

So Fake, So Real!

Josephine and the Voice of Death

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Impossible d'échapper à ce qui n'est rien.
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In Kafka's story, *Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk*, the fundamental question that the narrator asks is: What does Josephine mean for the community? That is to say: What does her art give to the community that the mice cannot give to one another through personal contact? And, in addition, what does Josephine's success with the community reveal about the community of mice, given that even the biggest sceptics among them recognize her as "their" singer?

What is exceptional about Josephine is apparently not her singing itself. She cannot even sing. She only "pipes" like all mice do. What is exceptional about her is that she has the nerve to demand attention to her piping. You have to *see* her. She makes "a ceremonial performance out of doing the usual thing" (Kafka 1971, p. 388). Each time she does this, a circle of quiet, respectful listeners forms around her. Josephine decontextualizes everyday piping, so that it is heard as such: "[H]ere piping is set free from the fetters of daily life and it sets us free too for a little while" (*ibid.*, p. 397).

Another of Josephine's additions—in fact a subtraction—is that she pipes notably more quietly than the other mice. This testifies even more to her pluck: Josephine performs substandard

piping in a highly theatrical manner. But it is precisely in this way, according to the narrator, that she reveals the essence of piping. He draws a comparison with nut-cracking: the essence of nut-cracking is revealed when clumsiness or hesitation creeps in.¹ It is precisely in this way, that is, not in spite of, but *because of* the fact that she does not even reach the level of ordinary piping, that Josephine unveils its essence. But how so? Why is it that the people unite around a rather pathetic demonstration of inability?

In a passage, the narrator-mouse—expressing himself in an unusual, lyrical manner—describes how Josephine invests all her vitality and spirit into her feeble piping, as if she is on death’s doorstep:

[I]t is as if she has concentrated all her strength on her song, as if from everything in her that does not directly subserve her singing all strength has been withdrawn, almost all power of life, as if she were laid bare, abandoned, committed merely to the care of good angels, as if while she is so wholly withdrawn and living only in her song a cold breath blowing upon her might kill her. (Kafka 1971, p. 390)

To claim that Josephine is doing something absurd is an understatement. On a kind of an imaginary stage, shielded from everyday life by solemn silence, Josephine expends nearly all her vital energy on piping that is weaker than the piping that costs the average mouse no effort whatsoever. But with this, as the comparison with nut-cracking suggests, she touches on the “essence” of piping that escapes the notice of the typical mouse for being done so effortlessly. Josephine indeed transcends, as the sober narrator must recognize, everyday piping. She therefore has a point when “she denies any connection between her art and ordinary piping [...]: this piping of hers is no piping” (ibid., p. 389).

¹ Just as, according to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, a “tool” only reveals its essence, namely the entire “equipmentality” of which it is a part, when it breaks down.

But how can the “essence” of piping be disclosed in a markedly toothless, usually barely audible piping? This is, of course, because all piping, regardless of how powerful and lively it might sound, has something to do with powerlessness, i.e., with an inability to pipe.

What is the nature of this inability? In Josephine’s insipid voice, the people recognize, as if in a dark mirror, the manner in which it is continuously exposed to the deadly threat of an unspecified enemy. The communality that is only really experienced when Josephine performs is therefore essentially the communality of a common exposure to death. This at least is suggested by the following sentence: “Josephine’s thin piping amidst grave decisions is almost like our people’s precarious existence amidst the tumult of a hostile world” (ibid., p. 394). Josephine flirts with death. The way in which she wantonly expends all her vital force on her singing embodies for the mouse-folk a kind of capitulation-in-advance to the always-possible death. Encouraged by Josephine’s shameless weakness, the otherwise so utilitarian-minded people become momentarily indifferent to the deadly foe. Relieved of the miserable obligation to preserve their own lives, they expose themselves to death in a childishly frivolous manner.

Therefore, the “essence” of piping relates to it not being a means of communication serving the function of self-preservation; it relates to something that resonates surreptitiously in it, namely the way in which each mouse exposes itself to death. Apparently, the mice needed Josephine’s “frail little voice” (ibid., p. 389) to be able to assume, even if unconsciously, this dimension. Through Josephine’s inaudible or barely audible voice, death confronts them not as something that must be avoided at all cost, but as their *freedom*. This freedom through death is what the mouse-folk recognize in Josephine, and it is for that reason that, unbeknownst to themselves, they recognize her.

The narrator describes how radical Josephine’s desire for recognition actually is. Indeed, Josephine demands recognition

for a piping that is manifestly weak and produces no articulable meaning. With this she expresses her exposure to death. Death condemns each of us to radical weakness and loss of meaning. Nobody knows what or how to pipe in the face of death. Everyday piping pipes, as it were, despite this powerlessness. There is something about this piping that is anxious as well as frenzied, regardless of how healthy and steadfast it may sound. Josephine “sings” this speechlessness in the face of death that pertains to all piping.

But is this opposition between Josephine’s speechlessness, on the one hand, and, on the other, the piping of her people, which bears resemblance to what Heidegger called *das Gerede* (“idle talk”), not too simple?

Lost Voice, Lost Death

Perhaps a few things can be clarified by turning to Hegel. In a fragment, the young Hegel writes something peculiar about animals: “Every animal finds a voice in its violent death, it expresses itself as sublated Self” (Hegel 1967, p. 161; quoted in Žižek 1996, p. 151, and Agamben 1991, p. 45). The cry emitted by the animal is not merely a cry of pain and horror, and thus an ultimate expression of its resistance to death. Just before dying, the animal suddenly obtains a *voice* that *assumes* death. “It expresses itself as sublated Self,” that is to say: it expresses its life as something that is over. It is not merely torn away from life, but *anticipates* itself as torn from life and, as such, looks back on its life. It is for this reason that Hegel here sees human language being born, if only to immediately disappear. For the voice of the animal is something momentary, an “immediately evaporating trace,” *unmittelbar verschwindende Andeutung* (Hegel 1967, p. 207). Moreover, the animal produces only a pure, undifferentiated sound without specific meaning. Its voice is pure sonority. In human language,

this sonority is “broken up” and differentiated by consonants. Linguistic articulation dialectically *sublates* the animal voice: it simultaneously negates and preserves it. As a speaking being, man inherits from the animal the ability to relate to life as something that is finished. But language arrives in the place of the death-cry.

With its universal concepts the speaking being withdraws from mere life. The negativity to which the animal gives voice only in the single fleeting moment just before its natural death is the rule for man as speaking being. Because of language, life is something that is remembered, and therefore also desired, from the outset. Human beings no longer need to die in order to die. The distance from life is no longer provoked by natural death itself; man assumes this distance from the outset with words, or better: words assume this distance in his stead. While the dying animal is, as it were, fully present at its death, allowing death to fully resound, man no longer has a voice for death. For man, death only lives in the labor of meaning.

The meaning of a linguistic expression is understandable only to the extent that the sonority of the “animal” voice disappears into the background. The tone is ignored in favor of the meaning. But that which is negated is preserved: the confrontation with death as something most terrifying. In his interesting comments on Hegel, Agamben draws a connection with the master/slave dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The voice must be positioned on the side of the—also disappearing—master, while the work of meaning is of course on the side of the servant. Agamben does not mention that the master does not really enter into confrontation with the terrifying aspect of death. His courage to fight was no real courage. He was actually unafraid of death because he was unaware of the absolute value of life. It was the slave who was shaken to the core in the face of death—and withdrew from it. The slave briefly experienced the absolute negation of his natural existence. But this horrible moment was fleeting and immediately reduced to an immemorial experience. The slave only

knows death in the form of labor. Labor is “sublated” negativity: through labor, negativity as but a fleeting unbearable moment of fear of death in which the slave loses all basis in reality becomes a force that *transforms* reality.

Agamben summarizes the analogy between the master/slave dialectic and Hegel’s early speculation about the origin of language as follows: “as language arrests and interrupts the pure sound of the voice, so work is desire that is curbed and preserved” (Agamben 1991, p. 47). In both cases, a radical but fleeting experience of death is the secret engine of productive labor.

“But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it” (Hegel 1977, p. 19). Who is Hegel writing about in this iconic sentence from the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*? In all his defiance of death, the master has not really experienced death because he is not really attached to life. The servant, on the other hand, was afraid of death. Thus, *no one* has endured death as death in order to subsequently maintain itself in it. “Death,” says Lacan, “is never experienced as such, is it—it is never real. Man is only ever afraid of an imaginary fear” (Lacan 1991, p. 223). Trembling in the face of death, the servant sees itself as an imaginary figure that really dares to look death straight in the eye and subject himself to it. Withdrawing from death, his “absolute master,” the slave raises his master to the position of an absolute master. The master is death that does not kill but forces one to work. In the master, the slave recognizes and accepts the radical negativity of his own self-consciousness, the courage for a radical detachment that he himself is not capable of. From a Lacanian perspective, the master is thus an imaginary figure to the extent that the slave uses the master as an image with which he anticipates a sovereignty that he himself does not possess.

The slave works for the master, that is to say, he does not enjoy. He works so that the master would enjoy purely. With

this move, the master obtains a divine status. He enjoys so purely because he is detached, because what he consumes serves no vital need—like the gods who love the scent of the burnt offering that ascends to the sky. In that sense, the master is not a desiring subject. Enjoying purely, he is already right where he wants to be. This pleasure is just as fleeting and meaningless as the death-cry of the animal, Agamben notes (1991, p. 47). The servant is the true desiring subject. By working, he delays his pleasure.

The master and slave dialectic is a mythical story, says Lacan. Not only has a life and death struggle never really taken place, what is more, the relationship between the two protagonists never really occurs in the purely imaginary space in which Hegel describes it. The “struggle of pure prestige” (an expression that Lacan takes over from Alexandre Kojève, not Hegel himself) is a borderline case that never occurs in its purity. According to Lacan, “[f]rom the beginning, between the master and the slave, there’s a rule of the game” (Lacan 1991, p. 223; see also Lacan 2006, p. 686). Implicitly, there is always a symbolic pact, and in that sense, recognition. The fascination that the master exerts on the slave as someone who is not afraid of death is always already symbolic recognition, mediated by signifiers. For the slave, the master is never a purely sovereign figure who enjoys in his stead while he himself must work, i.e., someone whose enjoyment stands in the way of his own, and who thus alternately fills him with envy and worship. As a signifier, the “master” ensures the structural inability to fully enjoy—an impossibility that also applies to the master. The fact that Hegel sees the future as belonging to the slave must be interpreted in a Lacanian manner as saying that there had always only been slaves.

In this sense, Hegel’s speculation about the transition from the animal voice to human language must be read as a myth of origin, the chronology of which is misleading. The *Aufhebung* of the animal death-cry in the negativity of language too strongly suggests a succession. For Lacan, the voice is something immemorial

because, as concerns the human being, there is always already symbolic articulation. Man has always already lost his voice. The linguistic being imagines the voice in order to undo the lack, the loss of contact with life and death that is established by the symbolic order. Understood in this way, with the cry of the dying animal Hegel presents a creature that would fully assume its death as present in its disappearance.

The speaking being has no voice for death as its death has always already happened. It is stillborn in language. Agamben writes: “For this reason, meaningful language is truly the ‘life of the spirit’ that ‘brings on’ death and ‘is maintained’ in death” (Agamben 1991, p. 46). What is strange here is that it is not living human beings but language that bears death and is maintained in it. While the dying animal could still directly grasp its life from its—anticipated—death, in humans this capacity is bequeathed to language. Language deprives the human of the voice with which it could assume his death. It a priori distances humans from their disappearance, i.e., from the absolute point from which they could look back on their life. Formulated in a Lacanian manner: The only disappearance known to man is his or her disappearance (“fading”) in the *signifier*.

Feigned Feigning

In the struggle, Hegel’s master wants to outdo the slave—who balks, trembling in fear—by defying death. One could say: Kafka’s Josephine, at least when she sings, is pure desire, which mustn’t be confused with any need. While the mice are fully occupied with the struggle for self-preservation, Josephine exposes herself to death. However, she doesn’t expose herself to death at all. No one is less committed to the struggle against the formidable foe than this “delicate creature” (Kafka 1971, p. 390). She only *performs* a death that she, like every mouse, shies away from. She only

pipes that death, and in order to pipe that death, she must pretend that she does not have the strength to pipe—thus, she must pipe weakly. We have already seen how the narrator formulates this: “It is *as if* she has concentrated all her strength on her song, *as if* from everything in her that does not directly subserve her singing all strength has been withdrawn” (ibid., p. 390; my emphasis).

The narrator remains staid even when lyrical. It is not due to a real lack of power that Josephine, even with the greatest effort, only manages to produce a weak pipe. We may assume that Josephine is capable of making herself heard in daily life. But when she emerges as a singer, she invests all her might in a dubious *display*, a *spectacle* of speechlessness, so as to give expression to the speechlessness to which she is compelled by her exposure to death.

Between the animal voice that cries out death, and the meaningful discourse in which the negativity of death is employed in the work of meaning, we encounter something that is no longer a voice but is not yet meaning: a lack of voice that is the pure openness to a possible meaning, a speechlessness that opens up the space of language. When Josephine pipes, barely audibly, it is as if she “regresses” to this pre-human, yet no longer animal moment—it is as if she refuses to conceal the loss of voice by producing meaning. She “sings” the voice as that which she has lost in making herself understood like everyone else.

To make yourself understandable means to lose your voice. But that which is lost continues to insist. The voice becomes something ghostly for the speaker, as if it were a *Doppelgänger* that is speaking for her (Žižek 2012, p. 676). Josephine reveals this ghostliness when, with great aplomb, she presents her voice as something that irresistibly insists—outside of her, as it were—without her being able to express it. It is as if the voice were an object stuck in her throat.

Josephine wants to be seen and recognized as the person who disappears in her singing, as if her “art” would sweep her away.

It is for this reason that she cannot sing with a beautiful and full voice, for then she would actually betray the fact that she doesn't actually lose herself in her singing, i.e., that she is alive and well. One can invest much energy in a song, but one can only invest *all* of one's energy in a song that is not there.

The narrator emphasizes the theatrical aspect of Josephine's performances. There is a shift from the aural to the scopic. With great aplomb and without letting much be heard, she lets it be seen that she has a voice. She produces signifiers that everyone immediately recognizes as appropriate to a "passionate" singer, "spreading her arms wide and stretching her throat as high as it could reach," "shaken by vibrations especially below the breastbone [...], head thrown back, mouth half-open, eyes turned upwards," "she purses her lips, expels the air between her pretty front teeth" (Kafka 1971, pp. 389, 390, 396). This performance has its intended effect. It silences all the mice. Everything indicates that Josephine believes she is singing. She is blatantly narcissistic and "half dies in sheer wonderment at the sounds she herself is producing" (*ibid.*, p. 396).

The most obvious interpretation would be that Josephine, by projecting the image of herself as an ecstatic singer, raises a screen so as to divert the audience's attention from the weakness of her voice. A significant part of her sensible audience is smart enough to see through this, and the mice also joke about it among themselves. But in spite of all the skepticism and mockery, during Josephine's performances everyone behaves in a dignified and respectful manner. Everyone appears to believe in her voice. Their response seems to be a version of the formula of fetishistic disavowal, as proposed by Octave Mannoni (2003): I know very well that Josephine cannot sing, but during her performances, namely when I *see* her, together with the others, I am moved by her singing.

The question, however, is how such a disavowal is possible. How is it possible that nobody, not even those who mock her,

escape the fascination? “She gets effects which a trained singer would try in vain to achieve among us and which are only produced precisely because her means are inadequate” (Kafka 1971, p. 394). Josephine’s stereotyped gestures and facial expressions do not fascinate because they enhance her singing but because they invoke a voice that cannot be heard. In other words: the image of the ecstatic singer that Josephine displays does not fascinate *despite* the fact that there is no voice equal to her act, but precisely *because* it invokes a voice that is not there. This missing voice creates a gap in the image of the diva, it makes that image incomplete and incompletable, and is fascinating precisely for that reason.

There is something embarrassing about the absolute seriousness with which Josephine indulges in the signifiers of a singing that is not there. The breastbone shaken by vibrations, the head thrown back, the mouth half-open, the eyes turned upwards—this seems to be a parody. All that is left of her singing is an empty posturing. The body that acts as if expending all of its strength on a song, as if just barely managing to survive the effort—“laid bare, abandoned, committed merely to the care of good angels” (*ibid.*, p. 390)—stands there, prouder and more invulnerable than ever. Josephine’s body *simulates* the life of Hegel’s spirit that does not shy away from death but “‘brings on’ death and ‘is maintained’ in death.” It is a specter.

This is reminiscent of Bataille, for whom the sacrificial ritual as the affirmation of death is always something of a comedy by which one aims to increase one’s prestige in the face of others (Bataille 1990). Josephine’s self-sacrifice only exists as a spectacle offered to her audience. She is only capable of this sacrifice to the extent that she (dis)plays it to others, i.e., as long as she translates it into signifiers that she, moreover, borrows from these others, thus ensuring her success with them: her vibrating diaphragm, her head tilted back...

Like every mouse, Josephine is a “slave.” Death is what she fears most. However, she can only assimilate the fact that death is

more than a thing to be avoided for as long as possible by making a spectacle of it. She can therefore rightfully be suspected of expecting that her spectators believe in her show, of desiring to see them corroborate the “truthfulness,” the “authenticity” of her surrender, and thus for them to recognize her as their “master.” Only in the vision that Josephine portrays for her audience is death transformed for her from a terrifying threat into a sovereign surrender.

But does Josephine seriously believe this? Does she believe in what she imagines? The narrator outlines her desire for recognition as something very ambiguous. In any case, she is recognized to the extent that she assumes the symbolic position as “singer of the mouse-folk.” Everyone, not only her fans, treats her with every respect and tries as best as possible to respond to her whims. But this recognition does not satisfy her in the least, only increasing her dissatisfaction and the quirkiness of her demands. Josephine knows very well that those recognized by “everyone” are recognized by no one in particular. One recognizes her in order to not really have to listen to her. Any sign of recognition proves to her yet again that she is not really recognized, at least not for the right reason, not for what her art is really worth. In this sense, Josephine is truly a modern artist. She looks down on the official Josephine-cult that reduces her to a mascot, a fetish: “I am not what you think/want me to be.” She knows that she remains unacknowledged as the object of symbolic recognition; that she disappears under the signifier of that recognition. As a matter of fact, this is the essential function of the signifier. The signifier with which I am labelled by the Other teaches me to live in ignorance about who I am for the Other and what the Other desires of me (Lacan 1993, pp. 37–38). Stated in more positive terms: the signifier absolves me of forever having to guess the desire of the other. To paraphrase Lacan’s iconic “definition” of the signifier: the signifier never actually represents the recognition that the subject desires for *the subject itself* but always for *another signifier*; therefore, the signifier that would really testify to recognition is ultimately lacking.

Now, we may note that Josephine, when haughtily rejecting any form of symbolic recognition, is at risk of ending up in the imaginary, that is, in a register in which she is even more dependent on her audience. She can only look down on any sign of recognition because she imagines that there is something in her that deserves the *real* recognition of the people, i.e., that this “something” is more or less the ultimate object that the people desire. This “something” is her *voice*, the very voice that she, like all other piping mice, has lost. But is this the imaginary? The imaginary is rather at issue on the previously mentioned scopic level: Josephine’s act dazzles the eyes with its spectacle of surrender. At this level, her lack of consistency is indeed exasperating: while she openly claims that no one understands her art, she clearly relishes the cult of Josephine. Stronger still: wherever she turns up, she immediately demands all the attention.

The sceptics among the mice have every reason to dismiss the image that Josephine poses of a sovereign giving herself over to her art as vain coquetry, as an embarrassing form of narcissism. Her posing is a case of *overexposure*. Josephine turns her singing into a fetish by reducing it to pure self-presentation as a singer that lacks the essential: the song. But on the other hand, the gap between pretention and result is blatantly open. By bringing the signifiers associated with the diva into the fray in such a provocative way, while omitting the singing that these signifiers are supposed to support, Josephine betrays the void within them. She demystifies herself. Her vibrating breastbone, her head thrown back, her half-open mouth—all of this *manifestly* hangs in the air. It is a constellation of openly empty signifiers, that is, of signifiers that only serve to support a decontextualized, stripped of its meaning, and weakened version of the piping that all mice produce daily. These signifiers are offered as centered around a lack. The sovereign surrender by which Josephine wishes to distinguish herself from the “ordinary people” is not only feigned, but is also presented as feigned.

Josephine tends toward the grotesque because she explicitly turns her surrender to her singing into a pose. She is pure, self-reflective appearance. And it is precisely this reflexivity of a pose posing as a pose that enables her to radically give herself to the audience by way of her voice that remains inaudible in her highly articulate self-positing. The narrator says:

Many a time I have had the impression that our people interpret their relationship to Josephine in this way, that she [...] is entrusted to their care and they must look after her; the reason for this is not clear to anyone, only the fact seems to be established. (Kafka 1971, p. 365)

For the people, the circumstance that Josephine is entrusted to them is an inevitable fact because that which is entrusted to them in Josephine's "mere nothing in voice" (ibid., p. 394) remains obscure, namely a *lack*. If Josephine delivered a real singing performance, then she would leave herself open for judgment, assessment, and for possible rejection. But because no articulable meaning (function, usefulness, objective) can be attributed to the claim she makes on her people, the mice cannot avoid this claim, however ridiculous, ludicrous, or irritating it may seem to some of them.

With her terrifying vibrating diaphragm, her head tilted back, her eyes fixed on the heavens, Josephine clearly demonstrates her desire for recognition; she demonstrates it all too clearly, so clearly in fact that she hereby betrays that she is ultimately not seeking this type of recognition. Josephine wants to catch everyone's gaze—so that her audience would hear her lack. For something in her knows that her display is laughable, but not because of what this display is lacking, namely, her voice. Josephine may well have "much to make one laugh [...] but we do not laugh at Josephine" (ibid., pp. 391–92).

No skepticism or mockery can cope with the "nothing" of Josephine's voice. That voice is so penetrating precisely because

it is inaudible, much like someone can feel stared at so intensely because he cannot locate the gaze anywhere within his visual field.²

As a subject, Josephine is a fleeting entity that is eclipsed by the signifiers provided to her by the Other *qua* symbolic order. These signifiers help her feign that she gives herself entirely to her art. Lacan associates the French verbs *séparer* (to separate), *parer* (to fend off), and *se parer* (to show off, to adorn oneself). Josephine shows off with an image of herself. With this farce she fends off her public and also immediately separates herself from *herself* (Lacan 1998, p. 214). Isabelle Huppert once said that, at times when she gets entirely caught up in her performance, she is invisible. At the moment when she appears to give the most of herself, she is no longer there.

As a speaking being, the human finds itself in the register of appearance, feign, fiction. But the fact that the truth, as Lacan says, has the structure of a fiction (Lacan 2006, p. 684) does not mean that truth is always “only” a fiction, as vulgar Nietzscheanism would suggest. The issue is rather that you cannot escape the truth, that is, that fiction, whether you like it or not, is always a way to be open to truth.

Certainly, Josephine’s surrender is mere theatre, it is feigned. And she would be mad if she did not know that. But as an artist, she naturally assumes that there is something truthful about this theatre, and wants to read this truthfulness in the astonished eyes of her audience. By means of her audience, she believes in her masquerade. As Nietzsche says about women: they pretend to give themselves, to which one could add that, through the impression they create on men, they may even start believing in it themselves...

² Jean-Michel Vives draws this analogy that Lacan himself does not between a “blind spot” in the visual field, discussed in Lacan’s eleventh seminar, and a “deaf point” in the sonorous field. See Jean-Michel Vives, “Pulsion invocante et destins de la voix”; available online: <https://docplayer.fr/40424234-Pulsion-invocante-et-destins-de-la-voix.html> (last accessed: March 16, 2019).

But is it so simple? It seems that, for Josephine, the pose of surrender reflects itself and thereby undermines its imaginary function. She feigns that she gives herself, and she is not afraid — with her improbable shaking breastbone, her head thrown back, her mouth half-open — to *admit* that she is feigning. But perhaps she only feigns so flamboyantly so as to hide that she *truly* gives herself. Josephine does something that, according to Lacan, only people can do: they *feign feigning* (Lacan 2006, p. 683; 2014, p. 63).

Josephine can do this because she is a symbolic animal. Each signifier of which a subject avails itself never really shows it as such, but always refers it to another signifier. In this way, all speech contains an element of feigning. The subject feigns, whether it knows it or not, whether it wishes to or not. The feigning is *objective*. No subject can avoid this feigning because it has no existence outside of all the deceptive signifiers in which it hides. When she emerges as a singer, Josephine yields radically to this feigning, that is, to how she appears to her audience. This is what is so lovely about her, and this is why she is worthy of her audience's admiration: by yielding to her spectacle without any reservation or irony, she breaks through the illusion that she is hiding "behind" her spectacle. In other words: she can only commit herself so totally to her feigning because she knows that this feigning is feigned. Josephine never exposes herself more than in the spectacle in which she hides.

Josephine's show seduces her audience. She teases them; she puts them, as people say *ad nauseam* about artists, "on the wrong track." She plays a game of withdrawing and approaching. She presents herself as an enticing as well as elusive Object, in short: as a cliché of feminine mystery. In this way she keeps her audience's desire alive. But the pose with which Josephine offers herself to them as a mysterious Object is so exaggerated that it is clearly but a screen she uses so as to hide the fact that she *really* offers herself to them as a passive object, powerless, speechless, "laid bare, abandoned, committed merely to the care of good

angels.” For her, the pathetic, anything but powerless display of powerlessness, whereby she feigns that all her force is not enough to produce simple piping, is pretense, diversion—displayed, first and foremost, *for herself*—by which to effectively offer herself to her audience as a powerless object. And this object is her voice. Feigning that she only feigns exposing herself, she literally exposes herself with her voice, which is a glaring lack of voice. This “frail little voice” *embodies*—that is: provides a kind of ghostly substance to—the empty hole around which Josephine’s coquettish comedy of gestures and facial expressions turns. Identified with a voice that is buried under all the expressible and singable words, Josephine is not an object that maintains the desire of her audience but an object to be *consumed*, an object of *enjoyment*.

Each subject inscribes itself into the field of the signifiers as absent. As mentioned earlier, it enables itself to be recognized therein without being known. That is why all recognition has something false about it, something feigned. This division between recognition and knowledge is “resolved” in the fantasy. In the fantasy, I portray myself as the Other’s ideal object. Accordingly, I am not somebody because I am recognized, but I become “recognized,” or better: *enjoyed* for what I really am.

On the one hand, Josephine appreciates that she is recognized as a singer, and she knows very well the tricks by which to consolidate that recognition; however, on the other hand, she works against that recognition by piping in a barely audible manner, for she wishes to be recognized beyond any signifier that she can communicate. Thus, Josephine wants to be recognized as a *subject*, i.e., as what is lost within the fabric of signifiers. In other words: Josephine does not want to be recognized for what she says (as the subject of the statement), but as the one who is always outside itself in what is being said (the subject of enunciation). And her voice, precisely because she evokes it visually rather than audibly, embodies this “outside itself.” It is a fantasmatic object. It gives density to the empty subject of the signifier. Identified

with this voice, Josephine does not so much play with signifiers that keep the desire of the Other alive, but rather *satisfies* and thus *kills* that desire.

But in the meantime, we understand that Josephine is far from crazy. This satisfaction, which would reduce her to an object of enjoyment, is a purely unconscious-fantasmatic given that she in no way would like to see realized. Far from being a passive and speechless object, Josephine is very active and eloquent. Specifically, she knows very well how to juggle signifiers. With her arms spread wide, her neck stretched high, and her mouth half-open, she weaves as it were an “Apollonian veil” across her fantasy. She externalizes, theatricalizes this fantasy to protect herself against the frighteningly intense enjoyment that is attached to it. She feigns giving herself “totally” to her audience in order to protect herself against her actual desire of being swallowed up by that audience.

A striking, more frustrating contradiction in Josephine’s attitude should also be understood in this same sense. Although she is absolutely convinced that nobody is truly receptive to her art, “what she wants is public, unambiguous, permanent recognition of her art” (Kafka 1971, p. 399). Josephine demands that the community formally recognizes her vital contribution to it. This demand is, of course, dubious. Why must the people officially recognize an artist they don’t understand, and who even makes it a point of honor not to be understood? The explanation that in the absence of authentic receptivity to her art Josephine is simply satisfied with an official tribute, is much too obvious. Although certainly deriving narcissistic satisfaction from the institutionalized Josephine-cult, what she mainly appreciates about this cult is that the community places her at a distance, allocates her a separate scene that ensures that the excess of her surrender remains but a spectacle, safely enclosed within the social field, legal and therefore an eccentricity neutralized in advance. As long as her people harbor an impersonal respect for her, her performance will not cause any ecstatic immersion. In short: to the extent that she is

certain of being *symbolically recognized* by the Other, she is not threatened by the fantasy of being *really enjoyed* by the Other.

Ultimately, Josephine doesn't fall under the spell of her fantasy because she dares to stage it. For her, the self-objectification typical of fantasy, i.e., the reduction of oneself to an object for the satisfaction of an imaginary other, is only a game played with signifiers of the symbolic Other. Josephine does not offer herself as the ideal voice-object that must satisfy the other's desire, but rather gives to the constellation of signifiers the nature of an object by way of centering them around an absent voice. She gives the signifiers that the community has provided to her (and thereby to itself) back to the community as empty shells deprived of the alibi of their meaning. This makes her "hermetic" singing radically social: she places the responsibility for its meaning entirely in the hands of her audience.

But how is it that Josephine succeeds with such a bogus staging of her infantile fantasy? According to the narrator, for the mice Josephine's performance is an opportunity for intense togetherness, allowing the individual to "relax and stretch himself at ease in the great, warm bed of the community" (Kafka 1971, p. 396). A performance by Josephine "is not so much a performance of songs as an assembly of the people" (ibid., p. 393). It reinforces social cohesion. It is "community building." It sounds like a "message from the whole people to each individual" (ibid., p. 394). Paradoxically, this message is generated by a rather asocial individual who is somewhat condescending to the people, convinced that no one understands her message. The intelligent narrator even candidly suggests that Josephine's breathless piping increases the intensity of the togetherness to the extent that the audience pay it little or no attention. Those who would concentrate on it would have to realize that it is worthless and feel a kind of embarrassment by proxy.

How is it that the "message from the whole people to each individual," the message that best serves to merge individuals into a community, is not performed by a full, sonorous, healthy

voice? This is because Josephine insidiously betrays the secret of the community, of how individuals are *called* to communality.

Each individual is a social being; as such, it is a human being by means of an appeal issued by the community. This appeal is originally a puzzling interpellation. At a fundamental level, the individual does not know what the community desires of them. The small child is pulled into it by being bombarded with signifiers from which they can only deduce *that* something is desired of them. The question of what is desired of them is therefore the first question the child asks, and is more originary than the question “Who am I?” The fantasy is a response to this question. In it, the child imagines itself to be the answer to that question. To avert the fear that arises from the child’s ignorance of what is desired of him or her, he or she postulates him or herself as the exclusive object of that desire. The—rather masochistic—logic here is: “It doesn’t matter what the other desires as long as it desires it from me.”

In addition to the gaze, the *voice* of the other may assume a central place in the fantasy. The other’s voice convinces the subject of being the other’s privileged object. This is strange, since the voice is precisely the point in the other where its desire is most enigmatic. But it is also logical, since all the other signifiers that the other directs toward the subject refer to worldly affairs outside the child, toward which the desires of the other are also apparently directed. These signifiers produce an always unpredictable meaning that never exclusively concerns the child itself, and that is why the child binds itself to something eminently meaningless: the voice, the voice that is purely and only voice, the voice that speaks to the child without saying anything meaningful. This voice, in so far as the child hears it say that it has been chosen, is actually fantasmatic and therefore never an empirical given.

By way of fantasy, the subject protects itself not only against its ignorance concerning the desire of the other, but also against the ignorance of the other itself. Because the other can a priori

only make its desire identifiable through signifiers that refer to one another, what the other desires from the subject always remains hidden beneath what it explicitly asks. Therefore, the other's desire is a mystery for the other. When the subject believes it can discern from the voice of the other that it is itself the object of the other's desire, it thereby conceals not only its own ineluctable lack, but also that of the other.

According to Darian Leader, the small child does not just babble to itself in order to learn to speak, but rather *to fend off* all of those voices that constantly speak to it. This is a "premature incorporation" to defuse the anxiety generated by the enigmatic claim that others continually make of it. Its babbling enables the child to appropriate these coercive voices.³ To do this, it must first and foremost drown out these voices. It must become deaf to them⁴ because they too strongly arouse in him the fantasy of being the submissive object of the other. Its babbling, which may also be a soft humming, is therefore an attempt to no longer simply be the object, but also to become the subject of a voice. Is Josephine's "frail little voice" not an extension of this childish infantile babbling? And if so, in what sense?

Lacan notes that small children babble while playing their solitary games, and that they immediately cease babbling once an adult enters (Lacan 2014, pp. 273–74). Whereas children babble "to themselves," Josephine babbles for everyone, as it were. Both babble to evade interpellation by others. It is as if people first and foremost speak so as not to hear. But not hearing is impossible. Like Kant before him, Lacan notes that, in contrast to the eye, people cannot close their ears. The paradox is that those who do not wish

³ Leader 2006, pp. 8–9. Lacan says: "A voice, therefore, is not assimilated, but incorporated" (Lacan 2014, p. 277). This means that the voice remains a *Fremdkörper*, a "foreign element."

⁴ See, once more, Jean-Michel Vives, "Pulsion invocante et destins de la voix"; available online: <https://docplayer.fr/40424234-Pulsion-invocante-et-destins-de-la-voix.html> (last accessed: March 16, 2019).

to hear anything from the other only hear the other's voice. It is therefore better to listen to what the other has to say in order not to hear its voice, which is so compelling in its meaninglessness.

While the babbling child searches for the meaning of the signifying material with which it is bombarded, Josephine empties this material of its meaning. She lets it be heard as that to which she has turned a deaf ear—therefore retaining only the voice. Tired and prickly in respect to the claim that the community of mice continuously makes on her, and to the unsolicited responsibility heaped upon her, all she retains from that material is the meaningless, haunting voice that sounds inaudibly within it. She thus permits herself to reduce all signifiers to silent witnesses of the inaudible voice, buried by meaning by which the people lay claim to her.

All that Josephine's solemn piping retains of mouse-piping is the silent, originary violence of interpellation, imperative in its meaninglessness. Like Marcel Duchamp, who placed a urinal on a pedestal, thus stripping it of its function, so Josephine presents on the stage a fragment, a strange condensation of everyday piping stripped of all contextually determined content.

As the voice of the people, Josephine's voice is simultaneously weak and compelling. The people do not exist without mice that respond to its call. It remains unclear what is understood by "the people," what holds it together as a people, what "the people" means. From what the narrator tells us, we understand that the mice people have no "master signifiers" (Lacan) that would provide their piping with a semblance of a foundation, or substantial anchoring. In the absence of such a master signifier, there is only that strange, capricious, spoiled singer, piping in the name of the people. Her "message from the whole people to each individual" does not provide each individual with "the people" as something that is grounded in God, Nature, a mythical Past, a Soul of the people, or in some other pre-symbolic substance. On the contrary: Josephine gives, she reveals to each individual

its people as an irreparable lack-of-being. The bluff whereby she commands attention for her “frail little voice” is a rather grotesque parody of the way that each mouse appeals every day from out of its desire to exist.

To the extent that Josephine embodies the lack, i.e., the eternal becoming of the community, she knows nothing and in principle wants to know nothing of the meaning, the usefulness or the importance of her message, since each meaning, use or importance attached to it would cover up the meaninglessness of the voice.

According to the narrator, when Josephine’s voice is replete with “small gaieties, unaccountable and yet springing up and not to be obliterated” (Kafka 1971, p. 397) that typify the mouse-folk, it indicates *enjoyment*. This enjoyment derives from the relief of any concern for self-preservation or certainty. Still, it is too easy to say that Josephine herself enjoys. Rather, she returns to her people the signifiers—restored to their original, enjoyment-soaked mysteriousness—with which it has bombarded her since she was a child. In that respect, her art, understood as a gift to her people, seems for Josephine a strategy of ridding oneself of this interpellation.⁵

Does Josephine, as I’ve argued, place the responsibility for the interpretation of her art entirely on her audience? This is too strong a claim. It would suggest that Josephine’s singing is a question addressed to the audience for which the latter owes an answer. Anyway, the audience realizes that the recognition officially given to Josephine does not compensate for its lack of understanding. But does the audience think that it still owes her “real” understanding?

Lacan often connects the voice to Freud’s concept of a severe, accusatory superego, i.e., an authority that is not satisfied with any repayment of debt. When Josephine displays the community’s

⁵ This idea draws upon Derrida’s claim that the essence of art was never reproduction (representation), but *restitution* (see Derrida 1993).

claim on each individual in its naked meaninglessness, she seems to be a representative of this superego. But nothing could be further from the truth. Josephine relieves her audience of all responsibility because she already responds to the claim that the community makes on each individual. This response is strange. It is a doubling, a ludicrous echo of the voice that calls her from the community. Josephine is not concerned with wondering about what the community asks of everyone. Gloriously irresponsible, she lets this question resonate in the void like a question that does not know what it is asking.

Lost in her own mousey piping, Josephine's voice returns to her as a strange echo, buried under the signifiers, none of which guarantee that she speaks through them. The only guarantee that she has is fantasmatic. Josephine imagines her own voice somewhere *between* the signifiers she has lost her voice in; she imagines it where the endless sliding from one signifier to the other skips or hesitates. It is precisely in the silence within the piping that Josephine imagines the voice as that which *supports* this incomprehensible sliding.⁶

The voice as the fantasmatic object *a* is, according to Lacan, actually silent (2014, p. 276). Just as the gaze can look at me from anywhere except from someone's eyes, so I "hear" the voice issue from no mouth. In this way, a shift is always possible from the visual to the aural and *vice versa*. Just as the gaze can look at me from a rustling in the room,⁷ the voice can speak to me from the strange, mute gestures and faces of others—gestures that I have muted by cutting away the voice. Thus, the voice as an object is never a phenomenon. It is the product of a cutting away, which is an abstraction.

⁶ "It's this passage from one [signifier] to the next that constitutes the essential feature of what I call the signifying chain. // This passage, insofar as it's evanescent, is the very thing that becomes voice—[...] it's the voice that sustains this passage." (Lacan 2017, pp. 322–23)

⁷ An example that Lacan takes from Sartre: Lacan 1998, p. 84.

Essential for the fantasmatic object is that it only supports our identity insofar as it remains hidden, “silently presumed.” If it unveils itself, then it turns out to be a strange, ghostly entity that—disconnected from any individual—calls from the void. Everyday chatter drowns out the voice. Singing, by bringing words to the edge of meaninglessness, seems to reveal the voice, but it also protects it against such disclosure. Singing only evokes the voice in order to exorcise it (Dolar 1996, p. 10).⁸

If Josephine demands attention for a singing that does not sing, that does not even pipe, does she want to express the voice itself? The voice “itself”—that would be the pure emptiness of a lack, in which case Josephine would assign to the people its pure lack of ground. She would have evoked anxiety—which she does not do. Josephine *symbolizes* the lack of ground. She evokes the voice, buried under the “meaningful” faces and gestures accompanying her singing, as that from which any meaningful expression has been removed and is hovering somewhere, unspoken and unsung.

Josephine pipes from out of a type of gap she has created within the common piping; she pipes from out of the point in that piping to which she has turned a deaf ear because she was too exposed to it, unarmed against it, with no answer. She pipes from within the people itself as someone who gets lost in their piping and therefore can in no way guarantee its meaning. She pipes as somebody that is nobody. When she opens her mouth half-way, when she purses her lips, throws her head back, without thereby generating but ordinary piping, she openly conceals the nothing from within which the people pipe to her.⁹

It is no wonder that the sober narrator’s astonishment regarding the fact that there is a place in the mouse community for

⁸ According to Jean-Michel Vives, if Lacan calls painting a “*dompte-regard*” (Lacan 1998, pp. 105, 109, 111), singing is a “*dompte-voix*.”

⁹ The voice “resonates in a void that is the void of the Other as such, properly speaking *ex-nihilo*” (Lacan 2014, p. 275).

something like Josephine is colored by the presumption of her uselessness. Like everyone who is called by their people, Josephine is indeed the one who is unable to translate this call into a clearly defined task or function; in a kind of helpless dismay, the philosophical astonishment at which is perhaps a kind of mitigating concealment, she pauses before the enigma of being interpellated by the other. In this sense, she belongs to those that Nietzsche addresses as the “superfluous,” *Überschüssigen* (1988, pp. 664–65).

“Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk.” As “superfluous,” as an eccentric exception, atypical for the people and, moreover, a transitory phenomenon, Josephine *is* the mouse-folk. She embodies the enigmatic, groundless and enjoyment-soaked message from the whole people to each individual. Nothing makes the mice cling together as a people like Josephine’s “fragile little voice,” which enables them to hear that there is no pre-given ground or reason to sticking together. It is apparently the strange privilege of art to give a positive and gentle form to the groundlessness of our togetherness. This is the luxury of its irresponsibility. But particularly essential is the paradoxical need for such a luxury. Art is evidently necessary because the lack of ground cannot be assumed as such, or better: the negativity of this lack, and the corresponding enjoyment, can apparently only be assimilated if they are *embodied*, i.e., if they adopt the positivity of, for instance, a singing body. This lack, conceptualized by Lacan as the “lack in the Other,” can only appear as a fascinating *Fremdkörper*, fundamentally unintegratable into the daily discourse in which everyone is supposed to guarantee the meaning of what is said, and may therefore be held responsible for it. Therefore, the popular utopia of the fusion between art and life is false. There is such a thing as art because there is something to life that remains forever intolerable, irreconcilable with life as it is “normally” lived.

Death Given Away

What is ultimately the relationship between Josephine and death? Hegel very speculatively employs the fatally injured animal as a *missing link* between purely biological and linguistic life. In its death cry, the animal, unmediated by language, finds a voice for its own disappearance. Man has lost this voice because language has cut him off from the living body with which he could express his death. In this sense, as Blanchot never tired of saying, language always turns death into something that has always already happened; and therefore it is impossible to die. Hence the recourse to fantasy: in fantasy, the subject still coincides with a voice that testifies to its death, thus enabling the subject to survive it.

In Lacan we read:

The first object he [the subject] proposes for this parental desire whose object is unknown is his own loss—*Can he lose me?* The phantasy of one's death, of one's disappearance, is the first object that the subject has to bring into play in this dialectic [...]. (Lacan 1998, p. 214)

Intimidated by the desire whose object is unknown to it, the subject offers itself as object. But since no specific attribute of the subject guarantees for the satisfaction of the Other, the only “object” that can do this is an object that transcends every attribute: the radical negation of all of the attributes of the subject, its disappearance. In a Hegelian “struggle for pure prestige,” the subject challenges the other with his disappearance, imagining that the other will experience this as an insurmountable lack. The subject thus not only presents to the other its disappearance; it also puts itself in the place of the other, from where it contemplates itself in its disappearance. It indeed sees itself as “the life that brings on death and is maintained in death.” The Hegelian subject that overcomes the absolute negativity of death by facing up to it is thus the subject of the unconscious fantasy.

In connection with the subject who offers its own disappearance as an object, Lacan uses, but does not further explain, the example of mental anorexia. Josephine seems to be an example of mental *aphasia*, although it is not real, certainly not that real that she could not perform it on the stage in front of an audience. Contrary to this, in his or her delusion of independence the anorexic has no audience. He or she does not know that by trying to realize a condition of total purity and intactness through starvation he or she challenges the Other with his or her virtual disappearance. An anorexic's relationship with the audience is unconscious, speechless. If they would make a spectacle of their hunger, they would end up in the paradox of Kafka's hunger artist (see "A Hunger Artist" in Kafka 1971). In order to invalidate all suspicion of deceit, the hunger artist absolutely wishes for his audience to believe that he really is starving. And he does this also because he really has an aversion to food. If his audience came to know this, it would realize that his starving has no artistic value.

The hunger artist *feigns feigning*. He presents his starvation as an art in order to hide from his audience the fact that his pain is real, as it is only pleasure. It seems that Josephine also feigned feigning. She too eloquently acts as if she is speechless, thereby hiding (first and foremost from *herself*) the fact that she is really speechless. However, in contrast to the hunger artist, who entrenches himself in an illusion of authenticity, Josephine is fully committed to her feigning. This commitment implies a moment of *disinterestedness*: Josephine can only immerse herself so intensively in her show because she is indifferent to the question of the extent to which she is really present in it—while for the hunger artist, of course, this is the essential question. Josephine only *unconsciously* believes that her speechlessness is real: she only believes it at the level of fantasy.

Josephine is in the throes of her fantasy in so far as she is convinced that her people are deaf to her singing and that she therefore sings for a mysterious Other that is actually receptive to it. This Other *believes* in her; it believes that she is only feigning

her speechlessness because she, in a hidden layer of her being, really is speechless—as speechless as the animal that, overwhelmed by death, has a voice only once. The hesitation in her voice expresses in the ear of this fantasized Other her speechless dismay toward death. But such a fantasy now seals precisely the loss, the expropriation of her voice: Josephine’s voice now only sounds through the ear of an imaginary other.

On the imaginary level, Josephine is certainly vain, and she tells her people something like: “Your much too practical pipe-speak leaves me with no voice for my speechlessness in the face of death, and so I pipe speechlessly to someone other than you.” On the symbolic level she says: “Only by piping in our pipe-speak am I, together with you, speechless, and my entire show is a demonstration of this.”

Josephine’s fragile little voice therefore sounds particularly impure. She “makes a ceremonial performance out of performing the usual thing” (Kafka 1971, p. 388). We know that this “usual thing” is a decontextualized and weak version of the busy piping by which the mice avoid death and in which they get lost. While the mice are usually immersed in the meaning of what they pipe, in Josephine they hear the forlornness of their piping. This forlornness is indeed the secret of their curious cheerfulness, of the fundamental lack of seriousness with which they transcend their utilitarianism.

The Other that would hear Josephine’s lost voice, the Other in which she would “maintain” her death, is a mirage, and so her voice is irretrievably lost, an unlocalizable drifting voice that belongs to and is intended for no one. In other words, it is only designated for the people that are deaf to it. But like the child who turns a deaf ear to the interpellation of others in order to “incorporate” it, the deafness of the people is a form of receptiveness. This occurs precisely when the mice no longer even try to garnish something from her voice, but “are quite withdrawn into themselves” and dream away, while “into these dreams Josephine’s piping drops note by note” (ibid., p. 396). It is precisely when Josephine *is barely there for them anymore*, that her voice interpellates them from a

source that is everywhere and nowhere, like a “message from the whole people to each individual.” Only then does Josephine’s voice visit them in and through her absence. In this way, Josephine has relinquished her voice, and her death along with it.

Because of this gap between the mice’s rather poor experience of Josephine’s performances and the uncanny effect that her voice has on them; because the mice do not understand how Josephine’s voice touches them, they may suspect that they are witnessing a communication that transcends them. In that sense they are fascinated by Josephine because they believe that she first and foremost addresses a superior, unknown Other, much like the priest who, turning away from the believers, addresses incomprehensible prayers to God. The modest narrator seems to believe in this ideal listener by going along with Josephine’s conviction that nobody can assess the value of her singing, thereby suggesting that there must be someone that recognizes its value.

For the mice, such a faceless Someone would serve as a kind of minimal religious compensation for their lack, namely for their lack of genuine receptivity to the enigmatic claim that Josephine makes on them in the name of the community. Because they only hear Josephine’s voice without knowing it, because in this way their receptiveness to her voice is conditioned by a primary *unreceptiveness*, they imagine an Other that would be perfectly receptive to Josephine’s voice.

But all in all, there is little to suggest that the mouse-folk are religious. Ultimately, the mysterious Other for whom Josephine goes to such great lengths can only be the people themselves. The narrator suggests this when melancholically musing about the time when Josephine will no longer be there:

[H]ow can our gatherings take place in utter silence? Still, were they not silent even when Josephine was present? Was her actual piping notably louder and more alive than the memory of it will be? Was it even in her lifetime more than a simple memory? Was it not rather because Josephine’s singing was already past losing

in this way that our people in their wisdom prized it so highly?
(Kafka 1971, p. 403)

Josephine's piping is so weak that it anticipates the silence that will prevail once she is no longer there, as if she wants it to be heard that her voice is already *sublated* (negated and preserved) in what her people gather from it. Thus, she pipes her voice as if the future in which she and that voice will be no more has already arrived, as if her death will therefore make no difference. She pipes her voice as it will be remembered, that is to say *forgotten*, by an Other that is radically unknown to her and to itself: her people. Josephine is the disposable, actually already disposed of bearer of a piping that is already there only for the people. That is why the mice value her singing so highly: it is a pure gift to her people. This gift is a *restitution* of something she never possessed. Namely, she gives to her people the gift of a voice for the death that she never had because it was always already lost in the ordinary piping of the people. Something in her may then fantasize that someone somewhere eternalizes her voice; but her whispering pipe is a type of condensation of the way the people, for whom each death is a vague reminder already before it even occurred, cheerfully pipe all death away in desperation.

As we know from Hegel and Heidegger, the ability to anticipate one's own death/absence is what is human about mankind. There is, however, something futile about such anticipation, but also something uncannily *frivolous*: in advance, I have placed my death in the hands of others. My death is no point from which I appear as true and indispensable. It is never mine, but that of the erratic, superficial, *cheerful* others who I myself am, of the others for whom there is no remembrance without forgetting. With her arms spread wide, her neck stretched to the extreme, her eyes turned upwards, her lips pursed, Josephine has already given herself entirely to those others, and thus to oblivion, "committed merely to the care of good angels."

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