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ERIK BÜNGER  
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In Stanley Donen's 1967 film *Bedazzled*, the two British comedians Dudley Moore and Peter Cook play an everyman character and the devil respectively. Moore as everyman asks Cook's Lucifer why he was thrown out of heaven. As explanation, Cook sits on top of a post-box and asks the bemused Moore to dance around praising him. Moore does so, but, after while getting bored of telling Cook how great he is, asks if they could swap places and Cook replies "exactly"!

The continual and unending praise of the seraphim and the cherubim in heaven is like other religious absolutes,

such as omnipresence, a hard thing to get your head around. Moore lasted about two minutes but the angels never stop and have never stopped. The origin of angels, pure beings of spirit, is a little murky to say the least. The defining view is that they were created from a word or a shout. So the word of God becomes praise, which in a Christian perspective is both a duty and a natural impulse and delight. Praise runs from mild compliment, through eulogia and panegyrics to homage, glorification and even idolatry. It is a rich area for study not least because in comparison to the histories of criticism it is often over looked. It is free from mimesis, pragmatism and objectivity and is first and last in the realm of the expressive. The question is who is praising whom. In his work *Gospels* (2006) Büniger presents a hagiography of stardom. The premise may seem simple; a series of famous people are describing someone. Eric Clapton says "he seemed to be an open channel", and that what he did was "perfect" Dustin Hoffman, is almost moved to tears, Meryl Streep, Woody Harrelson, Steven Spielberg and many others all add tributes. As you watch, the character that emerges begins to transcend human qualities, becomes larger than life, becomes divine! Büniger describes the piece as a work in progress and he adds to the endless praise as he uncovers new clips of ecstatic admiration, the laudation of the seraphim. The net result is a work of tremendous power that moves simple words to a higher level, like the origin of angels the word becomes spirit. Any suspicion that this is an empty gesture of star struck fascination is immediately dispelled when you look at Büniger's more recent work *Lecture on Schizophonia* (2008). Again he is attracted to moments when recorded sound and image bridge a space between absolutes, between death and life and between gods and

humankind. The references of this work are rich; the true origins of the Dracula myth, the invention of recorded sound, dubbing films in Germany, the enigmatic figure of Captain Howdy from the 1973 film *The Exorcist*, Céline Dion singing with Frank Sinatra and even the reworked speeches of Barack Obama. Bünger describes the work as “that which makes dogs bark at speakers, children look for the man behind the box and savages demand their captured souls returned”. The haunting performance and video confronts the moment when the microphone simulates intimacy and simultaneously defines the distance between bodies and in time. In one revealing line Bünger describes a duet between Natalie Cole and her deceased father as “a kind of a gospel celebrating technology’s final victory over death”. The making and doing of *techne* is not in the Aristotelian sense the imperfection of human imitation of nature but something that can transcend it. Bünger however still wants to celebrate the magic of the technical and in a typical sly gesture he copies the technique used in the original *Exorcist* and flashes the horror film image of Captain Howdy into Obama’s video. At the end of the work he also merges this image into that of Peter Drake the Nashville musician who invented the technique of singing through a guitar. *Lecture on Schizophonia* is work of considerable complexity and cunning and shows Bünger as an artist of insight and technical dexterity.

Walter Ong’s work *Orality and Literacy* first published in 1982 is an extraordinary book. Writing at a time when the discourse of art theory and cultural criticism was completely dominated by a combination of deconstructive philosophy and word based psychoanalytic theorising Ong presented a radical alternative. The work traces the spoken history and

function of language often hidden behind the domination of the written. As he points out, only a fraction of languages that exist or have existed had or have a literature. Orality is not something that precedes the full development of language, it is not a stage in some sort of linguistic evolution. Orality in Ong’s terms is always present as the interior voice and sound of language itself. For this reason, for some artists, including Bünger, his work is of enormous relevance. In discussing the relation of the spoken to the sacral and to narrative Ong shows that speaking is what frames the possibility of the divine. In both *Gospels* and *Schizophonia* the spoken word is what calls something into being and is not a trace or document. Bünger like both Susan Hiller and Peter Rose pushes the signification of language away from semiosis and forces us back to the body.



\\ ERIK BÜNGER \\

\\ *Gospels* (2006) - Video > 22 min 25 sec / ^ above ^ \

\\ *Lecture on Schizophrenia* (2008) - Video > 38 min / < opposite < \

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Polyglottolalia

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