Gramophony of an Application for “Recognition of a Condition of Permanent Desire”: A Performative Exploration of the Relationship between Notions of Subject, Voice and Writing

Abstract

Gramophony of an Application for “Recognition of a Condition of Permanent Desire” is a collage of theoretical arguments, creative writing and audio performances that examines notions of (life) writing, voice and subjectivity from a poststructuralist feminist perspective.

By engaging in what Smith and Dean (2009) describe as the interwoven processes of “practice-led research” and “research-led practice” I combined conceptual research with creative practice and produced a form of hybridised text that blurs traditional binaries of “fact”/“fiction”, “creative”/“critical” and “speech”/“writing”. Following Smith (1995), I suggest understanding Gramophony as an example of “performative autobiography” that challenges traditional discourses of identity and representation.

Keywords

Voice, subjectivity, autobiography, writing, performative research, deconstruction

Prologue: Gramophony as a Performance of Paradigmatic Metamorphoses

In retrospect it seems apposite to say that one day I let myself be swept up in a process of paradigmatic transformation because my feeling of discontent with the ideas and practices I had followed up to that point had become unbearable. The linear account of these radical metamorphoses could go something like this: Prior to attending my first conference on qualitative research in 2005 my notion of academic inquiry as a voice clinician and researcher had been restricted to what I would now call “positivist” approaches. Until that time my vocabulary relating to academic
paradigms had only consisted of the adjective “scientific”. This was mainly due to the circumstance that during my studies in Human Communication Sciences nobody had ever mentioned to me that there were academics out there who conducted research in manners that were different from the quantitative regime I was taught in the compulsory lectures on empirical methods. Instead, I was made to believe that what I got to know as “scientific research” was the only acceptable form of academic knowledge production and that the medico-scientific discourse with its truth claims and its preconceived speaking and writing formats was generally accepted by scholars of all fields as exemplary for the (re-)presentation of research.

Put differently, I was taught that in academia in general and in “Human Communication Sciences” in particular, the development of skills in speaking and writing practices in all their diversity are regarded as of only minor importance for the researcher-to-be. While it is one of the researcher’s tasks in speech-language pathology to get the patients to speak, write, read or listen—depending on the mode of communication one investigates—what is regarded as the research proper is the measuring and the evaluation of measurements of communication practices. Also what became later the object of my specialisation, the human voice, is considered in the Health Sciences to be best approached by acoustical analyses that result in statistical evaluation and the presentation of voice research at conferences and in journals tends to be limited to a recounting and interpretation of numerical data. As a consequence, the “human” or “personal” in this voice science is objectified and generalized to an extent that it seems reduced to the outdated haunting of a millstone around the scientist’s neck.

In the face of this exclusive exposure to such a limited and limiting research paradigm imagine my surprise when I attended my first qualitative research conference, entitled “The Art and Craft of Qualitative Research: Creativity and Critique”, where I saw presenters sing, dance and otherwise perform their research and listened to papers that were more often than not written in the first-person narrative voice. For lack of other decisive moments in my memory that might have triggered my paradigmatical transformation I consider the experience of this conference as the first important turning point in my academic orientation.

Gramophony is a rewritten version of a part of the first major research project I conducted after I had moved my professional affiliation from the Health Sciences to a section of the Humanities, where “the arts” also embrace “creative arts” (Azul,
2009). The piece is testament to the wide-ranging conceptual and methodological metamorphoses my work and I underwent in the course of this project that was significantly facilitated by my new research environment, in which I didn’t have to worry any more about being accused of availing myself of “unscientific” practices.

Moving from one Faculty to another, however, meant not only gaining new liberties (for instance, the lifting of the ban of the “I” in writing and the permission to blur genre conventions) but also needing to start from scratch with establishing theoretical and methodological skills and knowledge appropriate to my new field of study. Instead of acoustically analysing audio recordings of patients’ voices and evaluating the results with statistics programs reading, writing and the production of audio performances had become my new methods of inquiry. Moreover, every inch of what I had considered the area of my expertise, human communication, was exposed to a radical challenge. “Reading” was no longer the consumption of facts that were given in a text but became a meaning-making activity that blurred with the notion of “writing”. Writing was no longer subordinated to the notion of “research”, say, as a subsequent “mopping-up activity” (Richardson, 1994, p. 516), but instead positioned as the research proper that could take any form of contemporary text production (for instance, it could be non-fiction, fiction, or fictocriticism, it could be writing on paper, audio production, film-making, or dance). To understand writing as a “dynamic creative process” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960) and as “a constitutive force” (p. 960) that “produces meaning … creates social reality … and constructs … subjectivity” (p. 961) meant that I had to abandon my belief in notions of “meaning”, “reality” and “identity” as extra-discursive phenomena that could be represented in speaking, writing or other forms of performance and transmitted from one person to the other. In a nutshell, at the end of this process of reinventing my research and myself I had displaced the scientific understanding of human communication with a poststructuralist notion of writing as performativity and saw my work and my identity as products of discursive processes that were beyond my control.

Outside the discourse community I had recently joined, however, it proved quite difficult to explain the unconventional perspectives I had come to appropriate. Take as an example the following story.
An “I” is Asked to Show its True Colours

My partner’s mother once approached me after I’d given a spoken word performance and said: “As a mother, I have to ask you, how autobiographical are the texts you write?” As her question sounded to me as if she was asking herself: “Who is this person in front of me, chosen to become a member of my family?” I armed myself with the theory I had recently read and answered: “Well, I think what we casually call ‘autobiography’ is actually quite a complex construction. There is the ‘I’ that tells the story, there is the ‘I’ that features in the story and there is the ‘I’ that must have written the story. Most people tend to assume an identity of these three ‘Is’ and believe that the story is a factual representation of the ‘I’s’ life. Current academic theory, however, rips these assumptions apart.”

And then I took advantage of the increasing background noise, which indicated that everybody else was moving over to the buffet, and said: “Why don’t we grab a bite and discuss this later?”

So far, my partner’s mother hasn’t come back to her question and hasn’t asked me to elaborate on my theories and to further apply them to my writing, my life and my self. This gave her question time to gnaw on my mind. Should she approach me tomorrow I might say something like this: “Here is what makes matters even more complex: the triad of ‘Is’ I have in mind right now must have been called several hundreds of names so far or more. Each time someone makes someone of one of the ‘Is’ (without being sure of which of them), this ‘I’ is called a different name. ‘He’, ‘she’, ‘it’, ‘Sir’, ‘Lady’, ‘kid’, ‘dreamer’, ‘softie’, ‘nancy boy’, ‘beautiful’, ‘clever’, ‘patient’, ‘client’, ‘clinician’, ‘ancient’, ‘young man’, ‘love’, ‘darl’, ‘nerd’, ‘nazi’, ‘word-nazi’, ‘writer’, ‘sound performer’, ‘DJ’, ‘parasite’, ‘DJ Parasite’, ‘Mr. Azul’, just to name a few.

On top of this, people tend to translate names according to the rules of the language with which they are most familiar. Most people in this country, for instance, would translate the last name mentioned in my incomplete list of names to ‘Blue’, like out of the blue. In other places
‘Blue’ would be called ‘Blau’, like *blaumachen*, or ‘Blå’, like *Blåbärsoppa*, or ‘Bleu’, like *cordon(-)bleu*, or ‘Azul’, like *principe azul*. Depending on what they make of this chameleon of a name, people might think of something that comes without warning, of skipping work, of a drink that makes you look like a child that has taken the first attempt at DIY, with all the blue soup trickling down the sides of your mouth, like a vampire who took a bite of someone of noble descent, of two slices of Wiener Schnitzel filled with cheese and ham or of a *Küchenfee* like Jane who is so good at all things cuisine that she should be awarded a blue ribbon, of a prince from a fairytale who is so strong and so beautiful that if I had those thoughts they would take my breath away or of something else.

I know that this isn’t very satisfying, but here is how I would answer your question in short: Given the endless multiplicity of imaginary selves an ‘I’ may be made to stand in for and the multifarious instabilities troubling the notion of ‘autobiography’, the ‘autobiographicalness’ of a first-person narration may be best understood as a fantasy of indeterminable value.”

If I were to put this in more abstract terms I would say that in *Gramophony* the position and function of the author and narrator and the stability of the self are put under pressure. Contrary to the traditional concept of autobiography, this piece doesn’t offer a generic and stable representation of a self that could, moreover, translate itself from pages and speakers directly into the audiences’ brains. Reading and listening to *Gramophony* isn’t suited for finding out “who I am” and “what I want to say about me”. For what appear as “my” doing and being are not external phenomena that exist outside of language and to which I could simply refer but processes that are necessarily intertwined with the (mostly hidden) movements of “text production”. As Barthes writes:

> We know that a text is not a line of words … but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture (1977, p. 146).
Those textual movements of producing and being produced, in their undeterminable originality and iterability, must be regarded as something slippery that cannot be grasped or seized, as events that tend to get out of control. More precisely, I suggest considering them as “performative” events, and thus, with Butler, as the output of those regulatory practices “by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, p. 2).

As an example of such a regulatory practice I could classify my work as “performative autobiography”. In this naming I draw on Smith who uses Butler’s notion of performativity as part of her challenge to traditional understandings of autobiography. In her critique she deconstructs notions of “self” and “representation” as well as the allegedly straightforward relationship between the two concepts:

    [T]he “self” so often invoked in self-expressive theories of autobiography is not a noun, a thing-in-itself, waiting to be materialized through the text. There is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self … located somewhere “inside” the narrating subject … awaiting transmission to a surface (1995, p. 17).

As the text, for Barthes, “is experienced only in an activity of production” (1977, p. 157, emphasis in original) according to Smith, the self does not exist before the writing, but it is in writing, or through the mobilisation of meaning-making practices more generally, that the self emerges. She writes: “[N]arrative performativity constitutes interiority. That is, the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an effect of autobiographical storytelling” (1995, p. 18, emphasis in original).

As performative autobiography, Gramophony won’t deliver a representation of who “David Azul” is. It doesn’t tell the truth about the “indeterminable I” with its boundless number of names. Rather, this paper performs and explores the complex processes of how a subject emerges in speaking, writing, reading and listening, processes that, as Barthes, Butler, Derrida, Smith and others suggest, are written by a language system, a discourse, a regulatory regime that precedes our lifetime and shapes who we can become and how we can speak, write and interpret what we read and hear.
Further, even though the creators of genre labels seem to be sure that it exists, such an approach questions the possibility of “non-fiction writing”. For the performative “I”, there are no facts out there that could be represented objectively or accurately.

Yes, my partner’s mother attended one of my performances and asked me something about my writing afterwards. I am not sure, however, which of the words that appear in this story we uttered when we spoke. I don’t remember what I wanted to say to her on the day in question and whether what I actually said had anything to do with it. In addition, I have, of course, not the least inkling what she heard and understood and how she later interpreted what she remembered from our conversation. She might have stopped thinking about our chat already while deciding which food to choose from the buffet. Should she one day read this story and accuse me of making it all up I will agree with her and say: “You are right. Writers are fiction-mongers and I wouldn’t trust anybody who tries to tell you something else”.

Cixous says that “when you have lost everything, no more roads, no direction, no fixed signs, no ground, no thoughts able to resist other thoughts, when you are lost, beside yourself, and you continue getting lost”, this is when “beginning to write becomes necessary—(and)—possible” (1991, p. 38). As a plunge into the unknown and the uncertain, writing, for her, can only be understood as “a gesture of love” (p. 42), a gesture of desiring what one “can’t stop searching for” (p. 43). With Gramophony, I too am seeking for “a there that doesn’t disappear although I don’t ‘find’ it or enclose it, I don’t ‘comprehend’ it” (pp. 43–44).

**Gramophony of an Application for “Recognition of a Condition of Permanent Desire” (an Audio Performance in Six Movements)**

*The Story so far (a Reiteration)*

Let me introduce myself. I am *Gramophony*’s first person narrator, a voice clinician from Germany who migrated to Australia several years ago. Soon after my arrival I noticed that what I used to regard as “my world” had been turned topsy-turvy. Not
only did the cars drive on the wrong side of the road and summer was winter and winter was summer but also what I had believed in and done academically didn’t make sense to me any more.

Due to an encounter with poststructuralist theory and with a practice of writing that blurs notions of “fact” and “fiction”, “critique” and “creativity” I started to challenge the scientific theories and practices I had followed before. Instead of continuing to imagine the human voice as “a multidimensional phenomenon that [can] be measured through auditory-perceptual, acoustic, and physiologic means” (Oates, 2006, p. 24) and as an instance that “reveals the inner self” (Colton, Casper, & Hirano, 1996, p. 2) I felt drawn towards theories that cast both subject and voice as performative events (Butler, 1993; Smith, 1995; Kolesch, 2003; Kolesch & Krämer, 2006). Instead of perpetuating a notion and practice of writing as subordinated to the notion and practice of research, I began to position it as the research proper, a creative practice that was no longer limited to putting words on paper or screen but that included text production and meaning-making processes in general. In particular, I began to gather under the name of writing also those (audible) texts that I had known before only as “speech” or “voice” and I gave up the attempt of making a distinction between so-called academic and literary productions.

This repositioning led to such a thorough rejection from the part of my former colleagues and discourse community that I felt impelled to take on a new name and professional identity in order to survive in academia. I began to introduce myself to others as “DJ Parasite”, a creative writer and sound performer, who subscribes to Derrida’s critique of Austin’s concept of the performative (Derrida, 1988) and positions “parasitical” citation as the commonplace approach to text production. Despite this dramatic transformation, “DJ Parasite” aka “DJ Azul” aka “Blue”, “Blau”, “Blå”, “Bleu” et al.—our “indeterminable ‘I’” and “atopic narrator” (Barthes, 2002)—remains infatuated with the human voice, starts pursuing it and files an application for “Recognition of a Condition of Permanent Desire” with an imaginary government department.

Listen to a fictional online-interview between “my voice” and a cyber case officer. Hear how “the department of desire” deals with the challenges to traditional notions of sex, gender, identity, reality, knowledge and truth that are raised in the application. Check the evidentiary value of the statutory declarations that are handed in. How will the department decide?
Epilogue: Gramophony and “Gramophony” as Deconstructive Interventions

Gramophony of an Application for “Recognition of a Condition of Permanent Desire” is the result of what Smith and Dean (2009) describe as the interwoven processes of “practice-led research” and “research-led practice”. As the outcome of a repeated interplay of creative practice that led to research insights and scholarly research that led to creative work, my paper presents itself as a form of “hybridised writing” (Nettelbeck, 1998, p. 3) that “brings the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’ together” (p. 4) and undermines traditional classifications of methodology and genre. My approach is informed by Richardson’s conceptualisation of “writing as a method of inquiry” (1994), according to which writing is the method of knowing, the mode of producing the research as well as the research product and tends to adhere to an extended notion of writing that includes text production in general (and in particular also audible texts). My creative practice produces and is shaped by conceptual
research, which is concerned with the examination and critique of theoretical perspectives on the very practices that constitute my creative practice, namely the production of voice in writing and speech. Let me illustrate what I mean by this particular entanglement of critical practice and mode of text production with the help of an elaboration on my use of the term “gramophony” that appears in the title of my paper.

“Gramophony” as DJing

The term “gramophony” can on the one hand be understood as “the art of the gramophone” or as “gramophonic reproduction” (OED Online, 2010). Such an understanding invites us to imagine the author, first-person narrator and protagonist who appears throughout this paper as a DJ who spins, matches, mixes, juggles, scratches and cues pre-recorded or pre-written (audible) texts or voices and performs them for an audience. When writing my paper and producing the sound for this piece I did not only literally act like a DJ in drawing on various sources for my textual production, but I also appropriated the speaking position of “DJ Parasite” in order to allude to and implement Butler’s and Derrida’s critique of Austin’s concept of the performative.

In staging aspects of the theory of performativity in its deconstructive senses Gramophony displaces Austin’s concept of the performative as conventional act with a notion of performativity as iterability. Apart from challenging Austin’s notion of performativity as conscious acting confined to a set frame of social conventions it is in particular his definition of what constitutes inappropriate circumstances (that would lead to a failure of the performative) that I take up in my critique (following for instance Derrida (1988) and Parker and Sedgwick (1995)). Austin writes:

[A] performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy … Language in such circumstances is in special ways … used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiolations of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous
or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances (1962, p. 22, emphasis in original).

What Austin first pathologizes and then excludes from consideration—citation and the theatrical—are the very predicates that—for Butler and Derrida—“condition from the start the possibility of any and all performatives” (Parker and Sedgwick, 1995, p. 4). Reinterpreting performativity as a “mode of citationality” (Krämer, 2001, p. 250, my translation), Butler theorizes performativity “not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (1993, p. 2). Derrida emphasizes that a mark needs to be repeatable in order to “have a function called ‘normal’” (Derrida, 1988, p. 12). As distinct from Austin’s theory according to which performative utterances “as formulaic speech are embedded in institutionalised practices … [and] are bound to strict repetition … to the repetition of a speech stereotype” (Krämer, 2001, pp. 143–144, my translation) and whose performative power is “determined by an extra-linguistic context” (p. 249, my translation), for Butler and Derrida the power of performativity is located in language/discourse/textuality and involves the possibility (Butler) or the necessity (Derrida) of decontextualisation and change.¹

The speaking position of “DJ Parasite” appropriates both what Austin presents as the spectre of performativity (the figure of the “parasite”) and the notion of iterability (as the creative practice of “DJ-ing”). By producing performative acts as iterable utterances, DJ Parasite “entangles event (the actuality of the speech act), repetition (of a pattern) and difference (in the repetition)” (Schuhmacher, 2002, p. 386, my translation). Those utterances are therefore not understood as being “determined by an intention that is present to itself and that animates the utterance” (p. 386, my translation) but as being structured by an “essential absence of intending the actuality of utterance, … [by a] structural unconsciousness” (Derrida, 1988, p. 18). This destabilization of the author function in my argument resonates with some of the literature that discusses the practice of DJ-ing from a cultural studies perspective. As Herman argues, “[t]he art of the DJ depends heavily on the art of other musicians [and other players in the music industry]” (2006, p. 31). Therefore, the DJ cannot be constructed as “the author behind the music, the personality who stands outside the music and serves as its causal explanation, the creator to whom the
sound points” (p. 32). Instead, “rather than … standing as discrete songs with their own theological meaning, dance tracks come to function as texts, recontextualized by the DJ and having no definitive meaning on their own” (p. 34).

In putting on a collection of recordings of “my” voice and various computer voices, drawing on diverse textual sources (e.g. “my own” creative writing, publications by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, sound files made available by the freesound project etc.) when creating my multiple selves, I position the act of “parasitical citation” as a commonplace communication activity. By presenting the parasite as a necessary part in the performance of subjectivity, I initiate a process of rethinking its reputation and its name. Instead of repeating Austin’s tragedy that features the pathogenic deviant who etiolates the ordinary, I suggest a scenario of “commensalism” as a different way of understanding the workings of performativity. According to this notion, the ubiquitous condition of “eating at the same (linguistic) table” provides us, following Butler, with the “critical resource[s] in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility” (1993, p. 3).

“Gramophony” as a Displacement of the Phonocentric Notion of “Voice” and “Writing”

Apart from understanding “gramophony” as “gramophonic reproduction” or as “DJing”, let me invite you to consider the order of the elements of this compound. The word is composed of the English version of the Ancient Greek word for “voice” or “sound” (phone) which is preceded by the word for “writing” or “written” (gramma). This structure, in which writing always already precedes voice, can be understood as an implementation of Derrida’s deconstruction of what he calls the “phonocentrism” of western thought.

The central element of the “phonocentric” perspective, according to Derrida, is the construction of a hierarchical binary between spoken language (or “speech” or “voice”) and written language. While the former is privileged and rendered as “natural signification” (Derrida, 1997, p. 11) or “good writing” (“the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul” (p. 17)) the latter is devalued and presented as “conventional symbolization” (p. 11) or “bad writing” (“the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body” (p. 17)). Further, voice is
positioned as a direct translation of “‘mental experiences’ which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance” (p. 11) whereas writing “is always technical and representative” (p. 11). It is seen as subordinated to the voice and understood as distorting what is taken as the voice’s purity, as it innocently transmits the truth about the world and the speaker. Thus, in Derrida’s words, phonocentrism as a theoretical perspective produces the notion of an “absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning” (p. 12). This is the notion of voice in its traditional sense as it is taken for granted in many discourses and as I have challenged it above in its medico-scientific understanding.

Derrida’s criticism of phonocentrism, however, doesn’t stop with exposing the tendency to simplify and idealize notions of voice and text production. Rather, he continues his deconstructive programme by arguing that “voice” and “writing” as well as other “modes of communication or language use” in their traditional senses have to be put under erasure and displaced by a new notion of writing that he calls “gram” (2002, p. 24). For Derrida, “[t]o write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn … offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten” (1988, p. 8). Put differently, absence displaces presence as one of the key aspects of writing. What this means is that writing works beyond the presence of the producer, the receiver and the original context of the utterance “whether ‘real’ or ‘linguistic’” (p. 9). The text, “this inextricable texture, this interweaving” (1973, p. 112), this tissue of writing, emerges as a free-floating vibration that is tied to no one and nothing.

Moreover, the graphematic mark is structured by “the possibility of disengagement and citational graft” (Derrida, 1988, p. 12): it can be taken out of one context and inserted into others. Instead of being conceived as controllable by the hand and mind of one author, writing is understood as an “anchorless drifting”. Due to its infinite capability of engendering new contexts, writing involves continuous processes of metamorphosis. Correspondingly, Derrida understands this citationality or repeatability, which he calls the “iterability” of writing, according to a “logic that ties repetition to alterity” (1988, p. 7). Or as Krämer writes, “each repetition of a sign is characterised by a spatio-temporal shifting and implies a becoming different; repetition and the generation of difference are entangled” (2004, p. 16, my translation). For Kirby, writing as iterability works as a “breaking force … whose historicity and contingent implications rupture identity from the inside” (2006, p. 96,
emphasis in original). There are “fault lines … internal to every aspect of language [in Derrida’s sense] because there is no originary coherence which pre-exists this ‘breaking up’ of the language operation” (p. 97).

In that it is structured by absence and iterability, Derrida understands writing as “a systematic production of differences [or as] the production of a system of differences” (Derrida 2002, p. 28, emphasis in original). His word for this differential movement, in which “the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a being … are always deferred” (p. 29, emphasis in original) is “différance”. Because writing as différance is understood as preceding all appearances also the notion of “[t]he subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of différance” (p. 29, emphasis in original).

Derrida’s notion of writing is—necessarily and importantly—not identical with the concept of writing as “a species of … communication” (1988, p. 6). Instead, while in gram are repeated all those characteristics that have also been attributed to writing in the traditional sense, Derrida relocates it—and this is the decisive move—from its subordination to notions of language, communication and voice, to preceding them. The opposition between voice and writing is displaced by a writing that structures language in all its modalities and that produces instead, as it were, a graphematic writing and a graphematic voice. It is this new notion of voice and voice production (in writing and in speech) that I try to highlight with the term “gramophony”.

While it has been widely acknowledged that Derrida’s observations regarding the tendency to idealise the notion of voice constitute a valuable contribution to contemporary debates about meaning-making practices, the nature of the deconstructive operation that belongs to these observations has been misunderstood in several points, in particular among voice researchers. In Kolesch and Krämer, for instance, Derrida’s “diagnosis of phonologocentrism” (2006, p. 9, my translation) is made responsible for “a lasting marginalisation of the occupation with voice” (2006, p. 9, my translation). Krämer puts Derrida’s argument in context with attempts of “paving the way for a primacy of writing and precisely not of the voice” (2006, p. 270, emphasis in original, my translation) and Neumark argues that Derrida’s critique while “important to get past invocations of voice as true, unmediated, and authentic … somehow inhibited subsequent discussion of voice” (2010, p. xvi).
To my reading, however, the critique of phonocentrism does not aim at a centring of voice as a phenomenon in research, and nor is the point to reverse the hierarchical opposition in favour of writing. Derrida rather focuses the voice’s endowment with what Gibson calls “three kinds of seemingly unlimited power: the power to express an inward and intended sense; the power to grasp the external object; and a power over the signifier itself” (1996, p. 167). Or as Lagaay writes in a similar vein:

Derrida does not reject the voice as such in his philosophy but rather a particular idea of the voice: namely that it is the instance that represents the inner being or consciousness of a person in the most reliable way, that is, that it reflects the self-identity—the pure self-understanding—of a person (2004, p. 297, my translation).

In drawing on Derrida’s critique of phonocentrism Gramophony performs a deconstruction of the idealized notion of voice and its relation to subjectivity that is taken for granted in medico-scientific and other discourses. Of particular relevance is the connection between my paper and a recent anthology, entitled, *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretive and critical conceptions in qualitative research* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009), which interrogates the use of the notion of voice in qualitative research. Following a detailed overview of how qualitative research projects have contributed to a reiteration of “unproblematized notions and practices of voice” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, p. 2) in the past, the writers in this anthology argue for the promotion of approaches that both “‘strain’ the notion of voice” (p. 3) and engage in creative practices that produce “transgressive” voices.

In this sense, *Gramophony* joins forces with Jackson, Mazzei and others in order to emphasize the necessity to examine and perform voice “not as an intention of the subject but [as] an effect of discursive … conditions” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, p. 9). In so doing, the problem of voice is not presented as solved or solvable but the notion of voice and its uses is problematized. The value of such a project for qualitative research lies in “shifting qualitative inquiry away from uncritically engaging in practices and interpretations that limit what ‘counts’ as voice and therefore data” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, p. 4) and in challenging “those who
conduct qualitative inquiry to think differently about how they collect, analyze, and represent meaning using the voices of others, as well as their own” (p. 4).

Endnotes

i See Kirby (2006, pp. 77–78 and pp. 95–107) for a discussion of the differences between Butler’s and Derrida’s perspectives regarding the notion and workings of “iterability”.

References


