

an effort to rectify the homogenising 'undifferentiated otherness' into which the identities of marginalised subjects are often collapsed, such tactics result in an essentialist reinstatement of dualistic subject/other relations.¹² As Rey Chow warns, whether deliberately deployed as a move to 'silenc[e] the cry of racial oppression', or 'generously', by a 'well-meaning' subject who presupposes an unproblematic transition from subaltern to subject status, the gesture of 'giving voice' too easily becomes one of 'speaking for' — a ventriloquism by which we 'have the illusion' that the otherwise silent minor/subaltern/other is 'speaking freely', and the untranslatability of her/his history is violently erased.

By 'speaking for' the other we leave intact the set of binaries in which the colonised non-West is constituted as Unconscious Other to the colonial West's self-appointed Conscious Subject. However, if the subject is split in enunciation, and the discourse of the one cannot be construed without that of the other ('neither can be conceived exclusively in terms of its capacity to speak, both are simultaneously spoken'), the discourse of the other might be discerned in "those moments of seeming silence within and around discursive events... when language would appear to cease, and with it subjectivity".¹³ It could thus be argued that the silence of the subaltern is "not really silent at all", articulating rather "the inaudible sounds of a second discourse, a discourse of which the subject remains oblivious", inscribing thus a 'double vision' and effecting a resistance, as Homi Bhabha suggests, in the very ambivalence of the presence and authority of the colonial text.¹⁴

Others would contend that to confine the discourse of the subaltern to the negativity and silences of the conscious discourse of the subject is to affirm that the other is destined never to speak, only to be spoken. If "[l]anguage is... the possibility of subjectivity",¹⁵ silences, whether incidental to voluntary, fail as strategies of resistance precisely on account of their dependence on their acknowledgement as such:

*...the risk of going unheard is too great in a context where anonymity bears a strong negative connotation and silence can almost never be understood as a will not to say but only as a lack, a weakness or an effacement.*¹⁶

Following Gayatri Spivak's assertion that "[i]f the subaltern can speak... the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore",¹⁷ recognising that... "'speaking' itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination",¹⁸ Chow suggests that we turn to the (subaltern-) subject's silences in speaking as strategic clues to her displacement and historical oppression, marks of the untranslatability inherent in her 'translation' from subaltern to subject.¹⁹ Thus, while *Surname Viet* suggests that Vietnamese women have been precluded from "the ownership — the propriety, the property — of speaking... because it has always been assumed by others in the name of the people, the oppressed classes, and the nation",²⁰ its pauses, hesitations, silences, disjunctures and gaps within and between visual, aural and linguistic registers, can be seen as strategic in negotiating the hegemonies of knowledge and power in which discourse is invariably implicated.

The relationship between 'speaking subject, subjects of speech and spoken subject' is premised not on the continuity of narrative space and time, the constitution of a unified coherent subject pertaining to the classical economy of film, but on the foregrounding, rather than foreclosure, of "the other scene of its vision..., the outside — heterogeneity, contradiction, history — of its coherent address".²¹ Insisting on a distance, a gap, in which the intervention of

20 From Chow's discussion of Chinese women's relationship to speech, *ibid*, p 37.

21 "...the classical economy of film is its organization... as organic unity and the form of that economy is narrative, the narrativization of film... filmic procedures are to be held as narrative instances (very much as cues) exhaustively, without gap or contradiction", Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', in *Questions of Cinema*, Macmillan, London, 1981, pp 43, 54.

22 Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', in Bill Nichols (ed), *Movies & Methods Vol II*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, p 296.

23 Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', in Weiss and Belton (eds), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, University of Columbia Press, New York, 1985, p 335.

24 "Ligature 1. n. Tie or bandage (esp. In Surg.); thing that unites, bond; (Mus.) 'slur', 'tie' (Print) two or more letter joined (ff, x, etc). 2. v.t Bind or connect with ligature." *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. For discussions of 'suture', see Heath, *op cit*, pp 66–112, and Silverman, *op cit*, pp 194–236.

25 Irigaray, *op cit*, p 99.

26 "'Voice-off' refers to instances in which we hear the voice of a character who is not visible within the frame. Yet the film establishes, by means of previous shots or other contextual determinants, the character's 'presence' in the space of the scene, in the diegesis... The traditional use of voice-off constitutes a denial of the frame as a limit and an affirmation of the unity and homogeneity of the depicted space." Doane in Weiss and Belton (eds), *op cit*, p 338.