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Ventriloquizing Nation:
Voice, Identity, and Radical Democracy in
Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object.

Speech is in fact a gift of language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is. Words are trapped in all the corporeal images that captivate the subject. . . .—Jacques Lacan, “Function and Field of Speech and Language”

Compressed within (and between) the two epigraphs that begin my essay is a theory of subjectivity.¹ According to Lacan, the subject finds (or identifies) itself in language only to lose itself at the same time. Refusing any transparency to speech, Lacan highlights the loss inherent in any act of (self-)representation. The subject's speech is always a “gift of language” that comes from without and thus remains irretrievably other. In the search for a stable identity, the subject is captivated by “corporeal images” that might serve to mirror the subject's elusive wholeness and thus confirm its identity. One word for Lacan's “subtle body” of language is *voice*. In subject-formation, voice confers and confirms identity and, at the same time, dissolves it. There is an irreducible tension in the effort to subjectify voice—to make it both the source and expression of the subject—because voice, in Lacan's reading, remains on the side of the object. Extrapolating from Lacan's formulations, a subject's speech could thus be figured as an act of ventriloquism, appearing to emanate from the subject but articulated from without. And if that voice acts to confer and confirm a certain identity, it is an identity that is forever split by the foreign body—the objectal nature—of the voice.

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Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, like the Lacanian account of identity I sketch here, explores the connections between voice and identity through the figure of ventriloquism. And like Lacan, Brown's novel suggests that if voice holds the promise of establishing identity, voice is finally the mechanism through which subjective division is manifested. The plot of *Wieland* is notoriously difficult to summarize, but no reader would argue with the observation that the events of the plot are generated largely through ventriloquism.² To give a sketchy and overly simplified account of the novel, Theodore Wieland; his wife, Catharine Pleyel Wieland; his sister, Clara Wieland; and his brother-in-law, Henry Pleyel, live in a relatively isolated rural community outside Philadelphia in the period, according to Brown's own prefatory "Advertisement," "between the conclusion of the French and the beginning of the revolutionary war."³ The group begins to hear disembodied voices, and some—if not definitively all—of these voices are eventually revealed to be the work of Carwin, a newcomer to the group, who has the ability to ventriloquize his voice. Whether directly the work of Carwin or not—and Carwin denies it—Theodore Wieland becomes convinced that he has heard the voice of God, who demands the sacrifice of his family as proof of his faith. Wieland kills his wife and their children and is on the verge of murdering his sister when he is stopped by Carwin, whose ventriloquized commands cause Wieland to doubt his divine sanction. Wieland kills himself instead. The plot takes Theodore Wieland from the seeming subjective wholeness promised by God's vocal command to the subjective destitution brought about by the evacuation of that voice, when it is revealed to be the result of ventriloquism or illusion.

Although I have so far treated this disruption of the equation between voice and identity primarily as a psychoanalytic issue, involving individual identity, it has important political implications. Radical democratic theorists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, especially, have made Lacan's anti-essentialist account of subjectivity a key element in their analysis. If "there is no identity which can be fully constituted," as Laclau and Mouffe argue, then identity cannot be the ground for but, rather, is the effect of political activity.⁴ And this means, in turn, that democratic politics cannot be seen as the expression of a preexisting identity (or group of identities) but must be understood as actively involved in the *creation* of those identities. This necessitates a close examination of the modalities and techniques through which identities are created.

In the early National period, the Federalist party advocated an American identity that would be characterized above all else by unity and by an insistence on the connections between voices, bodies, and identities. That political logic is perhaps best encapsulated by the Federalist-penned Alien and Sedition Acts, a series of four interlocking acts designed, in the words of historian James Morton Smith, as “both a political weapon and an attempt to attain a greater ‘purity of national character.’”⁵ During the 1790s, France and the United States were involved in protracted diplomatic conflict, which escalated when it was publicized—in what became known as the XYZ Affair—that agents of the French foreign minister Talleyrand had suggested that the United States must loan France \$12 million and pay a bribe to Talleyrand before the French government would negotiate any new treaties with the United States. Though it was the external threat of an anticipated military conflict with France that ostensibly gave rise to the Alien and Sedition Acts, those acts focused solely on internal enemies. Three of the four acts—the Naturalization Act, Alien Enemies Act, and Alien Friends Act—were designed to protect the United States against aliens in its midst, yet it was the Sedition Act—which applied both to citizens and aliens—that became the most important of the four acts. Indeed, the only successful prosecutions were carried out under the guise of the Sedition Act; these included high-profile convictions of opposition newspaper publisher Thomas Cooper and Republican congressman Matthew Lyon. The Sedition Act, which made illegal virtually any speech or writing intended to criticize governmental policy, also reveals most strikingly the drive toward unified identity that animated the Federalists.⁶ Alexander Hamilton, for example, seized upon the opportunities provided by the furor over the XYZ Affair, remarking that the “spirit of patriotism” could be used to suppress the Republican opposition and to create “national unanimity.”⁷

One of the crucial words in the Federalist rhetoric of the period, and one that suggests the Federalists’ obsession with national unity, is *purity*. The Alien and Sedition Acts were designed to purify the body of the nation by expelling dangerous aliens and to purify the voice of the nation by suppressing oppositional speech. The sense of national crisis generated by Federalist rhetoric had led, early in 1798, to an outpouring of public support for President Adams and the Federalists, frequently articulated in terms of the fantasy of unified identity and univocality that the Alien and Sedition Acts would eventually legis-

late. For example, in May 1798, the *Columbian Centinel* published the following declaration of the militia of New Jersey: "Let our enemies flatter themselves that we are a divided people.—In New Jersey, Sir, with the exception of a few degraded and a few deluded characters, to whose persons, and to whose services the invading foe shall be welcome . . . —In New Jersey, Sir, there is but *one voice*.—"8 Adams himself answered personally nearly every one of these public addresses and proclamations, many of which, along with his responses, were published in book form in 1798.⁹ In Adams's responses, note Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, "the great preoccupation, transcending all else, is national unity."¹⁰ In Smith's analysis, Adams's responses not only reflected his and the Federalists' concerns but also did much to create the climate in which a unified national identity was the overriding political obsession, and in which the Alien and Sedition Acts then seemed a necessary step to secure that identity. Adams's declarations were praised by the *Columbian Centinel* as "the scriptures of Political Truth."¹¹ The goal of the Sedition Act, especially, was to insist upon the undivided univocality of American identity articulated so forcefully by the New Jersey militia.

Brown's composition of *Wieland* began in March or April of 1798, just as the XYZ Affair was coming to light, and he finished the novel in September, several months after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts.¹² In the context of Federalist concerns about voice, identity, and national unity, Brown's exploration of ventriloquism takes on an added significance. I read the novel as an oblique commentary on the crisis that occupied the forefront of American politics and the front page of many a newspaper as Brown was writing. Brown critiques the Federalist fantasy of vocal unity through the figure of ventriloquism. Unlike the Federalist fantasy that attempted to ensure the identity of voice and body politic through a legislative purification, ventriloquism divorces voice from body. Severing the seemingly necessary link between voice and body opens up possibilities of endless circulation between the two. What ventriloquism does not do, however, is liberate voice from the body. Indeed, the effects of ventriloquism rely on the listener's (mis)recognition of the voice's originating body. If anything, ventriloquism highlights the bodily origin of voices more strongly than "normal" speech by calling attention to the disconnection between the voice we hear and the body we see. The characters in *Wieland* cannot hear a voice without imputing it to a bodily

source, or in the most extreme case, an extrabodily, or divine, source. If bodies produce voices, voices also produce bodies. Ventriloquism thereby puts into relief questions of subjectivity and identity: whose voice, whose body?

Brown's play with the figure of ventriloquism in *Wieland* presents the voice as dividing and disrupting any sense of unified identity and suggests that the voice itself is naturally doubled. Though Carwin himself knows "not what name to call it," Brown explains in a footnote that Carwin's mysterious vocal power is called "*Biloquium*," literally, a "double speech" (*W*, 226). Carwin's talents may appear bizarre, yet Brown is careful to emphasize the simultaneous naturalness and art of this power. "I know not," Carwin explains, "that every one possesses this power. Perhaps, though a casual position of my organs in my youth shewed me that I possessed it, it is an art which may be taught to all." Brown's footnote further positions "ventriloquation" within the larger context of the imitative quality of the human voice: "Experience shews that the human voice can imitate the voice of all men and of all inferior animals." That is, the artful "mimicry" of *Biloquium* describes, *Wieland* suggests, the natural qualities of every voice (*W*, 226). Like Lacan, Brown shows the ventriloquized voice to disrupt the dividing line between subject and object, figuring the excessive mimicry of Carwin's biloquism as a potential model for every voice: doubled and divided, bodily and extrabodily.

Carwin's ventriloquism is disruptive. It is certainly possible, in the context of the politically traumatic period of the 1790s, to see ventriloquism itself as the target of Brown's novel. As a number of critics of *Wieland* have argued, the biloquial Carwin can be seen to focus anxieties about the Republican form of government and the potential power of politicians and demagogues to mislead the populace with seductive speeches. This, in essence, is a Federalist reading of *Wieland*, one that positions the novel as critical of the ambiguities of democracy. Jane Tompkins—perhaps the most influential proponent of this reading—argues that the novel is "a plea for the restoration of civic authority in a post-Revolutionary age."¹³ More recently, Christopher Looby has argued that *Wieland* shows Brown to be "a complex counter-revolutionary writer" (*VA*, 202). While Looby is critical of Tompkins's argument, finding that her reading of *Wieland* works to "reduce its bizarre complexity unnecessarily" (*VA*, 193), he nonetheless echoes her conclusion that *Wieland* "offers a direct refutation of

the Republican faith in men's capacity to govern themselves without the supports and constraints of an established social order."¹⁴ Looby argues that *Wieland* is "a discouraged reflection on the tenability of the claim that a viable political order could be guaranteed by discursive reason without the aid of the unspoken loyalty and reverence that supported the legitimacy of previous states" (VA, 193). Although they construct the logic of their readings somewhat differently, both Tompkins and Looby suggest that before Carwin's arrival the *Wielands* and *Pleyels* are, in Tompkins's phrasing, "leading the most rational and harmonious existence imaginable on a country estate on the banks of the Schuykill river."¹⁵ What Tompkins's and Looby's readings ignore is the way in which this bucolic idyll is already produced as illusory. Clara's narration of the novel is positioned between two tragedies: her father's spontaneous combustion, which begins her narrative and precedes the immediate events, and *Wieland's* familicide, which provides the novel's climax. Nor does the novel appear to blame Carwin for disrupting this illusory idyll. No character in the novel pursues the question of Carwin's guilt, and the text does not symbolically punish him for his role in the tragedy.

If Carwin's *Biloquium* separates voice and body, the gothic complexities of *Wieland's* plot show the novel to be unconcerned with reuniting the "proper" voice with the "proper" body. If many of the mysterious voices in the novel are explained as originating from Carwin's body, the voice that generates the central action of the plot remains disembodied. What is the source of the voice that drives Theodore *Wieland* to murder his family? Is it Carwin's voice? Or is it *Wieland's* "own" voice externalized by a delusive fantasy into the voice of God? The conclusion of *Wieland* gives surprisingly little attention to solving this mystery in an unequivocal manner. Instead, Clara's final comments have the effect of shifting attention—as in many novels of seduction—from the seducer to the seduced: she declares that the "evils" that have befallen the characters "owed their existence to the errors of the sufferers" (W, 278). If we take Clara seriously, the dangers of democracy lie not in misrepresentation—that is, in the representations of Carwin's voice(s)—but in the Lacanian category of *misrecognition*—that is, in the way Carwin's voice is heard. If the characters make the error of believing too strongly in Carwin's voice, the locus of the novel's critique is that very belief in the power of the voice. In a time when the legitimacy of the nation was also predicated

on the power of the voice, this critique of voice did—and still does—have political implications. Refusing the reification of the social order that is condensed in the singular figure of “the voice of the people,” *Wieland* insists on the divided character of any voice, and in so doing makes a powerful critique of the drive toward national identity figured in the Alien and Sedition Acts. While the novel reveals the power of the voice in fostering illusions of identity, it also suggests the dangers of insisting too stridently on the need for a unified identity. By reading the novel’s critique of identity as a political statement, I am therefore allying Brown with current theorists of radical democracy.¹⁶ To pursue democracy, writes Chantal Mouffe, “means discarding the dangerous dream of perfect consensus, of a harmonious collective will, and accepting the permanence of conflicts and antagonisms.”¹⁷ Ernesto Laclau insists that “[t]here is democracy only if there is the recognition of the positive value of a dislocated identity.”¹⁸ In this context, then, the force of the novel’s critique falls not upon the fragmentation of the social world of *Wieland*—as Tompkins and Looby argue—but on the drive to organize that social world into a “harmonious collective will.” That drive toward unity is best represented by Theodore Wieland’s “Federalist” search for vocal self-identity.

“The Divinity of Cicero”

Theodore Wieland is an orator and can therefore be understood as a participant in what Jay Fliegelman has called the “elocutionary movement”—a turn in rhetorical theory, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, that favored the “elevation of the performative aspect of speech over the argumentative,” therefore placing new emphasis on the practice of oratory.¹⁹ In *Wieland*, the figure that stands for Wieland’s tremendous psychological investment in the powers of voice is Cicero, the most famous of the Roman orators. Wieland’s passionate commitment to the study of oratory is signaled by what Clara Wieland jokingly refers to as her brother’s belief in the “divinity of Cicero” (*W*, 28). Yet insofar as it is the tenor of Wieland’s particular belief in “divinity” that leads him to kill his wife and children, and insofar as he receives “‘direct communication’” with the figure of his divinity as a vocal-auditory revelation (*W*, 189), Clara’s joke comes to have a frightening literality. That phrase, “the divinity of Cicero,” reread in the light of his eventual actions, suggests that Wieland’s investment in

oratory and his religious mania are inextricably connected. The proverb *vox populi, vox dei*—the voice of the people is the voice of God—was often used during this period to sum up the power of republican government. In its most typical use as a signifier for the workings of democratic representation, of course, the second half of the proverb, the *vox dei*, was subordinate to the first half, and it functioned merely as a sign of the unquestionable authority of “the voice of the people.” *Wieland* inverts that proverb by literalizing it. Theodore Wieland eventually reaches a state in which the *vox dei* no longer functions metaphorically. If *Wieland* appears to accept the undeniable power of the voice to generate action, the novel nonetheless subjects that power to an ironic critique.

Oratory wields social power by generating a kind of subjective doubling, of which Carwin’s *Biloquium* is only a more extreme version, as the influence of the voice creates in the listener a mirror image of the orator. This emphasis on the doubling of the oratorical self is visible in an anonymously authored essay entitled “Thoughts on Oratory,” which appeared in 1798, alongside Brown’s own “The Man at Home,” in the New York periodical the *Weekly Magazine*.²⁰ Published on 14 April, the appearance of the essay coincides with the early stages of Brown’s composition of *Wieland*. The essay can perhaps be taken as evidence of the widespread acceptance of the basic paradigms of the oratorical movement and a marker of the degree to which oratory was elevated in the early United States. Valuing the “eloquence of the heart” over “all the studied tones and periods of the most accomplished *artificial* orators,” the essay argues that “[t]he language which affects the hearts of the hearers, in the most powerful manner, must necessarily be reputed the most eloquent. The business of the speaker is to make the hearers feel what he feels himself.”²¹ The power of the voice is figured here as a connection between bodies, a communication that moves from “heart” to “heart” and causes the auditor to mimic the internal subjective state—the feelings—of the orator. It recreates the auditor, then, as an uncanny double of the orator.

Such an understanding of the voice’s power had obvious political implications, and the rhetorical theories of the writers of the elocutionary revolution of the mid-eighteenth century—such as James Burgh, Thomas Sheridan, and John Rice, who were widely read in the American colonies—testified to the political power of the oratorical voice.²² Within the context of the newly created United States, oratory pro-

vided a cultural technology for the creation of a national subjectivity. Some of the implications of the practice of elocution as advocated by Burgh and others are highlighted in one of the later editions of William Scott's *Lessons in Elocution*, published in Philadelphia in 1816. The text declares itself, on its title page, to be "[d]esigned for the improvement of youth" and includes, as if to emphasize the politico-national horizon for this formation of subjectivity, two appendixes under the title "A History of the United States to Eighteen-hundred and Sixteen and the Life of Washington."²³ What the eloquent voice offered the early United States was a model of republican politics, the possibility of social unity founded not upon the overt coercion of monarchical power but upon the more "natural" influence of oratorical persuasion. In the fantasy of speaker and listener locked into a sympathetic resonance, a fantasy so clearly delineated in the anonymous essay in the *Weekly Magazine*, these theorists saw—or heard—the basis for all "natural" social feeling. Oratorical persuasion thus allowed the United States to be imagined as an organic society predicated upon, in a phrase that Thomas Sheridan repeats again and again in the prefatory material to his *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, "the living voice."²⁴

If *Wieland*'s vocal fictions can be read with a political valence, then, this is in part because the notion of voice played an important role in the foundational politics of the early United States.²⁵ In 1796, for example, during debates on the floor of Congress that followed the ratification of the controversial Jay treaty with Great Britain, James Madison imagined the United States as a manifestation of the "living voice" valorized explicitly in Sheridan's *Lectures* and implicitly by the elocutionary movement as a whole. Madison's stance is consistent with the traditional idea that the United States derives its authority directly from the people, but his formulation of this problem also has the effect of shifting the locus of the Constitution's authorship from the drafters to the people and of shifting the technology of that authorship from the pen to the voice. Insofar as any animating intention can be found "beyond" (or behind) the Constitution, according to Madison, it is an intention carried by the voice:

... [W]hatever veneration might be entertained for the body of men who formed our constitution, the sense of that body could never be regarded as the oracular guide in the expounding of the constitution. As the instrument came from them, it was nothing more than

the draught of a plan, nothing but a dead letter, until life and validity were breathed into it, by the voice of the people, speaking through the several state conventions.²⁶

Arraying speech on the side of breath, life, and content, and writing on the side of death and empty form, Madison's use of what may be the most powerful—and ubiquitous—metaphor for American democracy illustrates that it is the “voice of the people” that symbolically underwrites the textuality of the Constitution. It is the voice that provides the spark of animation that transforms the hollow husk of the Constitution into a living document, the embodiment of a nation. What Madison constructs is a fantasy that has the United States speak itself into existence, brought from the “dead letter” into “life” through the power of the voice.

Wieland rereads these metaphors of voice from the position of the individual subject, uncovering—and critiquing—the desire for unified identity implicit in these nationalist uses of oratory; thus the novel also calls into question the Federalist drive toward national unanimity and univocality that lay behind the Alien and Sedition Acts. From the first moments of his introduction in the novel, Theodore Wieland's love of oratory is linked to his drive for identity. Though typically “grave” in his “deportment,” he has a “passion for Roman eloquence” and shows, Clara explains, a rather obsessive interest in oratory (*W*, 25, 27):

. . . [T]he chief object of his veneration was Cicero. He was never tired of conning and rehearsing his productions. To understand them was not sufficient. He was anxious to discover the gestures and cadences with which they ought to be delivered. He was very scrupulous in selecting a true scheme of pronunciation for the Latin tongue, and in adapting it to the words of his darling writer. His favorite occupation consisted in embellishing his rhetoric with all the properties of gesticulation and utterance. (*W*, 27)

Wieland's “veneration” illustrates the shift away from denotative meaning that characterized the elocutionary movement, which by “insisting that the universality of language lay less in the features of language than in the features of delivery and countenance,” held that the locus of meaning was “the body of the speaker and its attitudes, not the body and attitudes of the text.”²⁷ The elocutionary movement incorporated the entire body into the unity of the idealized speech

act. What oratory thus appears to offer *Wieland* is the possibility of self-identity, of a subjectivity unified in what we might call a moment of pure self-presence. *Wieland*'s desire here is not merely to understand the language of Cicero's orations but to embody that language, to find the proper bodily figurations—"gestures," "cadences," "pronunciation," "gesticulation," "utterance"—that will allow him to become one with the text, or more precisely, to become one with himself. What *Wieland* desires is to become one with his own voice in the performance of these texts, to have his voice represent himself perfectly. *Wieland* wants to reunite body and voice in a moment of complete identity. The irony is that *Wieland*'s obsession with the *re*performance of Cicero's speech suggests that identity can only be achieved through imitation, and that individual authenticity will always be the product of repetition.

The novel never shows *Wieland* rehearsing one of Cicero's orations. His powers as an orator are demonstrated, however, when he is called upon to testify in his own defense during his brief trial for the murders of his wife and children. That a written transcript of *Wieland*'s defense exists is evidence of the effects that his impassioned oration has on its listeners. As Clara's uncle reports, "'Judges, advocates and auditors were panic-struck and breathless with attention'" (*W*, 185). *Wieland*'s testimony, as represented in this textual record of his oration, further indicates that the source of his oratorical powers lies in his desire to demonstrate his identity, his undivided subjectivity. Indeed, *Wieland* begins by asserting the visibility of his identity, making his defense dependent upon his "character":

"It is strange; I am known to my judges and my auditors. Who is there present a stranger to the character of *Wieland*? who knows him not as a husband—as a father—as a friend? yet here am I arraigned as criminal. I am charged with diabolical malice; I am accused of the murder of my wife and my children!

. . . You know whom it is that you thus charge. The habits of his life are known to you; his treatment of his wife and his offspring is known to you; the soundness of his integrity, and the unchangeableness of his principles, are familiar to your apprehension; yet you persist in this charge!" (*W*, 186–87)

Wieland's shock at these charges registers his dismay, for *Wieland* sees his "crimes"—from his perspective, the sacrifice, rather than the

murder, of his wife and children—not as a violation but as further proof of his “integrity,” his identity. Wieland never denies that he has killed his family. Instead, his defense rests upon [his] motives, the “purity of his intentions” (*W*, 200). As Wieland explains in his courtroom confession, in language that insists repeatedly upon his singularity of purpose, “God is the object of my supreme passion. I have cherished, in his presence, a single and upright heart. I have thirsted for the knowledge of his will. I have burnt with ardour to approve my faith and my obedience.” Despite his “integrity”—“My purposes have been pure; my wishes indefatigable”—Wieland has found that his effort to divine God’s will “has always stopped short of certainty.” Only with the revelation that results in the death of his family does Wieland find his “wishes fully gratified” (*W*, 187). In the moments before that revelation, Wieland’s desires take the form not merely of a fantasy of vision but a fantasy of hearing. He imagines “[t]he blissful privilege of direct communication with thee, and of listening to the audible enunciation of thy pleasure” (*W*, 189).

What Wieland desires is to hear the voice of God, to have his identity secured and his will unified by the voice most capable of remaking the auditor over in its own image. Yet what is perhaps most striking about Wieland’s language in the political context of 1798 is that it functions as a virtual parody of the Federalist political rhetoric surrounding the Alien and Sedition Acts, with that rhetoric’s emphasis on “purity” and “integrity.” In May 1798, President Adams, for example, lauded Princeton students’ support of his policies in a phrase that seems to be lifted from the text of *Wieland*, praising “the innocence of your hearts and the purity of your intentions.”²⁸ Both Theodore Wieland and the Federalists defend their actions by adopting the language of Republican virtue, and by insisting that their actions are driven not by personal motivations but by concern for the public good. Wieland, for example, sees his act of sacrifice—the killing of his wife and children, those who are most precious to him—as proof that he has “set myself forever beyond the reach of selfishness” (*W*, 195). At the same time, as I have been arguing, the novel suggests that his desire to transcend selfishness is merely one aspect of his project to achieve self. And if the novel reveals this mask of virtue to be the result of delusional religious fanaticism, it also points to a political fanaticism behind the actions of the Federalists.

As the language of the text suggests, Wieland’s interest in oratory

and in theology stem from the same search for oneness: his “passion for Roman eloquence” parallels his “supreme passion” for God; his “indefatigable” study of Cicero parallels his “indefatigable” wish for revelation. Seen in this context, Clara’s reference to Wieland’s belief in “the divinity of Cicero” is a precise formulation of the religious fanaticism that underpins Theodore Wieland’s faith in the voice. When voice underwrites identity—as the oratorically produced voice of Cicero does for Wieland, or the “voice of the people” does for Madison’s construction of the nation—it does so as theonomy. When the *vox populi* signifies the kind of “absolutely self-present self-knowledge” required to legitimate the nation-state, it does so as the *vox dei* in disguise.²⁹ The irony of this recognition—an irony that is especially delicious in light of the events represented in *Wieland*—is that it makes identity an effect of ventriloquism. In the late eighteenth century, Cicero signified the republican impulse that was presumed to be enveloped in the act of oratory, the (free) exercise of the voice. In his search for self-presence, for identity, Theodore Wieland begins by ventriloquizing the voice of Cicero; he ends by ventriloquizing the voice of God. What *Wieland* illustrates is that the distance from Cicero to God, from the *vox populi* to the *vox dei*, is no distance at all.

The Desire of the Father [or “The Dæmon of Socrates”]

Wieland puts tremendous emphasis upon the connections between the present and past. When Clara begins to recount “the events that have lately happened in my family,” she starts, after four paragraphs of prefatory remarks, with the past: “My father’s ancestry . . .” is the phrase that signals the opening of her narration (*W*, 5, 6). Clara spends the bulk of the first two chapters of *Wieland* rehearsing the events that lead to her father’s death. And far from lessening with the passage of time, the power of those events, as she grows older, “oftener became the subject of my thoughts” (*W*, 21). What gives the circumstances of her father’s death added significance is their “resemblance to recent events” (*W*, 21), namely, to the actions of the younger Wieland that the novel will delineate. Although Clara also considers a “scientific” explanation for her father’s death—augmented by Brown’s footnote citing medical research into the phenomenon of spontaneous human combustion—what her interpretation of those events indicates is the basis upon which her father’s death and her brother’s murders can be

seen as illustrating “resemblance”: each follows from a belief in the presence of a “Divine Ruler” who communicates, in an “unequivocal” manner, with his subjects (“W,” 21).

This is, indeed, the reason Clara is able to say of Theodore Wieland, “There was an obvious resemblance between him and my father” (*W*, 26). When Carwin first ventriloquizes Catharine’s voice to distract Wieland and escape detection, this inexplicable appearance of a voice in connection with the temple is enough to make a sister think of the ties between father and son: “I could not fail to perceive a shadowy resemblance between it and my father’s death,” Clara remarks (*W*, 39). Like his father, Theodore Wieland is a religious “enthusiast” (*W*, 40).³⁰ What marks their “resemblance” is not only “their conceptions of the importance of certain topics” but the very physical manifestations of their beliefs by their bodies (*W*, 26). They resemble each other, not only intellectually but also physically. Yet it is not so much that they look alike, as we are apt to say of fathers and sons; indeed, Brown offers no physical description of either Theodore Wieland or his father from which we could conclude that their features are identical. Rather, their resemblance is that their features *show* their identity. The effects of Wieland’s melancholy religious “temper” are “visible in his features and tones” (*W*, 25). Similarly, once the elder Wieland takes up his Camissard beliefs, the “empire of religious duty extended itself to his looks, gestures, and phrases” (*W*, 10). According to Clara’s description of her father, his efforts to present himself as a paragon of religious belief have been successful: observers of the elder Wieland “might call him a fanatic and a dreamer, but they could not deny their veneration to his invincible candour and invariable integrity” (*W*, 13). As I suggested earlier, these are precisely the terms in which the younger Wieland builds his self-defense against the charge of murder and the terms in which the Federalists defended the necessity for the Alien and Sedition Acts. Wieland argues for his innocence on the basis of the unity of his character, the “soundness of his integrity” (*W*, 186); Abigail Adams wrote that John Adams would have to be “armed as Washington was with integrity, with firmness, with intrepidity.”³¹ Clara describes her father as finding “the foundation of his happiness” in his “belief of rectitude” (*W*, 13); Wieland boasts of his “single and upright heart” (*W*, 187). To have “rectitude,” to be “upright”—both these phrases take their meaning from a posture that appears to declare its own undivided visibility before the eyes of

others. The elder and the younger Wieland, father and son, offer—like the Federalist politicians in the public eye—the visibility of their public selves as the evidence of their private beliefs.

After the second appearance of a voice mimicking Catharine Wieland's voice—again at the temple—Theodore Wieland is inspired to take up a second intellectual project, no less significant than his love of oratory: “collecting and investigating the facts which relate to that mysterious personage, the Dæmon of Socrates” (*W*, 55). Wieland is never able to finish that writing project; instead, he eventually attempts to refashion his actions into an allegory of the story of Socrates. Wieland complains, in his oratorical defense, that his accusers “impute my acts to the influence of dæmons” (*W*, 201), a veiled reference that summons up the specter of Socrates. Indeed, both Socrates and Wieland claim to be actuated by a divine voice. And just as Wieland gives the fullest accounting of his divine voice during his trial, so Socrates, when speaking in his own defense in Plato's *Apology*, turns to his “*divinum quiddam*”:

You have heard me speak at sundry times and in divers places of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do.³²

Moreover, Socrates claims that this voice is that which makes him who he is, that which creates his identity *as* Socrates. He is, he says, “that gadfly which God has attached to the state”; he has taken this role as God's “gift” to the state, yet he has refused to become part of the state because his divine voice “deters [him] from being a politician” (*A*, 16, 17). Only this shunning of the “public life” necessitated by his relation with his divine voice (*A*, 18) allows Socrates to claim what we might call, in the language Wieland uses in his own trial, “the soundness of his integrity” or “the unchangeableness of his principles” (*W*, 186). Likewise, Socrates reads his life as the unfolding of the principle of identity: “I have been always the same in all my actions, public as well as private” (*A*, 18).

Yet the singular identity of Socrates therefore remains dependent upon this subjective division, the doubling of Socrates into body and voice, self and *dæmon*. In Derridean terms, Socrates's relationship with himself is supplementary. As Derrida makes clear in his analy-

sis of Rousseau, what he calls “the supplement” names the structure of a forever unsatisfiable desire for an original wholeness, for what Derrida calls presence.³³ The supplement is that which both adds to and takes the place of an imaginary and originary plenitude (whether that plenitude is understood as Nature, Mother, or God). The supplement is both an unneeded surplus and a constitutive substitution. To borrow Derrida’s language, mirroring the father through the reception of the father’s voice—that which seems to promise identity for the subject—both Socrates and Wieland are caught in the movement of “specular dispossession,” a doubling, supplementary relation that simultaneously “institutes and deconstitutes” them as subjects.³⁴ Wieland, who is identified by the patronym throughout the novel, takes on the desire of the father in two ways: as the desire of God, the Father (and so Wieland desires to fulfill God’s desire by becoming his instrument); and as the desire of the God *of* the father, the elder Wieland (and so Theodore Wieland desires to fulfill his father’s desire by repeating his father’s relation to God).³⁵ It is tempting to believe that the younger Wieland takes on the desires of his father-Father quite literally, becoming the surrogate for his father by carrying out the Father’s “command” that was “laid upon” the elder Wieland (*W*, 14). The text of *Wieland* offers no definitive answer to what Theodore Wieland’s father believes this “duty” to be. The elder Wieland hints only that he has exceeded the “period of hesitation and reluctance” that he has been allowed, and that he is “no longer permitted to obey.” This unnamed “duty” has been “transferred, in consequence of his disobedience, to another” (*W*, 14). Whether or not the elder Wieland has believed himself to be commanded to kill his family, and whether or not the younger Wieland has somehow imagined that to be the task over which his father’s will faltered, the language of the text again emphasizes the connections between father and son. Like his father before him, Theodore Wieland believes his actions to be a “duty”—a word he repeats three times (*W*, 194, 195, 196)—arising from a “divine command” (*W*, 195). Acting in obedience to the voice of his father-Father, what Wieland hopes for is wholeness; what he gets is dissolution.

Anxious Subjects

The initial vocal disturbance occasioned by Carwin’s ventriloquism comes at the end of a long, complicated scene. It begins with the

group—Clara Wieland, Theodore Wieland, Catharine Pleyel Wieland, and Henry Pleyel—gathered in the temple. Clara and Catharine are “busy at the needle” while Theodore and Henry discuss Cicero—more specifically, “the merit of the oration for Cluentius” (*W*, 34). It is this scene to which a number of critics turn to authorize a reading of *Wieland* as an allegory of the nation in 1798.³⁶ That very question is, at first, one of the points of contention between Wieland and Pleyel. Pleyel argues, referring to one of Cicero’s strategies in the *Oration for Cluentius*, that “to make the picture of a single family a model from which to sketch the condition of a nation, was absurd” (*W*, 34). Before they can resolve this “controversy,” however, Wieland and Pleyel are “diverted into a new channel, by a misquotation. Pleyel accuses his companion of saying ‘*polliciatur*’ when he should have said ‘*polliceretur*’” (*W*, 34).³⁷ Leaving the temple, Wieland begins to return to his house to check the text of the *Oration* when he is met by a servant who bears a letter from a family friend, Major Stuart. Wieland immediately returns to the summer house and reads the letter aloud. Shortly afterward, the group is suddenly driven from the summer house by rain, and they return to Theodore and Catharine Wieland’s house. There, the discussion eventually raises a question about Stuart’s letter, which Wieland remembers he has left in the temple. He leaves the group again, therefore, to check yet another textual dispute, but he is prevented once more from consulting the “original” text—this time by the ventriloquized voice of Carwin, who mimics Catharine’s voice to warn him not to continue the ascent to the temple. Deciding he “‘could do nothing but obey’” this “‘mysterious’” voice, Wieland returns to his house, without the letter, his face marked by “anxiety” (*W*, 37, 35). The scene is characterized by multiple substitutions and displacements: the quibble over a vocal quotation necessitates the referral to a text (Cicero’s *Oration for Cluentius*), yet this text is displaced by another (the letter from Major Stuart), which is given an oral performance (Wieland reads it aloud); that text is then misplaced and its retrieval is blocked by a mimicked voice, which induces the affect of anxiety in Wieland. In the face of this anxiety, this doubling of his wife’s voice, Wieland obeys. The scene condenses many of the features of *Wieland*, but if this is indeed an “allegory of the nation,” its meaning is not so simple.

What the scene enacts is a seemingly unending regression of textuality, as one text (and one dispute) replaces another. What is sought in each case is the certainty that only an “original” text seems to provide.

Yet what brings the sequence to a halt, what finally stops the sliding and shifting of these disputed signifiers is a vocal sleight of hand—Carwin’s ventriloquism. The scene thereby also illustrates the differential nature of the authority that corresponds to written and to vocal language. Those written texts generate their authority through a historical connection to their site of production. Major Stuart’s letter, for example, has emanated from his hand, and it is this “‘authenticity,’” this physical connection to its author, that gives the letter its weight. Likewise, the text of Cicero’s oration is linked, through a series of textual transmissions and retransmissions, with Cicero’s delivery of that text in a particular time and place (at the trial of Cluentius). Cicero’s text is not tied in such a physical manner with its site of production as Major Stuart’s letter, and thus it is a more complicated example, but—at least for Theodore Wieland—it does not differ in kind. As part of his fascination with Cicero, Clara reports, her brother is also “‘diligent in settling and restoring the purity of the text. For this end, he collected all the editions and commentaries that could be procured, and employed months of severe study in exploring and comparing them. He never betrayed more satisfaction than when he made a discovery of this kind’” (*W*, 27). That is, Theodore Wieland sees the question of the authenticity of the texts of Cicero as a practical rather than a theoretical problem. If the “‘purity of the text’” is something that has degenerated over time, something that has been lost, it is still possible through diligent study to restore that purity. That textual purity, however, is not a guarantor of any truth-value contained by that text. Resolving the dispute over the accuracy of Wieland’s citation of Cicero will not resolve the dispute over the value of what Cicero’s oration means—which is the first thing about which Wieland and Pleyel argue. Wieland’s efforts to establish “‘the purity of the text’” of Cicero’s orations can be seen, rather, as coincident with what attracts him to Cicero in the first place: Wieland’s desire to inhabit Cicero’s intention and thereby to ensure his own identity. The text’s “purity” functions as a sign of its identity with the author’s intention, and its authority is generated by this identity.

Carwin’s ventriloquism gains its authority in an entirely different manner. What gives this vocal utterance its power over Wieland is that it cannot be immediately linked to a particular body. It sounds like Catharine Wieland’s voice, and thus presumably has been uttered by her, but her body is not in evidence; the very source of this voice is

concealed from Wieland. Wieland is puzzled by the unexplained presence of this voice in the absence of its originator: “The suddenness and unexpectedness of this warning, the tone of alarm with which it was given, and, *above all, the persuasion that it was my wife who spoke*, were enough to disconcert and make me pause” (*W*, 37; my emphasis). That this voice is spoken by Wieland’s wife, who does not seem to be present, is “mysterious” (*W*, 37). Yet it is precisely this mystery, this disjunction, that gives this voice its unquestioned authority. “What could I do?” asks Wieland when he reports these events to the rest of the group. “I could do nothing but obey” (*W*, 37). His obedience here prefigures his later obedience to the vocal injunction to slaughter his family. If Wieland cannot immediately ascertain the precise location from which this first voice comes, he at least believes he recognizes what body has generated that voice: Catharine. When he hears a voice that seems to come from nowhere—or from everywhere—a voice that is tied to no particular body, he (mis)recognizes it as the voice of God. It is the most unlocalized voice, the voice without a body, that carries the most authority. This is also true of Madison’s use, in the example I discussed earlier, of the trope of the “voice of the people”—a voice that comes from nowhere and everywhere—and it is in part the possibility of imagining this voice with no body that, like Wieland’s voice of God, gives this political metaphor its power as an image of national unity.

This power and obedience is not generated without its costs, however. Wieland’s initial exposure to Carwin’s ventriloquism, as I have already noted, changes his “looks”: when he returns, his face shows signs of “anxiety” (*W*, 35). Carwin’s voice causes anxiety. When Clara contemplates Carwin’s voice, for example, when she anticipates seeing Carwin and listening “to those tones whose magical and thrilling power I had already experienced,” she realizes that her “bosom was corroded by anxiety” (*W*, 79). More important, she describes this recognition with astonishment because it seems so unfounded: “I compared the cause with the effect, and they seemed disproportionate to each other” (*W*, 79–80). This excessiveness, the effect (or affect) that outruns the cause, is precisely what characterizes the experience of anxiety in Lacanian theory. Anxiety is constituted by the uncanny encounter with nothing (like the encounter with the gaze of the other in the mirror stage); that is, anxiety is constituted in the encounter with that special Lacanian object of nothing, the *objet a*, which marks the subtle differentiation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the

uncanny experience of the familiar *as* unfamiliar. “[A]nxiety signals,” according to Joan Copjec, “the overproximity of this object *a*.”³⁸ The *objet a* is, for Lacan, what represents the subject’s radical split, “something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ.”³⁹ Yet as in the dynamic of identity and non-identity in the mirror stage, if the subject’s relationship to that *objet a* constitutes its identity, the *objet a* is also experienced as a threat to identity.⁴⁰ As Copjec explains,

The special feeling of uncanniness is a feeling of anxiety that befalls us whenever we too closely approach the extimate object in ourselves. . . .

Normally, when we are at some remove from it, the extimate object *a* appears as a lost part of ourselves, whose absence prevents us from becoming whole; it is then that it functions as the object-cause of our desire. But when our distance from it is reduced, it no longer appears as a partial object, but—on the contrary—as a complete body an almost exact double of our own, except for the fact that this double is endowed with the object that we sacrificed in order to become a subject.⁴¹

Copjec’s discussion of the *objet a* can be read as a gloss upon the function of voice in *Wieland*.⁴² Carwin’s *Biloquium* doubles speech, creating a vocal imitation of the self that is experienced by the other characters as both familiar and unfamiliar—in short, as uncanny—and this explains why the affect that accompanies Carwin’s voice is, as in Theodore Wieland’s response, “anxiety” (*W*, 36). Yet if Carwin’s ventriloquism is the most obvious example of the voice’s power to double and divide, Copjec’s commentary is no less applicable to Wieland’s experience of his own voice. The voice, then, functions in *Wieland*—as it did in much of the political rhetoric of the early United States—as an “extimate object,” one that seems, from a distance, to promise wholeness for the (national) subject. This is the fantasy that structures Madison’s metaphor of the United States brought to life, just as it structures the Federalist dream of univocality manifested in the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, and as it structures Wieland’s desire for an identity unified in the recitations of Cicero or in the obedience to God’s vocal commands. Dismantling this fantasy of a unified national subject, *Wieland* illustrates the voice doubling and dividing, rather than unifying, the subject. Wieland, hoping to find a subjective unity in the voice, comes instead to find his own divisions there.

As Wieland slaughters his family, he imagines that he has received the vocal command that will unify his intentions, and taking God's desire as his own, he is "sustained" by "the breath of heaven" (*W*, 196). Like Madison's imagined Constitution, Wieland is infused with life by the "breath" that accompanies the voice (here again *Wieland* has revealed the *vox dei* that subtends—and subverts—the *vox populi*). This breath very literally serves as his foundation, because when it is withdrawn, Wieland collapses, "sunk into mere man" (*W*, 196). Despite Wieland's protestations about the "purity" of his "intentions" (*W*, 200), however, even God's voice cannot overcome the divisions of his subjectivity. The scenes that document his rapturous violence demonstrate that any unified identity remains a mirage. In the first instance, when Clara sees Wieland after she has discovered Catharine's death, what she witnesses is, initially, "a silence and conflict," followed by Wieland's own mimed dialogue of his conversation with God (*W*, 174–75). Wieland exclaims, in "broken accents," apparently in response to the command to kill Clara in addition to his wife and children: "This is too much! Any victim but this, and thy will be done" (*W*, 174). Wieland then answers his own plea: "Wretch! who made thee quicksighted in the councils of thy Maker? Deliverance from mortal fetters is awarded to this being, and thou art the minister of this decree" (*W*, 175). It is not clear whether Wieland is addressing himself *as* himself, or whether he is here ventriloquizing the voice of God. This is a scenario that recurs, however, several times. In a later scene, on the verge of killing his sister, Wieland asks God to "let me hear again thy messenger." He listens for a moment, and finding no answer, once more responds to his own petition: "It is not needed. Dastardly wretch! thus eternally questioning the behests of thy Maker!" (*W*, 248). This time it appears more certain that God's voice has not replied and that the "answer" Wieland gives himself is internally generated. The parallel construction—Wieland addresses himself both times as a "wretch"—would suggest that the first scene follows the same pattern. Regardless, what this interchange of voices suggests is that God's voice, the *objet a* that Wieland believes will make him whole, has, in its extimate proximity, revealed itself as Wieland's uncanny double. God's voice has merely made apparent the division of Wieland, as subject, in such a way that Wieland can now address himself as other.

Seen from this perspective, Wieland's continual insistence upon the "purity" of his "intentions," his claim that he is "pure from all stain,"

operates as a disavowal of this subjective division, a division continually manifested in *Wieland* by and through the voice. His desire to “set myself forever beyond the reach of selfishness,” beyond, that is, the realm of the self’s divisions in a divine “rapture” or *jouissance*, can only be sustained in the hysterical acting out of his desire as the desire of the father. His insistence on sustaining this desire, then, the insistence that his entire family (including Clara) be sacrificed, is an attempt to ensure that this “‘duty is fulfilled’” (*W*, 195). Yet at each turn, a new duty is “discovered.” Once *Wieland* completes each particular sacrifice, the divine desire passes and he is returned once again to the divisions of his self, a “‘mere man’” (*W*, 196). In the quest for identity there is no end to this limitless series, because there is no end to the divisions of the subject. The end can come only as it does, with *Wieland* bereft of voice: “His lips moved, but no sound escaped him” (*W*, 263). His vocal dissolution shortly precedes his suicide: seizing Clara’s pen knife, *Wieland* “plunge[s] it to the hilt in his neck” (*W*, 264). The neck, site of the vocal cords, source of the voice, is *Wieland*’s symbolic target. In the light of historical hindsight, Brown’s connections between Theodore *Wieland* and the Federalists seem particularly prescient. If anything, the efforts of the Federalists to ensure national unanimity helped to speed the Party’s demise. According to Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, “None of the four acts did anything to promote national unity,” and the Sedition Act, in particular, did “a great deal toward eroding away the considerable unity then existing.”⁴³ Seeking to unify the American voice through the Sedition Acts, the Federalists cut their own throats.

Wieland is a tragedy caused by the relentless search for unity of identity, and more particularly, a tragedy played out in the quest for a unified voice. The novel’s analysis of the divisions of the voice becomes an argument for a form of radical democracy that insists, to quote Laclau again, on “the positive value of a dislocated identity.”⁴⁴ In a cultural milieu that saw the status quo legitimized by the fiction of a unified “voice of the people,” a critique of this foundational discourse opens the social space again to the possibility of difference. Division is precisely what defines the subject of democracy, as several Lacanian cultural theorists—most notably Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek—have recently argued. “Democracy,” Copjec writes, “hystericizes the subject.”⁴⁵ The response of the democratic subject must be to accept this hysterical position, this division—to see the “truth” of democracy

in ventriloquism rather than in the voice of God. The horrid crime of Theodore Wieland, the destruction caused by his quest for subjective unity, is the logical outcome of a culture that naturalizes and essentializes the voice. Paradoxically, it is too literal a faith in the representative qualities of the voice—the literalization and embodiment of the “voice of the people”—that amounts to a betrayal of democracy.

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Notes

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- 1 See Jacques Lacan, “Function and Field of Speech and Language,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 87, 86.
- 2 “In *Wieland* everything happens on account of voice,” writes Christopher Looby, in *Voicing America: Language, Literacy, Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 165. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *VA*.
- 3 Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*, in “*Wieland*” and “*Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*,” ed. Jay Fliegelman (New York: Penguin, 1991), 4. Further references to *Wieland* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *W*.
- 4 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 111. The most important feature of what I am calling *radical democracy* is a rethinking of political terrain through an anti-essentialist account of identity, much of which stems—in one way or another—from Lacan. Such a broad definition includes a variety of theorists who could be further differentiated on other points; see, for example, Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988); Étienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” trans. Chris Turner, in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 86–104; Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991); and Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
- 5 James Morton Smith, *Freedom’s Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1956), 50.
- 6 Smith comments that “[t]he authoritarian alien and sedition system was the logical culmination of Federalist political philosophy” (*Freedom’s Fetters*, 21).
- 7 Alexander Hamilton to Rufus King, 5 June 1798, in *The Papers of Alexander*

- der Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961–87), 21:490–91; quoted in James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 176.
- 8 Declaration of the Militia of New Jersey, *Columbian Centinel*, 25 May 1798, quoted in Smith, *Freedom's Fetters*, 19.
 - 9 See *A Selection of the Patriotic Addresses to the President of the United States. Together with the President's Answers*. . . . (Boston: John W. Folsom, 1798).
 - 10 Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788–1800* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 589.
 - 11 See *Columbian Centinel*, 17 November 1798, quoted in Smith, *Freedom's Fetters*, 20.
 - 12 See Alexander Cowie, "Historical Essay," in Charles Brockden Brown, "*Wieland or the Transformation: An American Tale*." "Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist," vol. 1 of *The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown: Bicentennial Edition*, ed. Sydney J. Krause, S. W. Reid, and Alexander Cowie (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1977), 311–49.
 - 13 Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 61.
 - 14 Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 49. For an interesting reading that positions *Wieland* as both giving "expression to Brown's 'Federalist' concerns about the threat posed by expedient seducers" and presenting an "ironic critique of the foundationalism implicit in the Naturalization Law, the Alien and Sedition Laws, and, by extension, in the idea of America as a reified national entity," see Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 30.
 - 15 Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 40. Looby writes: "A brother and sister, Theodore and Clara Wieland, living on an estate outside Philadelphia with their friends and family, find their idyllic life disrupted by the arrival of a strange intruder named Carwin" (VA, 150). The difference in logic between Tompkins and Looby can be seen in their stances toward the idyll they construct from the text. For Tompkins, that idyll is ultimately ironic; for Looby, it is sincerely portrayed. But in order to read *Wieland* as reactionary, Tompkins and Looby must both, though for different reasons, sever the novel's past from its present. Tompkins must distance the terrible events the novel portrays in the present from the past in order to ironize the Republican ideal. Looby must distance the terrible events the novel portrays in the past from the present in order to preserve the "idyllic" quality of the Wielands' (pre-Revolutionary) lives.
 - 16 Nicholas Rombes Jr. also reads *Wieland* as revealing "the potential for

radical democracy” (“‘All Was Lonely, Darksome, and Waste’: *Wieland* and the Construction of the New Republic,” *Studies in American Fiction* 22 [spring 1994]: 44). Rombes’s vision of “radical democracy” is characterized by “assimilation and plurality” (38), whereas I suggest that radical democracy needs to refuse assimilation and recognize in plurality a lure that potentially conceals the fundamental antagonisms of the social sphere.

- 17 Chantal Mouffe, “Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy,” in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State*, ed. David Trend (New York: Routledge, 1998), 20.
- 18 Ernesto Laclau, “Power and Representation,” in *Politics, Theory, and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Mark Poster (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 292–93.
- 19 Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), 30. Throughout this essay, my understanding of this “elocutionary revolution” relies on Fliegelman’s account.
- 20 “Thoughts on Oratory,” *Weekly Magazine*, 14 April 1798, 325–26.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 325.
- 22 James Burgh’s *The Art of Speaking* was reprinted in over ten different American editions between 1775 (in Philadelphia) and 1804 (in Baltimore); in addition, it was excerpted in collections such as William Scott’s *Lessons in Elocution*, which was reprinted over forty times in the first forty or so years of the new nation. Fliegelman argues persuasively that this “new eloquence,” this “quest to discover (or theorize into existence) a natural language that would be a corollary to natural law,” “played a key role in the American revolution” by emphasizing the performative aspects of the speaking voice and concentrating on the persuasive rhetoric of oratory (*Declaring Independence*, 1–2).
- 23 William Scott, *Scott’s New Lessons in Reading and Speaking*. . . (Philadelphia: A. Walker, 1816). The full title of earlier editions is *Lessons in Elocution, or, A Selection of Pieces in Prose and Verse, for the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking*.
- 24 Thomas Sheridan, introduction to *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (Providence, R.I.: Carter and Wilkinson, 1796), xi.
- 25 In the language of 1776 or 1787, political issues were often argued through metaphors of voice. Just one brief example in what could be a nearly limitless series will have to suffice. In 1787, during debates over whether elected representatives in Maryland should be bound by constituents’ instructions, William Paca wrote that what was at stake was “the *right* and *force* of the *national voice* communicated and declared to the legislature . . . from *every* county, city, and borough. . . .” (quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* [Chapel Hill:

- Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969], 371). In perhaps the most ubiquitous use, then and now, voice is made to stand for a central act of democratic political representation: voting.
- 26 “Jay’s Treaty [6 April 1796],” in vol. 16 of *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. J. C. A. Stagg, Thomas A. Mason, and Jeanne K. Sisson (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1989), 290–301.
- 27 Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 43.
- 28 John Adams, in *A Selection of the Patriotic Addresses*, quoted in Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 589.
- 29 The phrase is Jacques Derrida’s. This language describes the philosophical and cultural origins of a desire for God’s voice: “God is the name and the element of that which makes possible an absolutely pure and absolutely self-present self-knowledge. . . . The logos can be infinite and self-present, it can be *produced as auto-affection*, only through the *voice*. . .” (*Of Grammatology* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976], 98).
- 30 Alan Axelrod deals with the significance of this word for the religious culture of the day; see *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983), 67–68.
- 31 Abigail Adams to Thomas Boylston Adams, 8 November 1796, in *Letters of Mrs. Adams, the Wife of John Adams*, ed. Charles F. Adams (Boston: C. C. Little and J. Brown, 1841), 2:231–32; quoted in Smith, *Freedom’s Fetters*, 96.
- 32 *Apology*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Bantam, 1986), 17. Further references to Plato’s *Apology* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *A*.
- 33 See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 144–46.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 35 In Lacanian terms, then, Wieland can be classified as hysterical: the hysteric’s desire “is to sustain the desire of the father”; see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 38.
- 36 See Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 60–61; Looby, *Voicing America*, 162; Roberta F. Weldon, “Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland*: A Family Tragedy,” *Studies in American Fiction* 12 (spring 1984): 2, 8; Bill Christopherson, *The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown’s American Gothic* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994), 36; and Shirley Samuels, “*Wieland*: Alien and Infidel,” *Early American Literature* 25 (fall 1990): 50. Looby is the only critic who, to my knowledge, pays much attention to the “narrative diversions and displacements” that structure this scene; see *Voicing America*, 162.
- 37 Wieland speaks the subjunctive form of the verb “to promise”; Pleyel insists upon the indicative. For an interesting meditation on some of the implications of the verb in this context, see Looby, *Voicing America*, 162–64.

- 38 Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 119.
- 39 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 103.
- 40 Lacan, of course, has expanded the encounter with an anxiety-producing double into a theory of the very formation of the subject. For Lacan, the subject is created in a fundamental misrecognition that he has narrativized as the well-known “mirror stage.” The assumption of identity by the subject, in the form of the specular image, is possible only insofar as the image is an exteriority that has anticipated the child’s self-mastery. That is, it is precisely because the child is *not* self-identical to the image that this mirror image can come to represent the self. At its very heart, then, as Samuel Weber argues, the “identity” of the subject is inhabited by non-identity; and this “alterity can never be entirely effaced, since it is what permits the identification to take place” (*Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan’s Dislocation of Psychoanalysis* [Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991], 13).
- 41 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 129.
- 42 See Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 242. Along with “the breast, the faeces, the gaze,” Lacan lists “the voice” as one of the incarnations of the *objet a*.
- 43 Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 593.
- 44 Laclau, “Power and Representation,” 292–93.
- 45 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 150. See also Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 164–65.