* is perhaps small.[[7]](#endnote-7) But that his speculations should echo decades later in other disciplines is not surprising, notwithstanding Walsh’s nationalistic efforts to ground the ‘inspiration’ for the advert in recent scientific research on humpback songs from Queensland University, Australia.[[8]](#endnote-8) In his own ‘leviathan’ *Sounding the Whale*, D. Graham Burnett describes Lilly’s work as the ‘single largest factor’ in transforming scientific and popular understanding of cetaceans as ‘intelligent’ life in distinction to creatures that could be killed with impunity.[[9]](#endnote-9) For Burnett, the lurid history of Lilly’s experiments with dolphins, incorporating both LSD and vivisection, was both far from unusual in 1960’s American military scientific practices and inseparable from that culture’s bioacoustic ambition to navigate the world’s waters in a covert fashion.[[10]](#endnote-10) It may well prove impossible to glean any knowledge regarding cetaceans that is free from entanglement with agencies from which we may prefer to remain disentangled, in this case the military and also the history of whaling. Donna Haraway’s persistent cultivation of the ‘non-innocent’ grounds of thought suggests that this entanglement is a general condition (in need of acknowledgement rather than disavowal). Burnett, by analogy, follows the Haraway of *Primate Visions* in seeing his work on cetology ironically reveal a ‘school for the study of human similarity and difference and a school for the teaching of the same.’[[11]](#endnote-11)

To recall briefly the narrative of the Optus advert: small vessels ferry orchestral instruments and musicians to a floating stage; as the instruments and anticipatory humans face the sea, the traditions of indigenous cultures are evoked and displaced; from their first whale-like notes the orchestra hear a whale intone and they resume playing enthusiastically; the camera cuts to underwater to visually evidence humpbacks heading towards the source of this sound; using classic point of view shots, the advert cuts back to a single whale breaching in apparent appreciation of the orchestral efforts; in spite of the whale’s girth, she merely causes a little sea spray; the small craft bearing the orchestra remains stable in the serene sea; the humans are joyously wonderstruck; the advert concludes that ‘when it comes to communication, anything is possible.’ In this fantasy of interspecies telecommunication a number of problems come together: the domestication of the humpback as both polite audience and performing animal; the dominance of the visual over the sonic; a perhaps productive confusion between voice and speech and music; and, the unwitting suggestion that whales are able to distinguish between a song that seduces - that is a summons to mating, and a performance of a song about love.

This chapter addresses the non-innocent knowledges that overlap when it comes to the question of voice, in the context of cetaceans in particular. Yet it also aims for a deconstructive difference such that study of the other species may not simply perform a solipsistic return to ourselves. Thus, the chapter does not concentrate on the more well trodden path of speaking for those who ‘do not have a voice’ in the sense of animal advocacy since this strategy leaves so many of our inherited concepts and political forms in place.[[12]](#endnote-12) Rather, it demands a revaluation of the abilities that we thought were our own as vulnerabilities in common with other species; even as those vulnerabilities are given singular expression, say in the event of whale song.

**The Oestrus Complex**

Many sets of ideas dogmatically recur across various fields of writing on animals, from philosophy to ethology. Writing against the elevation of the narrow field of language by psychoanalysis in light of the wider category of the trace, Jacques Derrida alights on what Jacques Lacan determines as the capacity to pretend.[[13]](#endnote-13) In Derrida’s account, the Lacan of the *Ecrits* does permit animals some complexity in communication by virtue of pretence in the specific circumstances of seduction and combat. But he refuses them the redoubled capacity of pretending to pretend, or to lie, or even to bear witness to a lie.[[14]](#endnote-14) This redoubled capacity is pivotal for language and characterizes it as the possession of humans alone. Embedded in the logic that fundamentally splits nature and culture, seduction and combat are excused as need and thus as natural in contradistinction to the lie as the convenor of culture and of the signifier. Without detailing Derrida’s critical revision of this trap at this point, I note merely the familiarity of the themes of seduction and combat.

As is well known, Aristotle credited humans alone with the capacity for speech while sharing the wider category of voice with other animals. Naming man in his *Politics* ‘as a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal’ by virtue of his sole possession of speech, in his *History of Animals* Aristotle goes into some physiological detail about why this he finds this to be the case.[[15]](#endnote-15)

The fact is that no animal can give utterance to voice except by the action of the pharynx, and consequently such animals as are devoid of lung have no voice; and language is the articulation of vocal sounds by the instrumentality of the tongue. Thus, the voice and larynx can emit vocal or vowel sounds; non-vocal or consonantal sounds are made by *the tongue and the lips*; and out of these vocal and non-vocal sounds language is composed. Consequently, animals that have no tongue at all or that have a tongue not freely detached, have neither voice nor language; although […] they may be enabled to make noises or sounds by other organs than the tongue.[[16]](#endnote-16)

In the case of the dolphin, he goes on:

The dolphin, when taken out of the water, gives a squeak and moans in the air, but these noises do not resemble those above mentioned [non-vocal noises]. For this creature has a voice (and can therefore utter vocal or vowel sounds), for it is furnished with a lung and a windpipe; but its tongue is not loose, nor has it lips, so as to give utterance to an *articulate* sound […].[[17]](#endnote-17)

Other animals may make noises or even ‘voice’, but they are physiologically barred from rendering these sounds articulate. Notwithstanding Aristotle’s limited familiarity with cetacean physiology including what are now called the ‘phonic lips’ internal to odontocetes heads, the problem of articulation will return in various forms throughout this chapter. While humans have apparently only been listening to the songs produced by whales by virtue of underwater microphones (hydrophones) over the last fifty years, it is remarkable how many marine researchers repeat Aristotle’s linked view that ‘all animals without exception exercise their power of singing or chattering chiefly in connection with the intercourse of the sexes.’[[18]](#endnote-18) As with the codicil of the ‘greater measure’ quoted previously, that this rule applies ‘chiefly’ in connection with seduction admits some lability.

In her recent work on humpback whales – the now most famous singers of the deep, philosopher Denise Russell draws attention to what we might call a failure of imagination when whale song is framed by many scientists entirely as the work of seduction: males sing in order to attract a mate.[[19]](#endnote-19) (To date only males have been observed singing, although, and as an index of the pace of new information in this field, recently recorded extra deep notes from humpbacks in their breeding grounds near Maui have caused scientists to speculate as to whether this previously undetected range - near the lowest limit of human hearing - might announce the sound of females after all.)[[20]](#endnote-20) Russell goes on to point out the numerous exceptions in numerous studies of when and where whales sing in excess of proximity to sites where they are known to reproduce. Philosopher and musician, David Rothenberg, who has himself played the clarinet to humpbacks through undersea speakers, goes so far as to say that while many bull whales have now been observed singing, in over thirty years of study no-one has concomitantly seen females rushing towards them.[[21]](#endnote-21) Rothenberg also points out our striking lack of attention to the sheer volume of sound made by whales – sounds which must surely have been at least *felt* as vibrations by those exploring the seas when those seas were teaming with such lives - prior to Naval recordings and official confirmation of this phenomena.[[22]](#endnote-22) In counterpoint to the doubts raised by Russell and Rothenberg on grounds of lack of visual evidence, in a recent lecture Philip Hoare offered a different twist on the same refrain made all the more curious given his extensive research on whales and experience in their company.[[23]](#endnote-23) He claimed that male humpbacks produce specifically penetrating bass tones in song in order to stimulate oestrus in females, their higher notes effectively produced by default as they run out of breath. The apparent absence of females in visible thrall to the song would then be beside the point, since sound travels faster in water than in air and these whales are among the loudest beings on the planet.[[24]](#endnote-24) The equation of breath with note perhaps reflects only the paucity of what human physiology might perform should we attempt to make sounds underwater, certainly it runs counter to studies of the structure of whale song. Studies such as those by The Whale Trust map patterns of a four to six theme sequence in each humpback song. *After each sequence* the whales then surface to breathe.[[25]](#endnote-25) Cetacean oxygenation is not like our own.

In their recent book, deliberately titled *The Cultural Lives of Whales and Dolphins*, biologists Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell detail the subsequent ethological study of what sounds are being made and by which species of cetacean. While nothing remotely like a babelfish has emerged to translate whatever it is that is being sung, they note with great interest not just that humpbacks are particularly loud singers, not just that they sing the same song in groups and in isolation, not just that their songs change over time, but that songs may change over a surprisingly short time, like a year, as well as travel, among different pods of whales, around the world’s oceans.[[26]](#endnote-26)

More speculatively – although without the light that speculation usually figures – we might wonder how the postures of humpback whales singing, tails closest to the ocean’s surface, upend our visual map of evolution. We are all too familiar with the ascent of man, diagrammed as the vertical ascension of a white man walking into the future, away from his more horizontal, hairy, dark, hominid ancestors. What might be the thought of evolution from land back to the sea, in the case of cetaceans, say? It could imagine a journey that does not order an ascent, in which a descent cannot be taken for the Fall. Rather than the horizontal plane surpassed and surveyed by the vertical, it would move from horizontal to any direction. This speculative evolution might also chart a journey not from smell to sight – Sigmund Freud’s narrative of the human, but *from smell to hearing*.[[27]](#endnote-27) Returning to the water from land, as Whitehead and Rendell point out, cetaceans maintained their mammalian dependence on breathing air, which allowed them to develop speed of movement, by virtue of oxygenation, as well as vocal communication.

For Animal Studies then, this would not just be a question of looking or listening for practices *beyond* seduction and combat as potential sites of complexity in non-human animals, although it is that. It is also to follow the implication of deconstruction and understand seduction and combat as *themselves* unable to be contained to a precisely ahistorical status of basic needs.

I’m aware, of course, that giving special attention to one group of animals here, as with recent attempts to lobby for non-human personhood for cetaceans, can attract the criticism of speciesism. By virtue of their brain size - relative to their bodies, and intelligence - relative to that of humans, cetaceans along with elephants and the great apes in particular become charismatic focal points for advocacy campaigns. Indeed when US Naval engineer, Frank Whatlington, gave recordings he had made of whales singing – made contingently while listening for enemy submersibles – to Kate and Roger Payne at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in 1964, he apparently told them ‘Go Save the Whales’.[[28]](#endnote-28) The recordings were subsequently integral to the early campaigns of Greenpeace.

While I would support such campaigns strategically, as Cary Wolfe advises, I also find increased engagement with the particularities of other creatures offered however unevenly by the life sciences both urgent and revealing. To pick up on my 2nd epigraph from Gregory Bateson - ‘I expect dolphin communication to be of an almost totally unfamiliar kind’ – he doesn't say this because ‘the animal’ is completely cut off from ‘the human’ (in the violent sense of the conceptual difference between the lacking animal and the capable human, that Derrida details). Rather he takes seriously the dramatic adaptation to life in water that cetacean bodies have undergone and thus departs from an anthropomorphic yardstick for intelligence.

Rejecting as ‘circus tricks’ the now infamous experiments to teach dolphins English carried out by John Lilley in the 1950’s including by injecting them with LSD, Bateson advised that if we are to get anywhere with understanding what dolphins sounds might mean then we must study inter-dolphin communication.[[29]](#endnote-29) Bateson’s work vehemently refuses the anthropomorphic misrecognition of seeing the idiosyncrasies of dolphin jaw development as the appearance of a ‘smile’ (the trademark trope of Seaworld). This misleading appearance is ironically most visible out of the water, or in shallow lit tanks. Deep underwater, with receding penetration of sunlight, the face, as we think of it in simplistic anthropomorphic terms (Seaworld) or ethical ones (Levinas) is beside the point. In his 1972 collection *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson suggests that

[a]daptation to life in the ocean has stripped the [cetaceans] of facial expression […] evolution has streamlined the body, sacrificing the expressiveness of separate parts to the locomotion of the whole.[[30]](#endnote-30)

This does not mean that cetaceans are not expressive. It does not necessarily mean, as Aristotle believed, that the lack of lips ruins the condition for articulation – although we might well ask ‘what are lips, or what do they do’. And incidentally, as if in a gesture of inoculation against future zoological knowledge, Aristotle assures us that voice is not ‘merely’ ‘the impact of inbreathed air against the ‘windpipe” but ‘what produces the impact must have soul in it and must be accompanied by an act of imagination’.[[31]](#endnote-31)

Rather, Bateson speculates, that ‘the information we get visually and the other terrestrial animals get visually must have been pushed [by cetacean evolution] into voice.’[[32]](#endnote-32) Given their underwater minimization of visual or analogue communicative forms, he further proposes that dolphin communication may rather operate digitally. Consequently without visual cues for comparisons across mammalian life – *they are not like us*, Bateson says that we will struggle to understand what ‘a primitive digital system for the discussion of patterns of relationship might look like’: it may, he says, ‘more probably, resemble music’.[[33]](#endnote-33)

***Animalséance***

I now want to turn to the ways in which voice sounds or is muted as an animal question when it comes to psychoanalysis. In the background I have in mind the question of suffering - the ‘can they suffer?’ question – through Derrida’s reformulation of Jeremy Bentham in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. While scholars such as Anat Pick have pointed out that we are only too capable of ignoring the suffering of others, human and non-human, Derrida’s emphasis on asking whether animals have the capability of suffering works also on another level. Counter-intuitively, asking ‘can they suffer?’ (instead of ‘can they speak?’) does not immediately, or primarily, operate as a call to empathy for the pain of the other. For Derrida, it is the *ability to suffer* that both modifies ‘ability’ which is now ‘no longer a power’, and also places vulnerability and mortality as that which we all share as transspecific common ground. It gives ‘the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals.’[[34]](#endnote-34)

Psychoanalytic frames, however, bind suffering into a problem of the relation between experience and language, where language and subjectivity are coextensive. I don't mean to sound so broadsweeping with the name of psychoanalysis, since it opens a diverse field and one with which I have much sympathy and find that a notion of *an* unconscious to be indispensable. My suspicion is that the most sophisticated recent psychoanalytic engagements with the question of the animal produce a new problem for animal studies. By the most sophisticated, I mean the work of John Mowitt, specifically his richly provocative essay from 2011 ‘Like a Whisper.’ There he gives attention to the framing of voice in post-Lacanian psychoanalysis as an explicitly political problem, one that rests on ‘the excision of the animal in the political animal’.[[35]](#endnote-35) The virtues of Mowitt’s acute reading are to bring out the pain of this excision and to do so precisely in the terms of pain *par excellence*, trauma. The snag is a move that absorbs ‘the animal’ as the anterior ground of ‘the human’ even though that ground may return symptomatically, traumatically.

CUT.

Mowitt’s work is, I think, engaged in a slightly oblique displacement of the work of Mladen Dolar. I phrase it thus since it is in only in Mowitt’s subsequent book on *Radio* that he specifically names the ironic issue with Dolar’s professed exegesis on the voice: any account of its acoustic character has faded away.[[36]](#endnote-36) This seems to me to be a problem both methodologically and politically. Mowitt’s ‘whisper’ might then strongly supplement Dolar’s ‘voice object’. My suspicion is that Dolar is explicitly involved in a kind of land grab to entrench the voice as the proper object of psychoanalysis embedding its traumatic qualities as effecting a properly human trouble. His book, *A Voice And Nothing More* has become a standard reference work to consult on the question of the voice and it is widely quoted by Lacanian and Deleuzian scholars alike, including in affirmation of Dolar’s signally willful misreading of Derrida. In fact it is only Mowitt, as far as I am aware, that has articulated the familiar strategy at work in Dolar vis-à-vis Derrida, namely that of ‘attributing to his interlocutor values the latter is known to have repudiated’.[[37]](#endnote-37) This may be because Mowitt has developed a theoretically less partisan body of work examining what he calls the ‘percussive field’ and that he maintains a long memory of disciplinary developments across the humanities. What Dolar actually writes is this:

So, if for Derrida, the essence of the voice lies in its auto-affection and self-transparency, *as opposed* to the trace, the rest, the alterity, and so on, for Lacan this is where the problem starts. The deconstructive turn tends to deprive the voice of its ineradicable ambiguity by reducing it to the ground of (self-) presence, while the Lacanian account tries to disentangle from its core the object as an interior obstacle to (self-) presence.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Dolar is sufficiently attached to this ‘ineradicable ambiguity’ that is reappears as the closing term sealing this chapter on ‘The Metaphysics of the Voice’.[[39]](#endnote-39) In loyal echo of his series editor, Slavoj Zizek, Dolar’s account mistakes the metaphysical legend of which Derrida is critical for his own account of what voice might be.[[40]](#endnote-40) As Mowitt puts it in his *Radio* book, the ‘ineradicable ambiguity [of the voice according to Dolar] cannot easily be disambiguated from precisely what Derrida means by the trace.’[[41]](#endnote-41) This is true. However, while Mowitt counters that what Dolar claims with ‘voice’ *is* what Derrida evokes as ‘trace’, Mowitt does not follow the ways in which Derrida’s trace opens out onto animal traces. What raises my hackles, then, with Dolar is that unlike the speech/voice distinction in Aristotle (bad enough), voice now becomes a properly human problem by virtue of its embeddedness in trauma (this is how it gets worse). ‘The animal’ risks becoming the new Real.

**The Trouble with Trauma**

Sensitive to acoustic meters in excess of ‘the voice,’ Mowitt works the difficult to grasp ground of the whisper as the means by which to catch wind of traumatic repetition. Whispering becomes this means through what it does rather than what it is (rather as if Foucault were listening in on a psychoanalytic session), while what it is remains intangible, of another character than simply hushed speech. Rather the whisper speaks to the ‘unvoiced’ in vocalization. Bearing in mind the character of trauma as that which constitutively lacks representation, Mowitt then goes on to name the whisper as that which channels the archaic pain of the domestication of animals and those humans who enjoin ‘the capacity to heal with the capacity to train’.[[42]](#endnote-42) I phrase it in this way since across Mowitt’s case studies, from the film named *The Horse Whisperer* to a hybrid television episode combining two popular series – *The Ghost Whisperer* and *The Dog Whisperer*, whispering both convenes non-human sounds *and* as if by some centrifugal force [which perhaps answers to the name ‘politics’] comes to settle upon the traumatic suffering of human subjects.[[43]](#endnote-43) While the non-human whispers that Mowitt indicates include a brief and highly suggestive reference to Pilgrim, the traumatised horse in *the Horse Whisperer* ‘telling […] secrets to himself, or picking them up from the insects, the wind, the thud of his own hooves’ in explicit if fleeting reference to Derrida’s recasting of the autoaffective voice as constitutively open to the outside in *Voice and Phenomenon*, the moment is brief.[[44]](#endnote-44) This tendency may well arise from the dominant conception of trauma as the site of the failure of words; traumatic experience is precisely unvoiced, inarticulate. This is the first lesson of psychoanalysis, derived from Freud’s formative years finding the means for hysterical patients to speak of rather than symptomatize their reminiscences, after all. Ironically in his much earlier and brilliant essay ‘Trauma Envy’ Mowitt was critical of the way in which Zizek demoted the merely local incidences of trauma mobilized by identity politics (in which a tally of the greater wound bestows the greater authority by which to speak) in order to make the grander gesture of identifying the Lacanian Real itself with trauma, thereby giving psychoanalysis the last word on the subject (with Zizek as its ‘Traumatic Colonel’ in Mowitt’s pithy pun).[[45]](#endnote-45) Yet I wonder if this gesture is bizarrely repeated in ‘Like a Whisper’ with animals on the side of the relatively local trauma of domestication and the human on the side of a wider and more profound condition of trauma.

By way of Aristotle and the ‘political animal’ as well as Nietzsche’s identification of the trauma of the expulsion of animality as the gesture of politics, Mowitt comes to his most complex offering. He argues that the problem is not simply the numerous methods of exploitation and destruction of animals by humans, but that humans work to destroy their own animality in order not to repeat this on animal others (albeit without success). I take Mowitt to mean that when we are exposed to psychic pain we are so exposed by means of a repetition of the pain of domestication (that is the expulsion of animality). ‘Trauma,’ as he puts it ‘regardless of its precipitating cause, repeats the becoming human of the animal’.[[46]](#endnote-46) Given his discussion of *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Dog Whisperer*, as well as his invocation of Freud’s land-loving legend of the ascent of man, it is not surprising that Mowitt speaks of horses and dogs.[[47]](#endnote-47) Harnessing these to the homogenizing force field that is the name of ‘the animal’ cannot help but command the homogeneity of animal experience in relation to domestication.[[48]](#endnote-48) The ‘subject’ as the structure obtained by the ‘political animal’ barely flinches. If trauma must be dependent on subsequent representation in order for any possible abreaction, then trauma must be properly human.[[49]](#endnote-49) If that trauma ‘repeats the becoming human of the animal,’ it is difficult to imagine how it might ever be heard. Hence it only ever travels ‘like’ a whisper.

I want to double back on elements from Mowitt’s field of enquiry that might retrieve other communicative processes from their psychoanalytic eclipse. For example, in name-checking Paul Patton’s essay on competing models of power in the training of horses – an essay housed in the same book, *Zoontologies*, as Derrida’s ‘And Say the Animal Responded’ - Mowitt alights on the putting of ‘linguistic knowledge back on the table’.[[50]](#endnote-50) Yet there are other ingredients also served up on this table. What strikes me as crucial in Patton’s own rather Foucauldian exegesis is his invocation of Monty Roberts’ method of ‘horse whispering’. In distinction to methods of ‘breaking’ horses both widely used and as specifically used by Roberts’ own brutal father (since, yes, there is a story of traumatised humans also shadowing this narrative) he aims for a non-violent method of what he calls ‘starting’ horses. Crucially, Roberts gleaned that horses were communicative participants in domestication and not simply its oppressed object. Moreover he learns this by, and develops his ‘join-up’ language on the basis of, observing wild mustangs in which mares discipline errant young horses by temporarily expelling them to the less secure outside edges of the herd.[[51]](#endnote-51) Discipline in and as communication does not simply arrive when horses met humans. Like writing for the Nambikwara people, which did not commence with the contaminating arrival of Europe in the form of Claude Levi-Strauss in Derrida’s famous analysis, discipline was already at work.[[52]](#endnote-52)

**Song sung blue**

The blanket administration of valium and many other drugs to dolphins in captivity is clearly an abhorrent acknowledgement of the traumas produced by such environments as Seaworld – and doubly abhorrent since this treatment is entirely for the benefit of human spectators. It is a training without healing, without a ‘dolphin whisperer’ in so far as that which evolved into voice in Bateson’s speculation, is collapsed into spectacle. I wonder if the noise pollution of the oceans produces traumatic effects on cetaceans that as well as patently contributing to ecological disaster, also impacts on the wild future of psychoanalysis.[[53]](#endnote-53)

Writing on acoustic ecology in the wonderful collection *Thinking with Water*, Shirley Roburns underlines the importance of sound to cetaceans from the practicalities of navigation through echolocation in the dark and massive space underseaworld to the orchestration of what Roburns calls ‘acoustic clans’.[[54]](#endnote-54) While the sheer speed and range of sound travelling through water has been to cetacean advantage, Roburns points to the volume of noise now entering the waters from industrial and military sources as catastrophically deafening causing stranding and death. Only in the last few weeks some 29 sperm whales have stranded and died along the east coast of the UK, Germany and the Netherlands (an unusually high number – strandings in this location average 6 per year). Discussion of these deaths on the *Guardian* environment pages from marine expert, Andrew Brownlow, suggests that ‘some things would never leave a pathological legacy, such as if they were startled and disorientated by noise.’[[55]](#endnote-55) This is a highly questionable understatement of the physical dangers of what can effectively be weaponised sound, and is directly contradicted by US Navy statements regarding sonar exercises in the Bahamas from 2000, not to mention their draft environmental impact statement for 2014-2018 which announces that its plans might ‘unintentionally harm marine mammals 2.8 million times a year over 5 years’.[[56]](#endnote-56) Some cetaceans themselves produce sounds offensively to stun or kill prey. Brownlow further remarks, in mystification, that the British Navy had not been conducting any ‘massive exercise’ comparable to the 2011 undersea explosions that killed 19 pilot whales off the coast of Scotland. Roburn’s article more holistically looks at the massive changes in ocean acoustics seen over the last century, from the heavy hitters such as Naval sonar, seismic surveys, and the testing of nuclear weapons, to the more banal but ever-proliferating volume and variety of shipping.[[57]](#endnote-57)

Rather than a psychoanalysis that that maintains a once and forever divide between the animal and the human, Derrida acknowledges the abyss between humans and other animals while seeing that abyss precisely as a site of growth, of cultivation. If trauma is inherent to historical life, this too is transfigured. History. That is to say, time. Summarising Rousseau, Derrida writes: ‘No prelinguistic sonority can […] open the time of music’.[[58]](#endnote-58) ‘Prelinguistic sonority,’ if there is such a thing would be timeless, it would only repeat the same thing (seduction, for example). If, as Derrida implies in OG, ‘prelinguistic sonority’ so-called not only opens the ‘time of music’ but all its Rousseauian associations, sociality, imagination, history, death. Then the categorical abyss between humans and other animals is displaced for the sake of a site of growth and cultivation. Giving attention to recordings of sounds made by humpback whales made their patterns discernible and they were named by the best word we had – song. Like our own conditions of communication, cetaceans do not have the *ability* to communicate, but rather the *vulnerability*.

Acoustic trauma, I’m wondering, occurs *both* through physical damage, *and* through interrupting the capacity of cetaceans to communicate.[[59]](#endnote-59) Deafening cetaceans means not just ruining their ability to hear – and Roburns notes the synesthetic sensory amalgam of ‘hearing’ and ‘touch’ in cetacean bodies, but also their ability to hear themselves, hear themselves thinking, perhaps, as sound waves articulate ocean space-time.

I move here between the particular - the effect of swiftly developing noise pollution on cetaceans, and the wider condition, the notion that historical life requires trauma. Perhaps the capacity to be traumatised by the interruption of communication is indicative of the wider reliance of all forms of communication to be so interrupted. ‘**Auto-affection** is a universal structure of experience. All living things are capable of auto-affection’ says Derrida, yet in affirmation rather than disavowal of ‘that dangerous supplement’, the outside, the other.[[60]](#endnote-60) The risk in the case of ocean life is not just that of anthropogenic pollution and overfishing but that the echo chambers, the echo-graphies of the ocean are diminished as they drown in anthropogenic noise.

1. *Of Grammatology*, 241. italics original. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Of Grammatology*, 248. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. John C. Lilly [1967] qtd in D. Graham Burnett, *The Sounding of the Whale: Science and Cetaceans in the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) p. 624. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. ‘M & C Saatchi launches Optus Whale Song’

<http://www.campaignbrief.com/2009/03/mc-saatchi-launches-the-optus.html>

accessed 08/02/16. As recently as April 2016 a brief twitter search shows viewers finding the advert online and assuming that it offers documentary evidence. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. John C. Lilly [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The advertisement with Walsh’s additional narration can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2ER2MXhPHg>

accessed 08/02/16. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Burnett, *Sounding,* p. 530. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Burnett, *Sounding,* p. 617. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Burnett, *Sounding,* p. 670. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. This path is critically discussed in Alison Suen’s *The Speaking Animal: Ethics Language and the Human-Animal Divide* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Jacques Derrida, ‘And Say the Animal Responded?’ trans. David Wills, in Cary Wolfe, ed. *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003) pp.121-146. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Derrida, ‘And Say the Animal Responded’ p.130. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Aristotle, from the *History of Animals* qtd in Zanata, 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Aristotle, qtd in Zanata, 8, emphasis added. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Aristotle, from the *History of Animals* qtd in Zanata, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Denise Russell, ‘Capturing the Songs of Humpback Whales’ in M. J. Boyde (Ed.), *Captured: The Animal Within Culture* (pp. 43-59) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0051214> [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. David Rothenberg and Laurie Anderson in conversation, https://vimeo.com/24119047 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. David Rothenberg, *Thousand Mile Song* (New York: Basic Books, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Philip Hoare, speaking at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, UK, 27 February 2016, author of *Leviathan, or The Whale* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Loudest beings…cite [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. <http://www.whaletrust.org/what-we-do/humpback-whale-research/whale-song/song-structure/> [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The Babelfish was a living universal translation organism imagined by Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell, *The Cultural Lives of Whales and* Dolphins (Chicago University Press, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Freud sketches the ascent of man in “Civilization and its Discontents” [1929] in the Penguin Freud Library V.12 *Civilization, Society & Religion*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991) 288, n.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Published August 6, 2015. Accessed 8 February, 2016. NPR special series ‘Close Listening: decoding nature through sound’.

http://www.npr.org/2015/08/06/427851306/it-took-a-musicians-ear-to-decode-the-complex-song-in-whale-calls [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. *The Girl who talked to Dolphins*, dir. Christopher Riley, UK, 2014.

Re: Tess Williams 2001 novel *Sea As Mirror*. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* 371. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Aristotle, from *De Anima*, qtd in Dolar, 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Bateson, 378. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Bateson, 375. Deleuze compares this digital communication to abstract painting (footnote in *Francis Bacon*). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Derrida, *Animal*, p.28. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. John Mowitt, ‘Like a Whisper’ in *differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies* 22.2-3, 2011, 186. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Mowitt, *Radio*, 2011, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Mowitt, *Radio*, 26. A strategy to which Zizek is especially prone. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 42, emphasis mine, qtd in Mowitt, 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Dolar, *Voice,* 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Zizek writes: ‘What Derrida remains blind to is the radical ambiguity of the voice.’ See Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, London: Verso, 1994, 195-96. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Mowitt, *Radio*, 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Mowitt, ‘Whisper’, p. 174. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *The Horse Whisperer* (dir. Robert Redford, US, 1998), *The Ghost Whisperer* and *The Dog Whisperer* (National Geographic). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Mowitt, p. 178. See Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, Leonard Lawlor (trans.) (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Mowitt, ‘Trauma Envy’ 284. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Mowitt, ‘Whisper’, p. 179. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Freud sketches the ascent of man in “Civilization and its Discontents” [1929] in the Penguin Freud Library V.12 *Civilization, Society & Religion*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991) 288, n.1. What might be the thought of evolution from land to sea, in the case of cetaceans, say? It could emphasise an evolutionary journey that does not order an ascent. Rather than the horizontal surpassed by the vertical, it would move from horizontal to any direction. It might also chart a journey not from smell to sight, but *from smell to hearing*. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Mowitt, ‘Like a Whisper’, 179. The first lesson of Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is the violent error of this false singular ‘the animal’, as administered by the one who ‘calls *itself* man’. Even in contemporary animal studies the insidious force of the concept often repeats the coral of ‘the animal’. See Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. One might think of the now extensive scholarship on elephant mourning in order to fundamentally question the human purchase on representation. See, for example, Kelly Oliver ‘Elephant Eulogy: the Exorbitant Orb of an Elephant’ *in The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, ed. Lynn Turner, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, 89-104. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Mowitt, ‘Whisper’ p. 172. Paul Patton, ‘Language, Power and the Training of Horses’ in Cary Wolfe (ed.) *Zoontologies: the Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003) pp. 83-99. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Patton, p. 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Derrida famously discusses Levi-Strauss in this context in, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976) pp. 135-136. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. http://news.discovery.com/animals/whales-dolphins/killer-whales-on-valium-common-practice-140404.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Shirley Roburn ‘Sounding a Sea-Change: Acoustic Ecology and Arctic Ocean Governance’ in *Thinking with Water*, eds. Cecilia Chen, Janine Macleod, and Astrida Neimanis, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/25/uk-whale-strandings-why-did-they-happen> (Accessed 09/02/16). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cetacean_stranding>

<http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/05/11/11659008-navy-raises-sonar-impact-on-dolphins-whales-dramatically?lite> [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. See also: <http://uk.whales.org/news/2016/02/new-research-reveals-noise-threat-to-endangered-orcas> (Accessed 09/02/16). [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Derrida, OG, 195. Emphasis added. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Ken Balcomb, cited in Roburn, p.107. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. *Of Grammatology*, 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)