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Another Voice: Towards an Aesthetics of the Voice in Cinema

Abstract

This paper proposes a model to understand the voice in cinema, constructed via psychoanalysis and classical cinematic sound theory. The voice as an object (as it is for psychoanalysis) supposes a hole in the Other, an object that slips meaning. Kaufman and Johnson's 2015 film *Anomalisa* is commented on along these lines. This movie renders visible the way the cinematic language sutures the subject (a character in the film) and the Other (the diegetic reality).

Keywords

Cinematic Voice, Psychoanalysis, Suture, *Lalangue*, Superego

Introduction: Back to the Voice

"Suture" is one of the critical concepts of traditional psychoanalytic film theory. It has been theorized since the 1960s, treated almost exclusively in the visual dimension of cinema. However, if the suture is the signifiers', not the images', why has sound (as in many other film theories) not been adequately incorporated into the study of suture? As Todd McGowan (2021) observed, despite Lacan's proposed two partial objects to add to the Freudian list, the gaze and the voice, the former has undoubtedly been studied much more than the latter.

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At the turn of the century, Slavoj Žižek (2001) proposed a new study of sutures beyond its classical articulation as a shot plus its counter-shot.[1] Žižek proposed a suture within the same shot. Žižek's account, although very complex and innovative in discussing the concept, still dwells almost exclusively on the visual realm.[2] We can continue this work, pointing to another, the more complex suture that goes even beyond the discussions of one or two shots: the suture between the diegetic reality and the character's subjectivity; i.e., the moments within films where the frontier between "objectivity" (in terms of the cinematic reality, the diegesis) and "subjectivity" (in terms of what the character sees and hears) is erased. This instance can be called *a singular experience suture*, which includes evident hallucinations in just a few scenes[3] to the whole film built upon this collapse. Furthermore, to bring the voice to the front of the discussions on suture, I would like to propose a reading of what a singular experience suture would be when embedded in the auditive dimension of a film: Charlie Kaufman and Duck Johnson's 2015 animation piece *Anomalisa*. This movie proposes an extraordinary aesthetic experience in the auditive field and might introduce us to a reflection of what a voice is for cinema, a psychoanalytic approach, and even a phenomenon like love.

Thus, I will start this text by commenting on the different voices we can discern in cinematic language. Then, I will introduce the concept of the voice as an object for psychoanalysis, which will lead us to the Lacanian *lalangue*. In opposition to this, the voice of the superego is discussed. These two manifestations of the voice, the nonsensical *lalangue* and the commanding voice of the superego offer us an intricate relationship that confronts the protagonist of the movie to the nature of love. It is argued that the voice is the possibility of a choice: a choice between the other and the Other, and this choice has strict aesthetic and ethical consequences.

[1] For an introduction to this debate, see the classical text by Heath (1977).

[2] The very honorable exception are the pages dedicated to Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Parsifal* (Žižek 2001, 40-42).

[3] One of the most popular types of this collapse between diegetic reality and the character's subjective experience is in *Dumbo* (1941): in the famous scene where him and the little mouse get drunk and hallucinate of pink elephants, it is evident for the spectator that within that diegetic reality there are no pink elephants, but that we see this scene in the film *as through Dumbo's singular drunk experience*.

The Cinematic Voice

A collection of voices, in which we can barely discern what they are saying, opens *Anomalisa* over a black screen. There is a distinctive, subtle laugh among them. Michael, our protagonist, is on a plane. He takes a pill (we have the first close-up of a mouth) and opens a folded letter. A sort of phantasmatic woman appears over the letter and starts speaking, reading a hostile message directed to Michael.

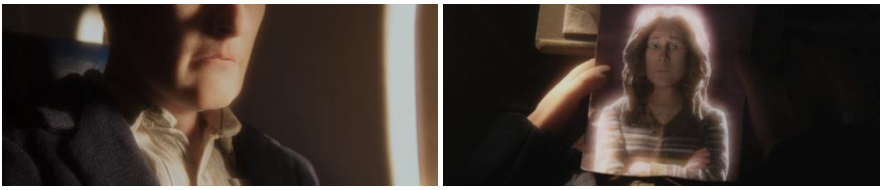

Fig. 1-2. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 00:02:44; 00:03:03)

Already here, we have complex issues to tackle regarding what is a voice for cinema: the first and most evident answer is that it is the voice that corresponds to a character. Let us call this *a character voice*. This correspondence is a starting point where we can align *a* voice to *a* character.

Nonetheless, it is widespread to hear voices in cinema that do not conform as easily to a specific character. This commonness introduces us to the concepts of voice-off and voice-over.

There are two types of voice-off for Pascal Bonitzer (1986, 322-323). The first is the voice that we hear from a character within film space, but we cannot see them: the character is *in the diegetic space and time*, just *out of frame*. Let us be more precise than Bonitzer and call this first type a *voice-over*: a voice that is heard and *whose source is within the diegetic space and time but out of frame*.

The second type of voice-off for Bonitzer is what we can call (and the way I understand it in this paper) a proper *voice-off*: a voice that is heard and whose source, whether known or unknown, *is not in the same diegetic space and time as what we are seeing and hearing* is. The most common use of this is the narrator voice, who can be identified (like the future Alex, in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971, who comments on these events in his past that we see in the movie), or is not identifiable (like the narrator in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*, 2001, who never identifies himself and tells us about past and future events unknown for the characters).

What is noteworthy is that these voices cannot be understood outside the notion of diegetic reality.[4] The voice creates a sort of suture between the character's interiority and the diegetic world's exteriority (just like our own voice, in the world outside the movies, does). The voice is a band-aid that closes the gap between the character's body and the reality outside that body. For such reason, distinguishing between cinematic voices allows us to see that the body constituted in cinema is "a *phantasmatic* body"[5] (Doane 1986, 335).[6]

Thus, we have three voices: (1) character voice, (2) voice-over, and (3) voice-off. A voice might even evolve among these three stances: a character within the frame starts speaking, telling us about a dream they had (character voice); as they do, the camera pans to the open window to their left, leaving them out of the frame although we can still hear their voice (voice-over), and we have a transition to see their dream, yet still hear their voice (voice-off). So far, these three different voices can be distinguished with not too much difficulty.[7]

Anomalisa is not a film that is clarified with these distinctions. Take the folded letter Michael "reads" as an example: yes, he is reading the letter, but the voice we hear is from Bella, the author, who appears as a phantasm over the paper: it is a kind of combination between a voice-off (she is not in the

[4] For a discussion regarding the concept of diegesis and other narrative levels, refer to Aguilar (2019).

[5] Doane's emphasis.

[6] Nonetheless, Doane is not considering here the radical concept psychoanalysis has for what the voice is. As will be emphasised later, in so far as the voice is taken as an object, it is not only in, or through, the realm of cinema where the body is phantasmatic, i.e., where the body and the voice do not seem to go together, but have and extimate, uncanny relation to each other.

[7] Of course, an exposition on the voice in cinema perhaps is incomplete, or näive, if it does not tackle Michel Chion's famous book, *The Voice in Cinema*, and his concept of *acousmatization*. For Chion (1999, 18), an acousmatic sound is one that we can hear but whose source we cannot see. He even proposes the existence of an *acousmêtre*: an acousmatic being whose voice we can hear but whose presence is not visible in the screen. This might be the case for a voice-over, as the examples Chion himself gives (1999, 21-22). Chion reminds us that a narrator that is certainly no part of the film diegesis (like Cuarón's film) is not acousmatic, for the acousmatic presence "must, even if only slightly, have *one foot in the image*, in the space of the film" (Chion 1999, 23). Thus, the problem with Chion's concept is that even though he talks about an acousmatic being, he is in fact talking about a body (perhaps it should have been named *acousmacorp*, acousmatic body). I believe that *Anomalisa* truly proposes the existence of an *acousmêtre*: an *acousmatic being that has no body*.

diegetic space and time of the plane), and a character voice (she appears in the frame saying the content of the letter). The shot is interesting in its own, but it is not uncommon in films, and it is not what is so peculiar about *Anomalisa*.

The Voice of the Puppets

The plane lands, and as Michael walks through the airport and gets into a taxi, we realize that all the faces are familiar: they are all the same face (with changes in the hairstyle), except Michael's, whose face is unique. Moreover, as we hear more and more voices, we realize we are listening to the same one: they all have the same voice, no matter sex or age. This sameness is the most important aesthetic decision of the film: our experience of *Anomalisa* and the plot itself is rooted in it. Indeed, this decision means a disturbance in the auditive dimension of the film, caused precisely by the use of the voice, just as McGowan described: "The voice is a disturbance of the aural field. It is the point at which sound ceases to align itself with signification and the partiality or noneutrality of the aural field becomes apparent" (2015, 77).

Fig. 3. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 00:04:37)

This generic voice compels us to wonder what *Anomalisa* is for the previous exposition on cinematic voices. In the first approach, we can say that, contrary to its typical use, this is a movie where *the voice-off is visible within the frame*, for there is no one who has their voice, but they all have *a generic voice* that stands for *a generic Other who speaks through them*. We should write this Other with capital O, in the same sense that psychoanalysis distinguishes between the other (people around us) and the Big Other (the sym-

bolic agency that creates the conditions for symbolic human life). The others and the Other are not two distinctly differentiated entities, for the latter is always incarnated in the former more often than not.

This ambiguity is why psychoanalysis proposes a radical understanding of what the voice is. We do not have "our own voice" since our voice does not entirely belong to us. For psychoanalysis, an Other speaks through our bodies and voices, and the voice is not reduced to a phenomenon of sound or the study of sound as a physical phenomenon of speech. Studying the voice is not the same as studying phonetics. We speak within a symbolic structure that regulates what we say when we speak. The leftover of this process is the voice, "a nonsignifying remainder, something resistant to the signifying operations, a leftover heterogeneous in relation to the structural logic which includes it" (Dolar 1996a, 10).

If the voice does not entirely correspond to a body, there is a never-closing gap between language and the body (Dolar 2006, 73). As a *remainder*/*leftover* (something we discard or throw away after doing something) and as a *reminder* (something that causes us to remember something), the voice never fits the body it supposedly comes from; it is the unavoidable *rem(a)inder* of the process of speech and signification. The voice is something that does not belong here, yet we cannot simply forget it. We might stumble upon the idea of "disembodied voices" in some analyses that take the voice as an essential axis (e.g., McQuinn 2014). The matter is more radical for psychoanalysis: the voice itself is always an object disembodied.

In *Anomalisa,* the voice does not fit the body. It is ethereal, it is shared by (almost) all individuals, yet it does not belong to any of them. It seems like they do not speak but *are spoken*. We cannot ignore the fact that they are puppets in a stop-motion movie because they are spoken (as will be exposed later, they are the phantasmatic puppets in Michael's way of dealing with reality).[8] We could risk the hypothesis that, once we understand the dynamics of the voice for humans, we can see why we are all puppets: there is a form of ventriloquism inherent to human speech.[9]

[8] For the concept of *marionnettes fantasmatiques*, phantasmatic puppets, see Boully (2008).

[9] The performances by Nina Conti, a ventriloquist that uses a monkey whose voice disappears when she goes to sleep, offers a succinct definition of the voice as a parasite, a remainder that lives inside of us (see BBC Studios 2014). Also, think of the recurring type of scenes in David Lynch's film that deal with this problem of the correspondence of a voice to a character: from the lip sync scene in *Blue Velvet* (1986) to the little man and the telephone at the party in *Lost Highway* (1997) to the Silencio club at *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

When I say that we are spoken, I do not mean it sublimely or abstractly, but in a substantial daily experience. Notice the way politicians seem to repeat the same discourse over and over again ("I am working in favor of the people," "our Party defends our national values"); are they speaking? Or are they spoken through? Notice the way journalists say "they have to" ask a particular question at a press conference or how they describe themselves as "the voice of our readers"; who are they speaking on behalf of? Furthermore, notice our lapsus and parapraxes, the psychopathology of our everyday communication, when we say a word while meaning another. Who is speaking? Is it me or some Other inside of me who speaks through me? In Žižek's words (1996, 103): "I hear myself speaking, yet what I hear is never fully myself but a parasite, a foreign body in my very heart."

Indeed, this is how we hear *Anomalisa*: a collection of individuals sharing the same monotonous, androgynous voice and face. There is a hole in the (cinematic) language made by the voice. This hole is the signification process's leftover, the rem(a)inder of our adaptation to the Symbolic order, a particular function that, according to Žižek (1996, 119), the voice introduces in our experience of the world.

The Voice of the Machine

Michael arrives at The Fregoli Hotel,[10] which continues the generic and monotonous aura of the film in its interior design. In the hotel elevator with the bellboy, Michael is already tired of something recurrent throughout the movie: small talk. The cab driver, the hotel receptionist, the bellboy, the waiter over the phone, the waitress at the bar: all of them, who are providing a service (keep in mind that Michael is a customer service expert), seem *compelled*, by a foreign power, *to talk* (about the weather, the airplane, the food), to say something in order to keep the silence away.

Michael looks for Bella, the letter's author, in the yellow pages. "I didn't recognize your voice," says Michael on the phone (how could he? She sounds just like the rest of the people). They arrange to meet at the hotel bar, where they have a nasty fight over the end of their past relationship.

Drunk, Michael goes to the sex shop close to the hotel, thinking it is a toy store. He seems intrigued by a particular item behind the counter: an ancient Japanese doll, partially broken in the face, half its body exhibiting the internal gears and wires.

[10] The Fregoli syndrome has been studied in psychiatry, and is described for a person who believes that different people are the same. A different syndrome is the Capgras one, where the same person seems to be many.

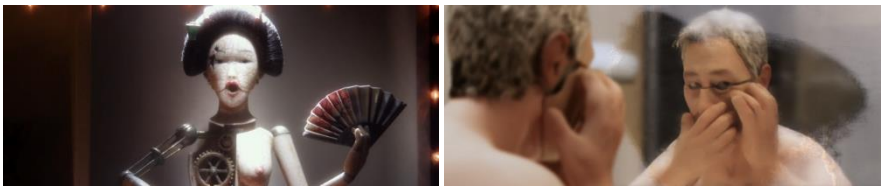

Fig. 4-5. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 00:31:29; 00:33:26)

Back at the hotel, Michael looks in the mirror after a shower. A hallucination occurs. His face starts moving involuntarily as if the gears inside him were malfunctioning (just like the gears in the doll). His face starts to "peel off" right when he hears a woman, the third voice we hear in the film.

The Voice of an Anomaly

Michael is shocked, "someone else," he mutters. He goes to the hall, knocking on many doors until he finds Lisa, the distinctive voice owner and Emily's blonde friend. They tell Michael they are in town for his talk tomorrow, a conference on customer service based on a book he published, *Let Me Help You Help Them*.

The three of them go to the hotel bar to have drinks. On their way back to the rooms, Michael asks Lisa to have a private talk. They go to his room and start flirting. Michael notices Lisa's scar on her face. She does not want to tell him the story behind it, and she knows people find her ugly. Michael says she is extraordinary, but he cannot say why: "Your voice is like magic," he states. Lisa offers to sing Cindy Lauper's *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*. Michael cries after she finishes the song.

Fig. 6. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 00:44:46)

They start to have sex in a kind of clumsy way. Lisa has not had sex in many years, and Michael is still confused because of her voice. She offers to sing Lauper's song again, now in Italian. We have another close-up of a mouth. The counter-shot is Michael looking.

Fig. 7-8. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 00:53:15; 00:53:21)

These two shots are peculiar, one following the other, because it is here where we see Michael's attraction to the orifice of the voice: the mouth. For Chion (1999, 23), if the invisibility of the source that originates a voice is the basis of acousmatization, the opposite process, disacousmatization, renders visible such a source. Like a hole in the body, the mouth could be the point where the voice escapes, a crack that leaks the voice. Yes, unquestionably, some physical qualities of the voice come from the mouth,[11] but the voice as an object of psychoanalytical inquiry, the voice that is not studied by phonetics, does not come from the mouth:

> Where does the voice come from? It comes from the innermost realm of our being, but at the same time it is something that transcends us, it is in ourselves more than ourselves, yet again, a beyond at our most intimate (Dolar 2006, 96).

It would be easy to think that the voice comes from the mouth, as Michael's obsessional look at Lisa's mouth shows. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that the voice we are talking about, the one Michael is falling in love with, is a gap between our body and the Symbolic order in which our body is placed (this seems both true for Lacanian psychoanalysis and the film theory of the voice—Doane, Bonitzer and Chion—previously exposed). This gap exists insofar as, besides the qualities measurable by machines, something in the voice escapes what the subject is saying or the subject's intentions. There is something uncontrollable in the voice, some enjoyment the voice seems to be getting or providing beyond our control.

[11] Also from the stomach, our throat, and even, it could be argued, from other people's ears.

For example, in the dialogue right after the Italian version of Lauper's song: Lisa says, "I love French and Italian the most. I don't like German, sounds mean to me." What does to "love" a language but to think that other languages sound "mean" signify? Do Germans think it sounds mean to say "Ich liebe dich" ("I love you")? Do French people think "Je te hais" ("I hate you") sounds lovely?

This case is an example of the different words each of us enjoys saying or hates hearing in their materiality prior to their meaning. This sort of enjoyment is beyond the signification of the words, and it is what Lacan referred to as *lalangue*, a contraction of *la langue* (the speech, the tongue).

Lalangue is the evidence showing that we should see "the sign's subordination with respect to the signifier" (Lacan 1998, 101) to understand the nature of a language. This subordination means that words have materiality, manifested primarily in their sounds, which come before meaning, before what the words mean in a dictionary. *Lalangue* is the series of homophonies, vacillations, and word-plays proper to a tongue. It is the series of problems that arise from the sound-alike of words, beyond their specific meaning; equivocations that are proper to the specific languages, persisting in a language's history (Lacan 2001, 490).

For Dolar, *lalangue* is the privileged place where we can find the voice as what brings the body and the Other together: "To put it roughly, and in a simplified way, words, insofar as they serve as 'raw material' for unconscious processes, are treated as sonorous objects. What counts in them is their particular sonority, resonance, echoes, consonances, reverberations, contaminations" (Dolar 2006, 139).

This collection of contaminations creates a new meaning out of what seems nonsense. The voice is the vehicle of this collection, a sudden intrusion in the signifying chain in the Symbolic order: "The element of the voice, in the form of contingent and senseless co-sonance, unexpectedly runs amok and produces nonsense, which in the second step turns out to be endowed with an unexpected sense emerging from it" (Dolar 2006, 141). *Lalangue* is not composed of the physical aspects of the voice but of enjoyment beyond meaning that emerges only in meaning itself, a sort of negative dimension of meaning found within the meaning.

If *lalangue* is the sort of enjoyment we get from the contamination words get by their use, by putting them together, and "in this contamination a new formation is born—a slip, which may sound like nonsense but produces the emergence of another sense" (Dolar 2006, 140), now we can adequately understand the scene that gives the title to the movie. When Lisa says she

likes the word "anomaly" and feels like one, Michael creates an example of *lalangue*: "Anomalisa" is the expression of enjoyment in the homophony proper to the voice, precisely what *Lisa* is for Michael in the movie—an *anomaly*, a contingency, an unexpected presence that shatters his conception of the world.

The Commanding Voice of the Other

Night shifts into the day. When the sun has risen, the room's phone rings. It is Lawrence Gill, the manager of the hotel. He asks Michel to come to his office to discuss "a matter of some delicacy." Michael goes to the basement and through a room full of secretaries.

He meets the manager in his office, a big basement with a hole in the middle. After some small talk, asking about his impressions of the fish tank, Michael loses his patience and asks what the problem is. Lawrence admits he has read his book, and productivity went up 90% (just the same figure Lisa used for the productivity at her workplace). Still a little intimidated, Lawrence tells Michael he knows that Lisa spent the night in his room, confesses his love for him, and asks him to have an affair with him *but not with Lisa*. Michael, angry and astonished, leaves, and when going through the room with the secretaries, they all tell him the same thing: "You can fuck me if you want, Mr. Stone. Just not Lisa!".

He goes through the stairs. In the hallway, he loses his jaw, just like in the mirror scene, seconds before listening to Lisa for the first time. A robotic-like skull underneath his face is revealed (just like the Japanese doll). The mouth moves at its own will as if *it* is trying to speak. He puts it back.

Fig. 9-10. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 01:07:19; 01:07:24)

He finds Lisa in his room and tries to convince her to escape with him. "They don't want us to be together, I think they'll kill you if they need to […] You are the only other person in the world!". People start knocking at the door, calling Michael by his name. He wakes up, and it was all a nightmare.

While having breakfast, Michael tells Lisa he will leave his wife, that he is unhappy with his marriage and wants to be with her. They discuss this, and we get another close-up of Lisa's mouth while chewing.

Fig. 11. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 01:11:26)

Michael asks her not to click the fork against her teeth. He also says she is "a little controlling" in explaining the separation to his son. Then, he complains that she is speaking with food in her mouth. Lisa apologizes for her table manners and suggests that they go to the zoo. At this moment, a generic voice is heard over her unique voice, both voices simultaneously. Michael tries to dismiss the matter, pointing to *an ache in his body* ("My stomach hurts. It feels empty. It's clenched"), but he cannot stop hearing both voices until in Lisa's last dialogue in this scene, we only hear the generic one.

How come Michael was so sure he was in love with Lisa and was even planning to leave his wife, yet a few minutes later, he is so disappointed as he hears the generic voice coming through Lisa's mouth? Why is Lisa sounding generic now? Is it because Lisa had the generic voice all along? Or perhaps something happened in the dream?

I have discussed the psychoanalytic account for *lalangue*, the privileged dimension that the voice enjoys. However, there is another place where psychoanalysis also recognizes a particular investment we have with a voice, what we call in our daily life "the voice of conscience":

> [the voice of conscience] in which psychoanalysis was soon to recognize the voice of the superego—not just an internalization of the Law, but something endowed with a surplus that puts the subject into a position of ineradicable guilt: the more one obeys, the more one is guilty. To put it into the somewhat simplified form of a slogan: the surplus of the superego over the Law is precisely the surplus of the voice; the superego has a voice, the Law is stuck with the letter (Dolar 1996a, 14).

Moreover, it is in the form of a dream, the fulfillment of a wish, where Michael stumbles upon the superego's voice, telling him not to have sex with Lisa. It is not in a pseudo-conservative way ("be faithful to your wife") but in consideration of what Lisa is to him: a crack in the Other. Her voice is the embodiment of the Lacanian *objet a*, the object cause of desire, and encountering with Lisa is encountering *the* object of enjoyment, encountering a hole in the Symbolic order, in the Other. It should be no surprise that the encounter with *objet a* is within a romantic encounter, for Lacan theorized its existence in the psychoanalytic love situation par excellence, transference, and characterized *objet a* as "the object that cannot be swallowed [...] which remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier" (Lacan 1981, 270).

Perhaps Michael fits the Žižekian definition of a psychotic. In a simplified understanding, a psychotic is someone who cannot access the "actual" state of things because some key signifier (the paternal metaphor, the Name-of-the-Father) is missing, so the psychotic is excluded from the Symbolic order. Žižek continues:

> However, the obverse of this exclusion, the inclusion, should also not be forgotten. Lacan pointed out that the consistency of our "experience of reality" depends on the exclusion of what he calls the *objet petit a* from it: in order for us to have normal "access to reality," something must be excluded, "primordially repressed." In psychosis, this exclusion is undone: the object [the gaze or the voice] is *included* in reality, the outcome of which, of course, is the disintegration of our "sense of reality," the loss of reality (Žižek 1996, 91).

Lisa's unique voice is an object that does not fit the established Symbolic order, and for Michael, this is a psychotic experience, for he cannot account for her voice in terms of stupidity, nonsense, or something for which his mantras for customer service can account. Lisa's voice is not lacking, but an unexplainable and dense presence and Michael's dream was a way to enable him to *not* deal with it, to return to a state where he could understand and deal with the Other. In a way, Lisa was too much otherness for Michael's (stupid yet functional) Symbolic order, manifested through her voice. The generic voice Michael hears in everyone is even more radical than Chion's *acousmêtre*, for it is undoubtedly a being that exists (we hear its voice), but one that has *no body*: it is in *every body*; and Lisa is, as Lacan might have put it, that object which cannot be swallowed, stuck in the gullet of that *acousmêtre*, a subject that creates an impasse in its smooth functioning.

Following the command of the superego, Michael conceals subjectivity in his everyday experience through the generic voice, and it is the command of the superego that again imposes the generic voice over Lisa's (in the breakfast scene) in order to keep the smooth functioning of the Other.

Now, we can characterize what the voice in *Anomalisa* is in terms of the previous discussion on film theory. I stated above that, contrary to its normal use, *Anomalisa* is a movie where *the voice-off is visible within the frame*, for there is no one who has their own voice, but they all have *a generic voice* that stands for *a generic Other*. Now that we understand Michael's attempt to impose the generic voice over the people around him, we have an example of the singular experience suture mentioned at the beginning of this paper: a suture where the limits between the diegetic reality and the character's subjectivity collapse, and what makes *Anomalisa* so unique is that this happens with the sound. We have heard the film from Michael's ears, and it is a voice-off whose location is within the main character's psyche and taints the diegetic reality.

The Voice of the Individual

At his talk, Michael looks pretty nervous, unable to concentrate. The quiet audience (Emily and Lisa in the middle) and bright lights disturb him. He tries to deliver his speech but cannot. He dedicated his career to building a name as an expert in customer service, this area of the capitalism of goods and services where "each customer is treated as an individual," as he says, and the problem with that is that there is no individuality at all. Michael says:

> Always remember, the customer is an individual. Just like you. Each person you speak to has had a day. Some of their days have been good, some bad, but they've all had one. Each person you speak to has had a childhood. Each has a body. Each body has aches. What is it to be human? What is it to ache? What is it to be alive?

It is *in the body* where he feels the unbearable Other, just as it was in his body where he located the pain of Lisa's voice transformation. Again, the voice bridges the gap between the body and the Other, which is both *inside* and *outside* of them. The voice is at the same time *excessive* and *missing from* the body.

Before he cracks in front of the audience, Michael mentions his antidepressants. Another close-up of a mouth: "Is it the Zoloft,[12] Dr. Horowitz? Is it the Zoloft?". The subtle laugh from the beginning is heard again. Who is laughing? We should venture: it is the superego. The excessiveness of the laugh is the correlate of the superego injunctions, an excessiveness that pills cannot control.

Fig. 12. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 01:17:00)

Back at home, Michael is welcomed with a surprise party. He is furious and asks Donna, his wife, who she is. She responds: "I don't know who I am. I mean, who are you? Who is anyone? Who could answer that question?" Michael is left alone in the living room, listening to the Japanese doll singing. This song is from the fourth voice in the film: one that comes from a doll whose mechanic interior is exposed.

Fig. 13. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 01:22:05)

[12] A famous antidepressant.

As the camera zooms out, leaving Michael alone in his house full of guests, listening to the doll, we start hearing the generic voice of Lisa as a bridge between Michael's loneliness and Lisa's trip back home. Lisa is writing a letter in a car, with Emily driving. Gradually, the generic voice fades, and her unique voice comes to the front. Unlike the letter that opened the film, in this one, she says a kind goodbye to Michael, wishing to meet him again under better circumstances. She signs as Anomalisa.

Fig. 14-15. *Anomalisa* (Kaufman and Johnson 2015, 01:22:45; 01:22:54)

She looks at Emily on her left. Emily looks back, and her face is not the generic face we see throughout the film. Again, this exchange confirms that the movie is told from the subjectivity of Michael. The film ends.

From the Voice of the Other to the Voice of the other

Perhaps I should confess that I felt something uncanny the first time I saw the movie. I could not precisely point it out. I did not know what was in the film that made me skeptical and uneasy. It was not until I read about the cast after watching it that I realized one actor (Tom Noonan) was voicing almost every character.

I think this should not be kept at bay because, in the end, both watching and analyzing films are singular aesthetic and intellectual experiences. I believe that this sensation of not feeling comfortable yet still watching, or being attracted to something without knowing what that is, is how we precisely experience love: love works because there are no reasons to love, no objective rules that can regulate *why* you love someone. To love is to fall into a contingent trap that retroactively connects and provides reasons for the trap itself, "the junction of a contingent exterior with the most intimate interior" (Dolar 1996b, 129).

As the theoretical discussion showed, the voice is the leftover of our process of symbolic adaptation. It is something found outside of our body and reveals, at the same time, something so intimate to us. There is a dimension, in Lacanian theory, of the collapse between the interior and exterior: *exti-*

macy.[13] Extimacy does not simply render our most hidden core visible. Our most hidden core is to be found outside of ourselves. Furthermore, the suture of singular experience in cinema could render visible this precise dimension: it is in the diegetic reality where we find echoes of the hidden subjectivity; at the same time, it is in the most interior subjectivity where we can find the most external reality.

It is easy to see the relation between the Lacanian extimacy and the Freudian uncanny. We stumble upon the uncanny when we encounter something simultaneously familiar and strange, i.e., a collapse of the boundaries between things we know and things we do not know. Even though the uncanny has historically been studied, especially in the realm of fantasy and horror, we can also see love as an uncanny experience: we feel at home with the loved one and, at the same time, we are on the verge of the abyss of the unknown. Moreover, the trick psychoanalysis reminds us of is that when we fall into (the abyss of) love, we should learn to discern the moments when we are listening to the commanding voice of the Other from the moments when we encounter the nonsensical voice of the other. It is a choice between the Other and the other; it is an ethical decision that shapes our everyday life beyond an aesthetic decision for cinematic purposes.

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[13] It was Jacques-Alain Miller (2010) who elevated this Lacanian neologism to the category of a concept.

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