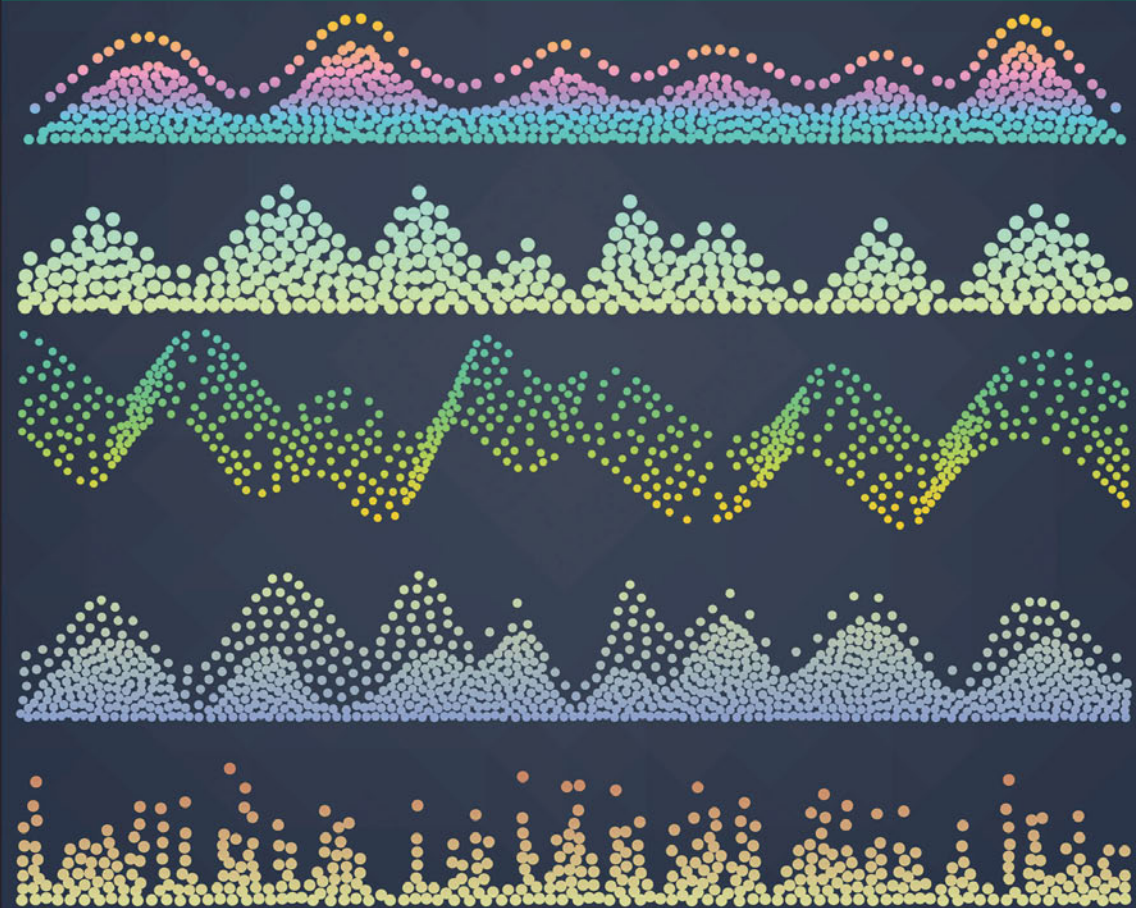


CAMBRIDGE CRITICAL CONCEPTS

Sound

and Literature

EDITED BY ANNA SNAITH



SOUND AND LITERATURE

What does it mean to write in, through and about sound? How can literature, seemingly a silent, visual medium, be sound-bearing? This volume considers these questions by attending to the energy generated by the sonic in literary studies from the late nineteenth century to the present. Sound, whether understood as noise, music, rhythm, voice, vibration, the acoustic or the oral, has long shaped literary cultures and their scholarship. In original chapters written by leading scholars in the field, we tune in to the literary text as a site of vocalisation, rhythmicity and dissonance as well as an archive of soundscapes and modes of listening, not to mention a sound technology in its own right. *Sound and Literature* is unique for the breadth and plurality of its examination of the field of literary sound studies.

ANNA SNAITH is Professor of Twentieth-Century Literature at King's College London. Her publications include *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (Palgrave, 2000) and *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). She has edited Virginia Woolf's *The Years* for *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf* (2012) and *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* for Oxford World's Classics (2015). She is currently working on a monograph about interwar literary modernism and noise.

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fill this page with sound

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928)

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Introduction

Anna Snaith

A week after the end of WWII, a nightingale begins to sing in the darkness of a northwest London park. 'Figures of listeners' appear in the nearby lighted windows.¹ Part of the 'emanations of peacetime', the mellifluous whistles and trills transfix but also unsettle those within earshot emerging as they are from an auditory wartime regime of hyper-alert listening.² The bird sings 'into incredulity [...] note after note from its throat stripped everything else to silence.'³ This is Elizabeth Bowen's 'I Hear You Say So' (1945), but in all her fiction, and her work as a broadcaster and writer for the BBC, Bowen had a keen ear for the acoustics of modernity, particularly the uncanny and troubling properties of found sound. In this story, too, given that the nightingale's song is acousmatic – the tiny bird unseen – Bowen plays with the confusion between 'absolute' and reproduced sound. 'Listen, they got a nightingale on the wireless!', one character exclaims.⁴ The BBC had first broadcast a nightingale's song (in duet with the cellist Beatrice Harrison) in 1924 and it became a popular feature, especially during WWII when its harmonics were thought to soothe the populace's beleaguered ears. But the story also sets up complex reverberations with a chorus of nightingales, from the wartime staple, 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square' to centuries of poetic warblers: Ovid, Keats, Anne Finch, T. S. Eliot (many of these alluded to directly in story). Literary culture shapes how and what we hear, particularly in the case of a sonic fetish object as resonant as the nightingale. As one character notes: 'it's ourselves we hear.'⁵

This book explores the conjunction of sound and writing: the phonographic. What does it mean to write in, through and about sound? More specifically, how might we understand the coalescence of the literary and the sonic? This may seem counter intuitive: surely the composition and reception of literature are silent, visual processes. With the rise of print culture, so the story goes, what was au/oral fell into silence. And sound is ineffable, disappearing as it is produced, therefore it evades literary or

written capture. Only with the advent of recording technologies do we have access to 'real', geographically or temporally remote sounds. The chapters in this volume unspool such narratives by positing the literary text as a site of vocalisation, rhythmicity and dissonance as well as an archive of soundscapes and modes of listening. Putting your ear to a book – touching skin to paper – yields much more than resounding silence. The sonic takes us to literature's place in the world – how it is heard, read, declaimed – as well as its representation of multi-sensory experience. Sound is central to conceptualisations of the literary whether formalist, socio-political, philosophical or embodied. In fact, the demands the sonic makes on all these categories of enquiry have profound methodological implications for literary studies.

But first, what is sound? In physical terms, it is a mechanical wave caused by vibrating molecules travelling through a medium: whether gas, liquid or solid. Place an animate being in the equation and sound becomes an object of audition experienced when those waves make contact with a body. This causes a complex physiological process as the ear drum instigates a chain of vibrations (through bones, fluid, hairs) before the mechanical becomes electrical signals sent along the auditory nerve to the brain. In this way, hearing conjures up a world of moving and colliding objects and their radiating impact. As vibration, sound is the ground of existence. Humans' deafened relationship to molecular noise indicates the limits of an anthropocentric perspective when it comes to the resonating universe. A lithograph version of Edvard Munch's 'The Scream', recently on exhibit at the British Museum, bears the inscription: 'I felt the great scream throughout nature.'⁶ Suddenly, in the sonic boom generated by the reversal, the iconic image becomes one, not of a piercing cry, but of a self-deafened figure retreating from the horror of cosmic bedlam. Noise-maker becomes listener; focus shifting from mouth to ear.

The lid-less human ear is ever open, leading to the joyful and terrifying intensities of sonic affect. Sound can be both a weapon of warfare and a means of bonding individuals and communities to each other, to a place or to a past encounter. High decibel sonic environments not only prompt involuntary physiological response, but the aural and haptic blur as sound saturates the body removing the distinction between exterior and interior ('listener collapse' as Michael C. Heller has called it).⁷ The bodily impact of extremely loud sounds, as well as low frequency vibrations, are a reminder that sound literally moves us.

Hearing is a product of the interplay of physiology and cognition. The physiology of hearing – often assumed to be a universal process – is

controlled by a web of variables. Deafnesses take us not only to the spectrum that is hearing, but the non-auditory causes and effects of sound. Hearing varies according to frequency, age (hence the ‘mosquito’ used as a sonic deterrent for the young), species and background noise or positionality. As Jonathan Sterne has explored, there is no access to hearing in any natural state, and even descriptions of the process of hearing (and its terminology such as ‘aural’ or ‘auricular’) are culturally and historically determined.⁸ In recent years, a wealth of interdisciplinary scholarship has braided together the hearing sciences (audiology, physiology and psychoacoustics) and histories of auditory cultures and technologies, placing different emphases on the extent to which perception (and histories of perception) are culturally and/or technologically determined. As David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny write: ‘sound resides in this feedback loop of materiality and metaphor.’⁹ Bruce Smith has argued, in relation to early modern audile cultures: ‘with listening, the science of “psychophysics” can take us only so far.’¹⁰ Attending fully to listening requires a ‘*psychology*’, a ‘*cultural poetics*’ and a ‘*phenomenology*’ of listening.¹¹ Written documents offer insight into this ‘amalgam of biological constants and cultural variables’ and the ‘habitus which determines the frontier between the perceived and the unperceived.’¹² Sound is bound up with its inscription: phonetic or musical notation being only two of many ways of transcribing the audible. The history of sound is also the history of its emulation, description, visualisation and categorization. Discursive representations and sensory experiences have a mutually informing relationship.

The essays that follow indicate the subtle and layered relationships between intra- and extra-literary sound (whether music, noise, vibration, rhythm, voice). This volume aims to counter the commonly held assumption that writing sound can operate only at the level of metaphor: always an approximation and a poor one at that. From literal talking books, to auditory understandings of reading, to histories of recitation, the text becomes a place of ‘sounding-out.’ The sonic disrupts the written precisely because it triggers and evokes a sense and medium other than the one used to experience it. But any sense experience, even visual, conjured in or by a novel or poem is at a remove from phenomena. The mind’s ear tunes in just as the mind’s eye assembles. Literary (or written) sound’s potency can be gained from the fact that it foregrounds the gap between experience and representation. As Justin St. Clair puts it: ‘the relationship between literature and sound is fundamentally dislocatory: the “there” of textuality is necessarily at a remove from whatever soundscape a specific passage records [...] Literature, in other words, is

inherently acousmatic.¹³ As R. Murray Schafer notes: ‘*all visual projections of sounds are arbitrary and fictitious.*’¹⁴ The self-consciousness or amplification of the sonic dimensions of the literary medium, whether in alignment with or dissonance from the sounds a text gestures towards, might be considered an onomatopoeic mode that applies beyond a literal ‘figure of sound.’ The history of literary writing is also a history of the creative fuel derived from encounters between writing and sound.

Literature sounds out most obviously when the text is transferred off the page into another medium as performance, broadcast or audio-recording. The digital has enabled and complicated the boundaries and shifts between reading as/and listening. Poetry perhaps most clearly foregrounds the sonic elements of its medium through the use of assonance, alliteration, metre, rhythm and rhyme.¹⁵ Gertrude Stein’s playful phonemic patterning not only oscillates between pure sound and signification but amplifies the variations that open up between text as read/seen or voiced/heard. This extract from the ‘Food’ section of *Tender Buttons* (1914) elucidates this well (please read aloud, several times):

ORANGE

Why is a feel oyster an egg stir. Why is it orange centre.

A show at tick and loosen loosen it so to speak sat.

It was an extra leaker with a see spoon, it was an extra lickier with a see spoon.

But novelists too, of course, have attended to the sound-bearing aspects of language, whether through poetic prose, onomatopoeia or awareness of the undulations and repetitions of phonemes. Joyce writes for the ear as for the eye in *Ulysses*, especially in the high-decibel, surround sound collage that is ‘Sirens’ with its demand that the reader ‘Listen!’¹⁶ Its noisescape encompasses an eclectic musical and vocal soundtrack (looped around ‘The Croppy Boy’), the found sounds of bells, steel boots, whirring clocks and the onomatopoeic rendering of ‘Clapclipclap’ and Bloom’s fart: ‘Fff. Oo. Rrpr [...] Pprpffrrppff.’¹⁷ Not to mention Bloom’s own meditations on acoustics: ‘it’s in the silence you feel you hear. Vibrations. Now silent air.’¹⁸ Joyce’s multi-modal writing evokes the omni-directional soundscape of urban din at the same time as gesturing towards the arbitrary and inadequate representation of sound via black marks on a white page.¹⁹ T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* can be understood as sound art with its hubbub of ‘demotic’ speech and popular song, ‘automatic’ sounds of the gramophone, mytho-onomatopoeic renderings of birdsong, and ontological musings on silence and noise. Literary noise takes us back and forth across context, content and form.

The written text is haunted by and anticipates its o/aural past and future. As Stephen Benson writes: ‘to think in any way of literary narrative as requiring, or involving, or as predicated upon voice, phantasmically or otherwise, involves the imagination of sound, of the *sound* of a voice.’²⁰ Experiments with typography, punctuation or internal monologue are just some of the ways in which writers play with or reject the conventions of vocal representation thus engaging with a politics of voice. James Kelman’s refusal of speech marks in short stories such as ‘The Bevel’ is a case in point.²¹ From the title onwards, Linton Kwesi Johnson’s Penguin Classics collection – *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* – signals the ways phonetic representation requires vocalisation, thereby gesturing in print towards the gig, rally, and sound system. E. K. Brathwaite’s concept of ‘*total expression*’ is an orientation towards Afro-Caribbean poetics that recognises its origins in orality and posits the ‘noise and sounds’ of audience, performer and performance space as integral to meaning.²² A sonic approach attunes us to the acoustics of the site of reading and the relay of voice to the reader’s internal and external sound world.

Attempts to register auditory experience have altered the shape, or acoustics, of the literary text. In Hope Mirrlees’ poem *Paris* (1919) experiments with font size, text orientation and the inclusion of a musical stave (from Handel’s *Rinaldo*) render the plural audile points of urban strolling. Literature can also embody and incorporate musical forms through lyric poetry, the incorporation of song lyrics or the formal evocation of musical forms such as the fugue. The epigraphic musical extracts, without words or titles, that open the chapters of W. E. B. DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) are taken from sorrow songs such as ‘Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen’ (see [Chapter 8](#)). The way the black marks demand musical or vocal enactment is central to their articulation of suffering. Their pairing with poetic extracts from the likes of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Friedrich Schiller suggests the possibilities of transnational and transmedial connection as well as highlighting the disjunction between subject and mode.²³ Another form of conjunction is found in novelistic renderings of scenes of music making or concert-going, such as the ‘sublime noise’ of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in E. M. Forster’s *Howard’s End* or Wagner’s *Siegfried* in Woolf’s *The Years* or novels about the music industry such as Vikram Seth’s *An Equal Music* or Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

Literary texts can act as sonic archives, representing and preserving not just historical soundscapes but what Sam Halliday calls the ‘para-sonic’: the physical, political, cultural frameworks or situations in which sounds

are produced and received.²⁴ Literature is ‘especially well suited for revealing sound’s “configured” quality’, its ‘imbrication in the non- or trans-acoustic’, ‘its relationships with other senses’ and the ‘qualitative dimension that means certain sounds are actually of interest to people.’²⁵ The capacity of the literary to open up ‘fictional worlds at a geographical and temporal remove’ affords it a prosthetic function as ‘a highly refined, and highly effective, extension of our senses.’²⁶ Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), for example, evokes the sonic legacy of WWI in the communal hyperacusis that follows the acute hearing required of both soldiers and civilians during wartime. In a novel in which aural communities are formed by the pealing and clanging of bells, paired protagonists shell-shocked veteran Septimus Smith and society hostess Clarissa Dalloway are connected in sympathetic vibration by the auditory trigger of an exploding tyre. Literary culture contributes to our understanding of sonic objects, technologies and modes of listening, just as it can preserve or challenge sonic regimes of exclusion. As Douglas Kahn notes, modernism has been seen but not heard: assumptions of ‘mute visibility’ silencing its saturation in sound.²⁷

Recent years have seen a burgeoning of the field of sound studies with the publication of readers, new journals and monographs, many of which will make an appearance in the chapters that follow.²⁸ Jonathan Sterne, in *The Sound Studies Reader*, describes the field as: the ‘interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival.’²⁹ Many ‘sound students’, as Sterne notes, are also musicologists, literary critics, historians, philosophers, geographers attentive to the ways in which the study of sound cuts across and transforms their field.³⁰ Sound studies also moves within and without the academy which is central to its purchase on the experiential aspects of sound production and reception. Another guiding principle, and one which this volume follows, is attention to sound in its widest manifestation, whether mechanical, vocal, musical, infra- or ultra or in other ways non-auditory. This methodological capaciousness will be matched by an expansive understanding of the literary that encompasses sound installations, performance, radio broadcast, vibration, echo and spaces of sound making and silence such as recording studios or libraries. Sound studies has a critical and self-reflexive element, highly ‘conscious of its own historicity’ and attentive to ‘its core concepts and objects.’³¹ In ‘Is there a Field called Sound Culture Studies? And Does it Matter?’, for example, Michele Hilmes wonders whether the field, given its ongoing ‘emergent’ status, is ‘doomed to a position on the margins of various fields of scholarship.’³² Or, perhaps, therein lies its potential.

Another key motivation in sound (culture) studies is the rebalancing of ocularcentrism in conceptualisations of modernity. A longstanding set of associations attached to hearing versus seeing have produced what Sterne calls the 'audiovisual litany'.³³ Hearing is associated with interiority, subjectivity, affect, temporality and passivity, whereas sight is harnessed to distance, reason, spatiality and control. This sensory hierarchy binds vision to knowledge. One version of this narrative, known as the 'great divide' and articulated by Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, posits the distinction, triggered by the invention of print, between 'a modern, image-saturated West' and the 'sound-orientated, "tribal" societies of China and Africa'.³⁴ More recently, scholars have complicated the primacy of vision, whether Martin Jay's work on the history of antiocularcentrism or scholarship that connects histories of hearing and knowledge such as the anthropological work ('acoustemology') of Steven Feld or Karin Bijsterveld's *Sonic Skills*.³⁵ From a different disciplinary perspective, Veit Erlmann argues that 'the acoustic and physiological phenomenon of resonance [...] played a constitutive role in the history of modern aurality and rationality'.³⁶ Philosophy and otology converge around 'a set of strikingly similar problems concerning the foundations of subjectivity, truth, and sensation'.³⁷ Erlmann's approach, then, seeks a 'deeper interpenetration of the biological and cultural' that moves on from social or technological constructions of the senses to consider why and how 'certain orders of knowledge make some aspects of our auditory experience more worthy of attention than others'.³⁸ Jennifer Lynn Stoever's work on the sonic colour line (following DuBois) excavates 'a century of aural genealogies' to 'reveal the dynamic relationships between racial ideologies, the development of sound media, and the modern listening practices that shape (and are shaped by) them'.³⁹ Stoever argues that vision has been a 'powerfully defining element of race' but rather than elevating listening as *the* 'organ of racial discernment', or 'vision's opposite', she traces how sound 'frequently appears to be visibility's doppelgänger in U.S. racial history'.⁴⁰ She offers the term 'listening ear' to denote 'a historical aggregate of normative American listening practices and gives a name to listening's epistemological function as a modality of racial discernment'.⁴¹ Michele Friedner and Stefan Helmreich, exploring the connections between deaf and sound studies, note the supposed division between hearing and sight that might seem to separate these fields: sound studies seeks to 'combat the primacy of vision' where as 'Deaf studies argues that audist and phonocentrist tendencies suffuse everyday interactions as well as cultural theory'.⁴² Instead they complicate these

binaries by exploring a range of non-auditory approaches to sound as well as a 'shared concern about sensory socialities'.⁴³

The historic dominance of vision has not only minimized the critical energy devoted to histories and cultures of sound and hearing but has also shaped the understandings of particular sites of modernity, such as the city, which have revolved around spectacle and the gaze. Considering auditory modernity can lead us to altered concepts of the self: as Steven Connor posits 'a self imaged not as a point, but as a membrane'.⁴⁴ Aldous Huxley, a keen anti-noisite, anticipated this idea in the final pages of *Crome Yellow* (1921). The poet protagonist, Denis Stone, atop one of the towers of Crome surveys the crowds enjoying the summer fair in the grounds below. In the 'gulf of swirling noise' he can make out the 'prodigious music' and 'clashing of automatic cymbals' from the steam organ and attempts to write the vibrating body in noise.⁴⁵ He starts with 'my soul is a thin white sheet of parchment', discarding it in favour of: 'my soul is a thin, tenuous membrane'.⁴⁶ He likes this iteration. It has, he thinks, the 'right anatomical quality. Tight blown, quivering in the blast of noisy life'.⁴⁷ Literary sound has much to contribute to debates about sonic modernity for the ways in which it mobilises multiple senses in the process of reading, representationally in the pages or screen of the text itself and for the way it can test out and pre-empt the multi-directional aspects of auditory experience.

This is not a book about the history of representations of sound in literature or a history of the sonic reception or consumption of the literary. *Sound and Literature* attends, rather, to the **energy generated by the sonic in literary and cultural theory and criticism**, and the new approaches or modes of literary listening it has enabled. It names the field of literary sound studies but in that moment of naming aims to allow for the maximum possible reverberation between its key terms. Literature has been a noticeable absence in the wealth of synoptic tomes on sound studies.⁴⁸ This is surprising given that R. Murray Schafer's *The Tuning of the World* (1977), arguably an inaugural text in the field, turns immediately to the literary for its potential as an archive of sounds and how they were produced and received. In responding to that absence, *Sound and Literature* builds on a recent call, from the editors of *Sounding Modernism*, 'in sound studies, for more explicit engagements with the symbolic registrations of sonic modernity on textual forms'.⁴⁹ This need can be answered by 'more various and systematic analyses of modernist forms in terms of their capacities to mediate rhythms, sonic textures and vocal derangements'.⁵⁰

In contrast to musico-literary studies which has a well-established set of methodologies and terminologies (explored in [Chapter 4](#)), attention to literary sound in its widest conceptualisation has had less methodological attention. In addition to gathering and mapping existing work, this book will contribute to a broader, meta-critical understanding of the field – not via a fixed vocabulary or singular methodology – but an accumulation of keynotes and earspectives. This augments foundational work by scholars such as Melba Cuddy-Keane, Philipp Schweighauser, Jennifer Lynn Stoever and Angela Leighton. Cuddy-Keane has called for a new narratological vocabulary that accounts for the impact of modern sound technologies, so that, for example, the term ‘auscultation’ replaces ‘focalisation.’³¹ Schweighauser and Stoever employ terminologies that indicate attention to the way sound works in the world but also how textual form creates its own particular sound worlds (and the relationship between the two). Schweighauser, in the context of work on noise in American literature, has called for a ‘literary acoustics’³² and Stoever, in her work on the sonic colour line, uses the term ‘aural imagery’ to encompass ‘literary representations of sound – dialogue, music, screams, cried, laughter, and extraverbal sounds, as well as full range of ambient sounds – that activate a reader’s “inner hearing.”’³³ In *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (2018), Angela Leighton considers what it means to read and write ‘with the ears’, tuning in to the compelling problematic that also drives this volume: ‘if actual sound is itself a transient passenger, invisible and always to be interpreted by the ear, how much more acute is the strange interpretability of sound in the written word, the ghost effects of which are built into its workings.’³⁴ The sonorities of the literary (in this case largely poetic) are, she argues, not some incidental backing track but constitutive of meaning and knowledge and available to the thinking ear.

Sound and Literature’s focus moves from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when English became institutionalised as an academic discipline, through to the present day. This volume is organised, like others in the series, around three sections: Origins, Development and Applications. In the first section, chapters focus on the sonic preoccupations within early literary criticism and the legacies of such nodal points. These cluster particularly around the relationship between literature and music, rhythm, voice and the senses. The ‘Development’ section treats approaches that gathered momentum during the second half of the twentieth century and broadly concerned the historically and politically embedded aspects of literary sound and the influence of media history

and science and technology studies. ‘Applications’, the third section, contains chapters on sub-fields of these approaches, whether in relation to particular media, types of music, or orientations towards sound. While the structure is loosely chronological, many of the chapters themselves assemble a transhistorical literary sound archive that allows for reverberation across time and place.

The contours of debates about literary sound follow the varied orientations that mark the history of criticism and critical theory over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These perspectives and methodologies map on to privileged objects: the ear, specific sound technologies, configurations of listeners.⁵⁵ Poststructuralist critiques of a metaphysics of presence, and the consequent demotion of voice as ‘self-presence’, have more recently been countered by a return to orality as mediated and divided.⁵⁶ An expanded understanding of sound in recent decades has led to differently embodied approaches, whether in critical disability studies or on vibration, reverberation or resonance.⁵⁷ In methodological terms, the shift away from a hermeneutics of suspicion and towards post-critique or weak theoretical paradigms is often accompanied by a sonically inflected vocabulary of resonance and reverberation.

This volume is as much a provocation as a summation in its desire to widen the range of approaches, writers and texts. The recurrence of certain literary ‘sound objects’ have begun to create something of a canon in sound studies: Rainer Maria Rilke’s ‘Primal Sound’ (especially following its inclusion in Friedrich Kittler’s *Grammophon Film Typewriter* (1986, English translation 1999)), Kafka’s ‘Der Bau’, the preface to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (again, in good part, thanks to Kittler, given its pivotal place in *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900* (1985, English translation 1990)). This will be both reflected and challenged in the chapters to follow. The same could be said for the primacy of particular sound technologies and their narratives of origin. Paul St. Amour has diagnosed literary studies’ ‘gramophone problem’: ‘When reaching for a sound-reproduction technology to set beside literature, scholars now habitually grasp the phonographic assemblage.’⁵⁸ Other occlusions and methodological biases have marked the field. Sound studies’ affiliations with media history have led to a tendency to overlook the racial and gendered implications of sounds and their technologies. Jennifer Stoeber co-founded ‘Sounding Out!: The Sound Studies Blog’ in 2009 ‘explicitly to address the whiteness and maleness of institutionalised “sound studies” and the field’s inattention to power in its research agenda.’⁵⁹ Julie Beth Napolin (Chapter 9) brings racial politics to bear

on the history of sound technologies and their literary representation. Other contributors seek to reorient their field: whether Paul Gilroy's critique of the trend towards 'afro-pessimism' in studies of black music (Chapter 8) or Rebecca Sanchez' articulation of deafness as critical methodology (Chapter 13). Ella Finer (Chapter 15) underscores the work yet to be undertaken in feminist sound studies: on the history of women and sound and gendered auditory cultures, as well as the under-representation of women in the scholarship.

What follows in the remainder of this introduction cuts across the three sections of this volume, thereby providing an alternative way to navigate its content. I will introduce the chapters in the context of five paradigmatic approaches to sound and literature, pausing briefly on early articulations and setting up some of the debates to be explored in and across the contributions that follow. Writing sound and writing about sound come together to blur the distinction between primary and secondary material: sonically minded writers were so often also theorists of their craft.

Literature and/as the Sonic Arts

Much early writing in the field focused on music and the relationship between the arts. Walter Pater's oft-cited assertion (via Hegel) that '*all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*' revolves around music's ability to unite 'form' and 'matter' unencumbered by language.⁶⁰ The Romantic poets were particularly engaged by the 'power of sound' as meeting point of poetic imagination, its embodiment as voice, and nature's music.⁶¹ Coleridge's 'The Eolian Harp' (1795) celebrates the 'simplest Lute' for its ability to make audible nature's sublime music: 'its strings/Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes/Over delicious surges sink and rise,/ Such a soft floating witchery of sound.'⁶² Musico-literary associations, as Gemma Moss charts in Chapter 4, are part of a long history of aesthetic philosophy and considerations of the ways in which different art forms (or their fusion as in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*) make meaning, elicit emotion and express subjective experience. As the nineteenth century became the twentieth, the union of the arts – 'panaesthetics' as theorized by Daniel Albright – was motivated by various impulses, whether the Symbolists' synaesthetic 'derangement of all the senses', a remedy for social disintegration or a sense of the limitations of a single art form.⁶³

Much literary criticism in this period pivots around the distinction or the con/fusion between music and language and theories about their respective expressive or representational modes. Ezra Pound, poet,

composer and music critic for the *New Age*, was a keen theorist of the multi-media: 'Poetry withers and "dries out" when it leaves music, or at least an imagined music, too far behind it.'⁶⁴ He favoured the medieval troubadour Arnaut Daniel and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* for their exemplification of the unification of words and song. Melopoeia, as explained by Pound, is poetry in which the words are 'charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.'⁶⁵ The reader/listener is distracted from 'exact sense', lulled in between consciousness and the 'unthinking sentient or even insentient universe.'⁶⁶ In [Chapter 4](#), Gemma Moss treats Virginia Woolf as both theorist and practitioner of intermedial aesthetics. Woolf draws, Moss argues, on Wagner, and classical music more broadly, as a 'model for emotional and spiritual communication' and metaphysical consideration of how music makes meaning in relation to sensation, temporality and memory. Woolf's literary translation of Wagner's 'infinite melody' and the leitmotif can be understood as having philosophical, rather than merely structural or formal, inspiration.

Another key theorist of literary sound and its relationship to music, technology and aesthetics was composer, writer and instrument builder, Luigi Russolo. In his manifesto, *The Art of Noises*, and via the noise-intoners that he built, Russolo celebrated the mechanical, found sounds of modernity as a new music that would shock and awaken deadened ears both on the page and in the concert hall. As Brad Bucknell explores in [Chapter 5](#), Russolo's project was about shaping and aestheticizing urban din rather than mimetic recreation. Russolo saw his enharmonic music as a route to the sacred – the 'artist as a kind of spiritual engineer' writes Bucknell – motivated by attempts to attribute meaning to sonic chaos.⁶⁷

The cluster of chapters on music in this volume (4, 5, 8, 12, 18) represent just some of the plurality of approaches in musico-literary studies. During the second half of the twentieth century, this field expanded in approach and orientation: 'word-music' studies, work on particular genres such as opera, or individual writers, composers or aspects of musical performance.⁶⁸ The new musicology did much to bring literature and music into more complex dialogue. As Stephen Benson puts it, music was 'to be wrested from the dominating grasp of formalist analysis and conventional historiography. Music needed to be put back into the world in which it is made, performed, received and evaluated [...] A world of words.'⁶⁹ Fictional representations were thereby 'promoted [...] from the status of historical detritus to that of primary evidence.'⁷⁰

Nathan Waddell, in an overview of scholarship on modernism and music, notes the gain from a more 'capacious model of musical and sonic influence.'⁷¹ With this has come increased attention to popular music and its impact on the literary field, whether Victorian music hall, jazz and modernism, or the growth of the 'music novel' or 'litpop' in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷² Within this context, and part of a strand of chapters on performance or live sound (8, 15, 17), Barry Faulk, in [Chapter 18](#), treats the phenomenon that is 'Dylanology.' He goes beyond conventional lyric-centric treatments of Dylan, and a consequent dismissal of his recording aesthetic or attention to sound, by exploring Dylan's own reflections on the acoustic implications of the recording studio when making his *Oh Mercy* album in New Orleans. The emphasis he places in his memoir, *Chronicles*, on his collaboration with producer Daniel Lanois indicates his fascination with the question of recorded sound and blurring 'the lines that separate the studio interior from spaces outside it.'

The history of writing on Afro-Caribbean and African American music has long emphasized the contingencies and exigencies of musical production and reception. Sounding practices constituted vital modes of resistance and survival in the context of slavery. In Alain Locke's 1936 survey of African American music he names jazz an 'emotional revolt' from slavery, both 'antidote and cure' for sorrow, but also notes that it has become the 'characteristic musical speech of the modern age.'⁷³ In Jamaican Claude McKay's jazz novels, especially *Banjo* (1929), the orchestra of itinerant sailor musicians made up of West Africans, African Americans, and West Indians play 'beguin,' 'jelly-roll,' 'burru,' 'bombe' in the cafés of Marseille.⁷⁴ Music is a mode of communal resistance to poverty and wage slavery rendered in a text broken apart by the 'rude anarchy' of sound.⁷⁵ Typographic experiment with italics, font size, line breaks evoke the immediacy of performance; the text is threaded through with Papa Charlie Jackson's 'Shake That Thing': 'Oh, shake that thing...Jelly-r-o-o-o-o-oll!'⁷⁶ Music in the novel moves back and forth between the socio-political (the banjo itself as an 'instrument of slavery') and the sensory: between descriptive and mimetic modes.⁷⁷

Scholars have taken varying approaches to the conjunction of black music and literary culture: historical, technological, performative.⁷⁸ Paul Gilroy, in [Chapter 8](#), emphasises 'the ethical significance of communal cultural habits based on sound' and the 'travelling or trans-cultural' aspects of African American music. Gilroy mobilises a long history of writing about black music through Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois (including his involvement with the Black Swan Record Label) before stopping

on Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*: the first book on the topic authored by an African American and one which places music at the heart of an intellectually and politically committed paradigm of 'culture in motion.'

Adrian Curtin ([Chapter 17](#)) continues the focus on performance via the recent burgeoning of work in theatre sound studies. Curtin counters the prevailing emphasis on vision by delineating the numerous modalities of sound in theatre: 'plays in textual form may be considered performance scores that can be collectively *sounded out*,' as well as providing 'a record of specific sonic environments and "acoustemologies" (acoustic ways-of-knowing) that may have passed into history.' The array of approaches to performance sound – sound design, audience experience, the acoustics of performance spaces – are exemplified in Curtin's treatment of *Complicité*/Simon McBurney's *The Encounter*, a performance piece drawn from photojournalist Loren McIntyre's experience in the Javari Valley, Amazon. *Complicité*'s use of a binaural microphone, audience headphones, pitch-modulation software, purpose made field recordings indicate the complex, sonic, cross-pollination of art forms, including performance and installation art and cinema.

Rhythm, Orality, Voice

In *The Republic*, Plato associated the 'beauty of form and good rhythm' with 'mind and character truly well and fairly formed.'⁷⁹ Training in aesthetic and moral judgement depended on appreciation of particular rhythmic combinations and the union of words and music. Rhythm has, of course, been central to literary sound via a long tradition of prosody or the study of patterning to do with metre, stress and intonation. This can be materialised or vocalised during performance or recitation or via an inner ear or a tapping foot. Early twentieth-century critics were much preoccupied with the connections between rhythm, voice and authenticity in novels as in poetry. Arnold Bennett's assertion that 'a book is just a man talking to you' in *Literary Taste and How to Form It* (1909) indicates not only the conflation of narrative and authorial voice but the onus on the literary critic to train attentive ears to pick up the 'right' kind of voice. For Bonomy Dobrée, in *Modern Prose Style* (1934), the reader comes into contact with the writer through their style, manifested as 'the sound of his voice.'⁸⁰ 'Whenever we read a book', he writes, 'although we do not read it aloud, or even consciously form the words in our minds, we are aware of a voice.'⁸¹ In 'The Music of Poetry' (1942), T. S. Eliot eschews the 'accepted rules of scansion' in favour of the rhythms of 'the common speech of the poet's

place', which could include 'dissonance, even cacophony.'⁸² The patterns of 'sound' and 'secondary meanings of the words', he argues, are 'indissoluble and one.'⁸³ In a slightly different, but similarly sonically minded formulation, he defines the 'auditory imagination' as a 'feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling.'⁸⁴ This primal patterning fuses the ancient with the modern, for Eliot, in a kind of communal, transhistorical mode of hearing (see [Chapter 1](#)).

[Chapters 3](#) and [12](#), in different ways, complicate narratives about twentieth-century poetry and the supposed liberation from the tyranny of prosody. Jason David Hall ([Chapter 3](#)) posits Pound's 'anti-metronome modernism' as 'the culmination of a longstanding suspicion about sing-song and deliberately repetitive prosody.' Hall argues that 'Victorian metrical apparatus, associated with a wider culture of syllabic reading, scansion practices, and techniques that promoted a mechanical, metronome-like segmentation of speech and recitation' prompted concerns about automation that placed Pound at the end rather than the beginning of a fascination with beating and measuring. Recent work by Hall and Meredith Martin has done much to illuminate the contingency of understandings of metre: determined, in part, by issues of class, nationality and empire. Prosody was anything but the stable field imagined by those pre-WWI poets who wanted to reject it.⁸⁵ A. J. Carruthers ([Chapter 12](#)) extends this discussion further into the twentieth century through a focus on the poetry of Jackson Mac Low via the concept of 'prosodic dissonance.' In a period when experimental poets 'had all but fled from prosodic responsibility', Mac Low turns to Hopkins for a method of 'accentual markers' or a 'graphic marking of rhythm.' Carruthers terms this 'notational practice' or the 'scoring of dissonance' which, in turn, depends 'largely on the *matter* of listening.'

The shifting understandings of voice and vocality represent another subfield of literary sound studies. Theorisations of orality took on a different complexion in the mid-twentieth-century via the early media theory of Marshall McLuhan (*Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man*, 1962), his student Walter Ong (*The Presence of the Word*, 1967) and other members of the Toronto School. Their emphasis on developments in print culture and the move from orality to visuality tended to be accompanied by a sense of loss: in Ong's words 'sight isolates, sound incorporates.'⁸⁶ Ong's theologically orientated association of orality with the sacred and the authentic found its counter in Derrida's critique of logocentrism and a metaphysics of presence that associated speech with original meaning. Derrida interrogates the assumptions of the voice's power or the 'unfailing

complicity [...] between idealization and speech [*voix*]’ based in the ability to hear oneself speak (in way that we cannot, unaided, see ourselves look).⁸⁷ Recent years have seen something of a return to the topic of voice, but with renewed self-consciousness about the mediated or decentered elements of vocality. In Mladen Dolar’s preface, ‘Is There a Voice in the Text?’, to the edited collection, *Sound Effects: the Object Voice in Fiction*, he dispels the two ‘fantasmatic kernels’ epitomized by the voice that have buttressed literary study. Namely, the ideas that the authorial ‘voice’ is inimitable and that voicing a text aloud releases its higher meaning beyond and above the written. In contrast, the object voice, in a Lacanian sense, ‘does not entail an author, nor does it convey a meaning; it cuts through both.’⁸⁸ Bruce Smith has argued, for example, that speech is ‘not experienced totally in terms of *hereness*’ and that, as well as number of physiological elements that make the voice strange (pharynx, larynx), ‘presence is what a given culture takes to be presence.’⁸⁹ In a different context, Andrew Elfenbein has complicated an orality/literacy binary by focusing on the rise of elocution in the Romantic period via the ‘trained voice’ and its ‘supposedly unique capacities for realising print.’⁹⁰ Steven Connor’s history of ventriloquism, too, examines the many ways in which the voice is split from itself: ‘differing conceptions of the voice and its powers are linked historically to different conceptions of the body’s form.’⁹¹

Chapters 2 and 11 turn Derridean concepts back on themselves through a renewed focus on voice and vocality. In Chapter 2, David Nowell Smith posits an ‘imaginary of voice’, suggesting not just how a text is recited or read but how voice is thematized. He moves through a variety of tropes – the deathly voice, possession by voice – to argue that writing ‘unlocks energies and excesses in voice.’ The ‘poet’s voice’ was birthed by writing, thus providing yet another take on the relationship between the written and the sonic. Understanding of voice has oscillated, Nowell Smith argues, between excess and containment, but we might say instead that voice is ‘*extravagance*’: ‘more than mere sound, but also more than mere speech.’ In Chapter 11, Garrett Stewart considers not secondary orality but secondary vocality, or ‘subvocalisation’, to explore where and how we read. Literature, Stewart argues, is ‘a voice-activated operating system, even when read in privacy and silence.’ Countering the abstracted semiotics of Derridean linguistic play, Stewart attends to the ‘syllabic friction’ or the pulsing and patterning ‘heard’ before meaning. This not only puts the body back in the frame but suggests the voice of a reading rather than a reader. This is literature as pre-electronic synthesizer: ‘converting differential signals into operational, if suspended, sound.’

Listening and Hearing

The concern with literary voices and vocalisation is intimately related, of course, to hearing and listening. The chapters in this cluster (1, 13, 14, 15) not only complicate the conventional binary of hearing as physiological and involuntary and listening as psychological and active, but also de-naturalise hearing in various ways. Much of this scholarship in psychoacoustics and the history and philosophy of the senses has focused around the ear as an object of study: in particular, the nineteenth-century discoveries of Hermann von Helmholtz (*On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, 1863). Scholars have connected Helmholtz's findings on how the ear hears different frequencies, beats and tones to the aesthetics, politics and philosophy of auditory sensation and the formulation of the modern listener.⁹² In [Chapter 1](#), Sam Halliday explores physiological aesthetics and the move back and forth between an organic focus on the body and a desire for its transcendence. Ranging over genres and forms from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s, Halliday tracks the ongoing debate about where sensation occurs to argue that the distinction between sound and sense, or 'sensuousness and semantic value', which would be so central to Saussure's linguistics, in fact has its outing much earlier in nineteenth-century physiology. Furthermore, Halliday's perspective offers a welcome reminder, at the opening of the volume, of the ways in which understandings of hearing are bound up with multi-sensory experience.

Phenomenological approaches to sound have also gathered apace following the disembodied abstractions of the linguistic turn. Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (1976) counters the distrust of perception and the dominance of the visual through an ontology of the auditory derived from his own phenomenological investigations.⁹³ More recently, we have seen something of a sensual revolution. This is not just about 'playing up the body and the senses through evocative accounts of corporeal life [...] but of analysing the social ideologies conveyed through sensory values.'⁹⁴ The related field of sensory history attends to, in the words of Mark M. Smith, 'not only the history of a given sense but also its social and cultural construction and its role in texturing the past.'⁹⁵ Smith's *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* explores 'how important aurality, listening, and hearing were to the process of creating real and abiding notions of slavery and freedom.'⁹⁶ Alain Corbin's study of church bells in nineteenth-century, rural France tunes in to the keynote of a lost 'auditory landscape' that bears 'witness to a different relation to the world

and to the sacred as well as to a different way of being inscribed in time and space, and of experiencing time and space.⁹⁷ Written records reveal an emotional geography of the senses to do with the symbolism and power of site-specific sounds.

Much of this work is motivated by a desire to historicize, politicize or simply to foreground processes and cultures of hearing and listening, thereby countering their position as universalised or self-evident. Work in deaf studies, such as Christopher Krentz's on the contours and history of the 'hearing line', 'that invisible boundary separating deaf and hearing people', has served to demonstrate the instability and plurality of the categories 'hearing' and 'deaf'.⁹⁸ Lennard Davis, in positing deafness as a modality rather than a disability, notes that reading is, or can be, a 'deafened modality or moment'.⁹⁹ Turning to the history of science and technology, Mara Mills has shown that 'the development of electronic audiometry in the 1920s facilitated the medicalization of deafness' and 'the creation of a "normal curve" for hearing', the product of 'a collaboration between physicians, social workers, and the telephone company'.¹⁰⁰ In [Chapter 13](#), Rebecca Sanchez counters understandings of deafness as an absence of sound. Instead, she notes, 'deaf people's experience of sound is multisensory and multimodal, prosthetic, and interdependent.' Deafness then becomes methodology (rather than subject matter): a way of attending to multisensory listening practices as well as 'the expansion of the sensorium beyond the individual corpus.' This in turn de-naturalises the auditory practices of hearing people. Sanchez considers the relationship between the history of sound technologies and deafness, and cultural and physiological understandings of deafness, before focusing on range of art installations by Christine Sun Kim that revolve around how we gather acoustic information and the prosthetic and interdependent nature of hearing. Shelley Trower ([Chapter 14](#)) also complicates an 'ear-centric' (and anthropocentric) perspective by focusing on vibration, the infrasonic, and their implication in and for literary fiction. Here sound becomes tactile and extrasensory, given that vibration 'moves in and out of human sensory categories.' After assessing various nineteenth and twentieth-century literary-scientific vibratory paradigms, Trower settles on Dickens' *Dombey and Son* and 'The Signalman' for their depiction of railway vibration. Dickens sought, Trower argues, not only to convey the phenomenological experience of railway travel, thereby participating in the preoccupation with railway 'shock', but also to channel and control infrasound through literary form. The potential for vibratory 'playback through reading' thereby adds another layer to the sensory, and extra-sensory, elements of literature.

Questions at the nexus of bodies, politics, voice and listening are especially urgent in feminist sound studies. In the introduction to a special issue on 'Women and Soundwork', editors Kate Lacey and Michelle Hilmes write that 'a growing literature is beginning to amplify the history of women's soundmaking in and through the media across time, across media and across genres.'¹⁰¹ Bringing gender to the forefront has also occasioned reflections on the field-construction of sound studies itself: the occlusions and bias of its founding narratives and privileged objects. Tracing a feminist historiography of electronic music, for example, Tara Rodgers notes that creation stories centered around Russolo's *The Art of Noises* hide histories of misogyny and racism that persist in techno-objectivity and an emphasis on technical mastery and control.¹⁰²

While the scholarship in feminist sound studies is diverse, including interventions in all of the subfields represented in this volume, it is underpinned by the history of ways in which women's voices and bodies have been bound to silence or to strident, shrieking noise.¹⁰³ Again the literary offers a distinctive earspective on questions of gender and voice. Recent scholarship on transgendered voices, for example, has amplified the capacity of the literary to vocalise gendered transformation as well as providing a long history of narrative as gender switching or re-voicing.¹⁰⁴ In [Chapter 15](#), Ella Finer addresses such issues of representation and influence through the concept of 'echo': as sonic phenomenon, mythological figure and methodology. Because echo 'returns' sound in an altered, incomplete form it provides an apt metaphor for trans-historical, influences as complex lines of influence and intervention. Finer argues that the literary legacy of Echo (sign of the violated and silenced woman doomed to repeat) reveals her as expert listener and sound artist in choosing what to repeat. Finer finds this mode in the echoing spaces of contemporary artists whose work 'takes up space' through sound as well as offering models of hearing differently and collectively.

Literary Soundscapes

In the late 1960s R. Murray Schafer founded the 'World Soundscape Project' in Vancouver and began work in acoustic ecology conducting field recordings. Along with his study, *The Tuning of the World* (1977), Schafer set out a vocabulary and methodology that influenced a strand of literary sound studies focused around place and space. His capacious definition of a 'soundscape' included 'any acoustic field of study', whether a piece of music or an acoustic environment.¹⁰⁵ But his motivation was

rather more finely tuned: noise pollution (defined as acoustic confusion or the rise of lo-fi industrial sound) was having a deleterious effect on the environment and its inhabitants. Noise could best be countered, he argued, not through abatement but positive preservation, appreciation and analysis of the total soundscape prior to proactive acoustic design. His project of ‘earcleaning’ would train listeners in ‘sonological competence’, enabling them to identify and preserve natural sounds: the sounds that matter.¹⁰⁶ In addition to his sound archives, Schafer’s work has implications for the history of ‘sound writing.’ He employed ‘sonography’, or graphical notation systems able to categorize sounds in terms of acoustics, perception (psychoacoustics), function or meaning, and affective qualities.¹⁰⁷ He also developed a terminology for sounds significant by their ‘individuality’, ‘numerousness’ or ‘domination’: ‘key-notes’ (the ‘anchor or fundamental tone’ of an environment), ‘signals’ (foregrounded sounds like acoustic warning systems) and ‘soundmarks’ (sounds typical of the acoustic life of a community).¹⁰⁸

For Schafer, as Helen Groth and James G. Mansell discuss in [Chapters 6 and 7](#), writers of fiction were reliable ‘earwitnesses’ whose writings ‘constitute the best guide available in the reconstruction of soundscapes past.’¹⁰⁹ *The Soundscape* amasses a global and transhistorical collection of literary sound writing. Writers like Dickens and Zola, for example, Schafer argues, were the first to register the danger of extreme industrial noise.¹¹⁰ But the issue here is not just high decibel din but all industrial sound. Schafer’s sonic hierarchy, as Marie Thompson has argued, participates in an ‘aesthetic moralism’ in which ‘the ideal sonic future is located in the past’ and the polluting ‘noise of modernity [...] is toxic to nature’s reviving and rejuvenating quietude.’¹¹¹

Noise, neatly defined as an ‘orientation towards sound’ by Novak and Sakakeeny, has generated sound work in a range of disciplines.¹¹² Noise is the ‘unwanted’ sound of communications theory, a counter cultural fetish object, a precondition of existence, a mode of exclusion or silencing. It is the sign of sociality and protest as well as sound that can cause organic injury, even death (as in – spoiler alert – Dorothy Sayers’ *The Nine Tailors*). Acoustic shock, phonophobia, hyperacusis: these are all conditions depicted within and staged by literary fiction.¹¹³ In the age of information overload, noise has also prompted deliberations on the place of the literary in relation to communication and the transmission of meaning. In Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*, a text that explores writing and reading constantly in relation to sound and music, ‘literatures are in fact arts of “noise”’ in that through their polysemy communication is made

‘fallacious, hazardous: uncertain’ and the reader nourished by ‘counter-communication.’¹¹⁴ Philipp Schweighauser’s ‘literary acoustics’ responds to William Paulson’s notion that literature is the ‘noise of culture’ to read across intra and metatextual din. Literature, argues Schweighauser, ‘is not solely a privileged site for the representation of the noises of our acoustic world but is itself a discourse that generates noise within the channels of cultural communication.’¹¹⁵

In [Chapter 7](#), James G. Mansell offers a fuller account of Schweighauser’s arguments and then parses a different approach to the conjunction of literature and noise, hearing it instead as the ‘starting point for a revealing, sonically-attuned cultural history.’ Definitions of noise are inextricable from social relations and, as he argues, ‘turning a sound into a noise is the product of a good deal of cultural work.’ Much of that heavy lifting happens within the pages of the literary text. Mansell traces the role of writers such as Dickens, H. G. Wells and John Betjeman, in noise abatement campaigns from the 1860s to the 1960s before focusing on Georges Duhamel’s *America the Menace* with its categorization of certain sounds (the cinema loudspeaker, motor car, jazz) as noise. Intervening in debates about an ontological versus cultural approach to sound, Mansell opts for the latter given that an auditory culture approach balances the ‘affective and discursive presence of sound in society.’ The noisiness of noise resides neither entirely in the sonic object, nor entirely in cultural meaning, but rather in what might be called the sonic encounter between hearer and heard, an encounter contingent on place and time.

Schafer’s coinage has prompted a range of scholarship that focuses on sound and place.¹¹⁶ Emily Thompson, in *The Soundscape of Modernity*, as discussed in [Chapter 6](#), defines ‘soundscapes’ as ‘auditory or aural landscapes’ to foreground perception in addition to the sounds themselves.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, her work attends to the scientific, acoustic and architectural elements of modern listening. John Picker, in *Victorian Soundscapes*, also interweaves discussion of science, technology and literary culture to discuss the process whereby sound was ‘disciplined and made concrete’ during the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ In [Chapter 6](#), Helen Groth reorients the ‘soundscape’ debate by exploring not just how literature can encode or represent sonic environments but how they might be related to literary form itself. She uses Woolf’s essay ‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’ (1927) as a point of departure for the questions it asks about what forms of writing are possible, or not, in a modern acoustic environment. Woolf considers the future of literary genre through a return to Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as a model of novelistic close listening that

eschews what she deems the indiscriminate recording of the Victorian realists. Groth argues, however, that if we move beyond the periodizing constraints that Woolf sets up, we arrive at a new understanding: 'literary form is not only altered or re-ordered by its immediate sonic environment, but is continuous with it' even at the level of the letter and line. This, in turn, can complicate readings of literary soundscapes that assume a causal and compensatory relationship between literary form and sound.

Media History and Sound Technologies

Another cluster of chapters treats the cross-pollination between literary study and media history. The invention and popularisation of new sound reproduction technologies heralded altered conceptions of the literary or authorial voice but were also bound up from the beginning with writing.¹¹⁹ The phonograph was conceived as a form of 'talking' but also an inscription or writing machine. Radio broadcast demanded new modes of listening but was also immediately utilized as a transmission medium for literature, as well as a way of training and cultivating new literary audiences. Kate Lacey cautions against mapping listening practices too 'predictably or straightforwardly onto changes in technology' and [Chapters 9, 10 and 16](#), in differing ways, emphasize the interdependent relationship between literary culture and technology.¹²⁰

Many modernist writers were early media theorists: accounting for and anticipating new technologies of listening. In Hope Mirrlees' essay 'Listening in to the Past' (1926) she imagines a wireless able to tune in to the sonic past: 'old fragments of human speech blown in from the waste places of the universe.'¹²¹ The result would be an 'aural kaleidoscope', 'ever forming new patterns for the ear.'¹²² For Italian futurist, F. T. Marinetti, the creation of noise poetry meant detailed attention to the technology of writing. 'ZANG TUMB TUUUMB' (1914) evokes the sensory onslaught of battle through synaesthetic, onomatopoeic experiments in orthography and typography (see [Chapter 5](#)). His coinage of a 'wireless imagination' – characterized by 'parole in libertà/words in freedom' – both registered the actuality of wireless telegraphy as well as heralding a new form of art characterised by dynamic resonating objects, sounds, words: 'the absolute freedom of images or analogies expressed by liberated words, without the conducting wires of syntax and *without any punctuation*' (see [Chapter 16](#)).¹²³ When Woolf's time-travelling Orlando reaches 1928, her body becomes hyper-receptive to

sensory data as though one with the recording technologies of the age: 'her hearing quickened; she could hear every whisper and crackle [...] the clock ticked louder and louder until there was a terrific explosion right in her ear' as the clock struck ten.¹²⁴

More recently, the post-hermeneutic criticism of media theorist Friedrich Kittler often turns to modernist texts for their role as media fables. His theorization of the status of the literary is also worth rehearsing here. In the discourse networks of 1800 and 1900, the former is characterized by a nexus of orality, education and the mother's voice, the second by mechanical data storage. In this account, writing, and the literary, lose their 'special' status, hence the modernists' fetish for the materiality of language. The '*all sound*' of phonography signals the discourse network of modernism with its provocative blurring of sound and noise, sense and nonsense.¹²⁵ Noise becomes 'theme and method.'¹²⁶ The centrality of the sensing human gives way to inscription techniques: 'rather than being rooted together in one voice from the inmost soul, the isolated routines of reading, listening, and speaking become automatic and impersonal.'¹²⁷

A range of subsequent scholarship has continued this focus on mediality but complicated Kittler's techno-determinism. Work by Lisa Gitelman, David Trotter and Jonathan Sterne has explored the ways in which technology is imagined and anticipated.¹²⁸ For Gitelman, for example, technology is 'the reciprocal product of textual practices, rather than just a causal agent of change.'¹²⁹ For Trotter, 'communications technology is an attitude before it is a machine or a set of codes.'¹³⁰ In *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne explores the 'social and cultural conditions that gave rise to sound reproduction and, in turn, how those technologies crystallized and combined larger cultural currents.'¹³¹ The telephone, radio, phonograph emerge, Sterne argues, at the time and in the form they do because of historically contingent practices and understandings of sound, hearing and listening.

Chapter 16, with its single-medium audile point, recognizes the explosion of scholarship in literary radio studies in the past decade or so. It is surely no surprise that the new medium of sonic transmission would have preoccupied modernist writers given that so many of them – Virginia Woolf, Mulk Raj Anand, Louis MacNeice – broadcast on the BBC, and their radiogenic texts gesture towards the properties of broadcast sound with its blend of intimate listening and sonic dispersal. Under Reith's directorship, the BBC became a new venue for dissemination of the literary and training of certain kinds of readers as listeners. It also facilitated

transcultural connections between writers and the global transmission of their literature. George Orwell's live poetry magazine, 'Voice', for example, hosted T. S. Eliot on the Eastern Service alongside Jamaican poet, dramatist and activist Una Marson. This broadcast event, and the much-discussed image of its recording, has become a *cynosure* for such mid-century contact, at the BBC and elsewhere, at the same time, as James Procter has shown, as it obscures the competition, racism and tension she experienced at the BBC.¹³² Marson's founding of another BBC literary magazine, 'Caribbean Voices', which became a key venue for the dissemination of Caribbean literature and culture in the post-WWII period, underscores the importance of radio and the *o/aural* more generally in histories of postcolonial or world literatures.¹³³

In [Chapter 16](#), Debra Rae Cohen examines the recent boom in literary radio studies and interrogates its archives and methods. She notes the ways in which, despite proclamations of interdisciplinarity, the paradigms and priorities of literary study obscure attention to radio *sound*, as well as to the conditions of its production, broadcast and reception. Not only does script take precedence over 'broadcast event', but in an environment of 'sonic scarcity' surviving recordings, such as that of Woolf's 'Craftsmanship', are fetishized. Adherence to models of literary authorship means selective focus on certain kinds of radio content as well as eliding the communal process of radio production. While Cohen's calls for more 'capacious' terminologies and methodologies echo across other chapters in this volume, her intervention also represents a particular vantage point on 'sound' and 'literature', one in which the latter term has muted the former.

These remediations across print and audio relate also to technologies of reading. A text may have an imagined sound track, but books can, of course, *be* sound. Matthew Rubery's history of recorded (or audio) books, for example, challenges 'conventional notions of the book as a print resource and of reading as an activity performed exclusively with the eye instead of a multitude of senses.'¹³⁴ In [Chapter 10](#), Edward Allen examines the literal and symbolic implications of the 'talking book.' Starting from an artefact, or a 'demo in the art of sound-writing', 'The Speaking Picture Book', Allen moves on to argue that the meaning of 'phonography' 'is to be found in the pages of literary history.' Not only was the phonograph considered a new kind of book in ways germane to disability studies that complicate reading as seeing, but literary fiction, specifically the writing of Alfred Robida, plays with and anticipates

the uses and limitations of sound technologies such as the phonograph. Sound technologies are imbricated with the literary in multiple ways: analogy, textual object, structural device or via the reconfiguration of sound reception and production in texts in which the machines themselves are nowhere to be seen.

In [Chapter 9](#), Julie Beth Napolin considers the ‘racial unconscious’ of technology, and by extension the oft-times assumed neutrality of media history. Alexander Weheliye, for example, has remarked upon the problematic tendency to situate Afro-diasporic musical cultures outside of the technological, arguing instead that the ‘interface of these two discourses provides a singular mode of (black) modernity.’¹³⁵ Drawing on work by Gitelman, Stoeve, Weheliye and Gustavus Stadler, Napolin outlines the entanglement of sound technologies and the history and legacies of slavery thereby questioning Kittler’s notion that the phonographic ‘real’ can capture the ‘acoustic event as such.’ Through engagement with short fiction by William Faulkner and Harlem Renaissance writer Angelina Weld Grimké, she argues that literature, as a sound recording technology, engages in ‘*heteraudiophony*’: ‘a diversity of sounds, listening positions, and acoustical spaces.’ It creates, then, a ‘particular kind of historical record: the linguistic presentation of sound—its tense and mood—does not record a positive event, but rather a site of contact’, which can, in turn, create a sonorous negativity that reverberates with the ‘yet to come.’

Literary studies – like sound studies – is a grazing, multi-disciplinary field. Their conjunction, then, is significant precisely for its potential to trouble and cut across critical and theoretical traditions. Not only that, sound problematizes the very assumptions and conventions that have defined ‘the literary’ and muffled its reverberations. This collection turns up the volume on those noises with an array of provocations set to resonate with one another and beyond. No book of this kind can hope to be exhaustive in its reach and we go to press with a keen sense of the approaches that might have been included. And this editor’s modernist bias will be, I’m sure, already apparent. Let these silences and predilections be a prompt to further scholarship that expands the temporal and geographical scope of our archive. Literature is that place where words slip and slide, a site of contestation and transformation. Tuning in to its complex acoustics – the way writing generates, records and reactivates sound – is only to amplify those qualities on and off the page.

Notes

- ¹ Elizabeth Bowen, *Collected Stories* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 850.
- ² Bowen, *Collected Stories*, p. 850.
- ³ Bowen, *Collected Stories*, p. 848.
- ⁴ Bowen, *Collected Stories*, p. 846.
- ⁵ Bowen, *Collected Stories*, p. 850.
- ⁶ See https://blog.britishmuseum.org/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-scream/?_ga=2.101417666.238527656.1556121600-2053229815.1556121600 [Accessed 24 April 2019]. Thanks to Chris Mourant for alerting me to this version and its implications.
- ⁷ Michael C. Heller, 'Between Silence and Pain: Loudness and the Affective Encounter', *Sound Studies* 1.1 (2015), 40–58 (p. 45).
- ⁸ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 10–11.
- ⁹ 'Introduction', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 1–11 (p. 1).
- ¹⁰ Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early-Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 8.
- ¹¹ Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early-Modern England*, p. 8.
- ¹² Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early-Modern England*, pp. 8 and 189.
- ¹³ Justin St. Clair, 'Literature and Sound', in *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*, ed. by Michael Bull (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 353–61 (p. 355).
- ¹⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of Our World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994), p. 127.
- ¹⁵ For work on the sonic aspects of poetry see: *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. by Adalaide Morris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); *The Poetry of Sound/the Sound of Poetry*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. by Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- ¹⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 239.
- ¹⁷ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 328–76 (p. 376).
- ¹⁸ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 357.
- ¹⁹ See Derek Attridge, 'Joyce's Noises' for a discussion of lexical and non-lexical onomatopoeia in Joyce's writing, *Oral Tradition* 24.2 (2009), 471–84.
- ²⁰ Stephen Benson, *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 9. See also *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative* (2016), ed. by Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel, for a definition of this sub-field of narratology with its focus on narrative and aural media.
- ²¹ James Kelman, 'The Bevel', in *Not Not While the Giro* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1983), pp. 33–45.
- ²² Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), pp. 18–19.

- ²³ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999). See also Anne E. Carroll, 'Du Bois and Art Theory: The Souls of Black Folk as a "Total Work of Art"' *Public Culture* 17.2 (2005), 235–54 for a discussion of Wagner and Du Bois in relation to the paired musical and poetic epigraphs in *Souls*.
- ²⁴ Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 12.
- ²⁵ Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 12.
- ²⁶ Ralf Hertel, 'The Senses in Literature: From the Modernist Shock of Sensation to Postcolonial and Virtual Voices', in *A Cultural History of Senses in the Modern Age*, ed. by David Howes (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 173–94 (p. 194).
- ²⁷ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 2–3.
- ²⁸ See in particular, *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford: Berg, 2003); *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. by Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*, ed. by Michael Bull (London: Routledge, 2018); *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (from 2015).
- ²⁹ 'Sonic Imaginations', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–17 (p. 2).
- ³⁰ Sterne, 'Sonic Imaginations', p. 3.
- ³¹ Sterne, 'Sonic Imaginations', p. 5.
- ³² Michele Hilmes, 'Is There A Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does it Matter?', *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005), 249–59 (p. 249). Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard in 'What is Sound Studies?', in *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* (pp. 16–23) discusses the field's definition and laments the 'omission of the study of sound itself from sound studies' (p. 18). See also Michael Bull and Les Back's *Auditory Studies Reader* (2003) the title of which suggests their emphasis on the workings of sound in culture and society.
- ³³ Sterne, 'Sonic Imaginations', p. 9.
- ³⁴ Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 14.
- ³⁵ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Karin Bijsterveld, *Sonic Skills: Listening for Knowledge in Science, Medicine and Engineering (1920s – present)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018).
- ³⁶ Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*, p. 11.
- ³⁷ Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*, p. 12.
- ³⁸ Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*, p. 18.
- ³⁹ Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p. 4.
- ⁴⁰ Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line*, p. 4.
- ⁴¹ Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line*, p. 13.

- ⁴² Michele Friedner and Stefan Helmreich, 'Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies', in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 87–97 (p. 87).
- ⁴³ Friedner and Helmreich, 'Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies', p. 94.
- ⁴⁴ Steven Connor, 'The Modern Auditory "I"', in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 203–23 (p. 207).
- ⁴⁵ Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (London: Penguin, 1937), p. 217.
- ⁴⁶ Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, p. 218.
- ⁴⁷ Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, p. 218.
- ⁴⁸ There are signs that this is changing. See for example Justin St Clair's chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*.
- ⁴⁹ 'Introduction: Sounding Modernism 1890–1950', in *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film*, ed. by Helen Groth, Julian Murphet and Penelope Hone (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 1–15 (p. 4).
- ⁵⁰ 'Introduction', p. 4.
- ⁵¹ Melba Cuddy-Keane, 'Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative Through Auditory Perception', in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 382–98.
- ⁵² Philipp Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006).
- ⁵³ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, p. 286.
- ⁵⁴ Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 5.
- ⁵⁵ See Brian Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn', *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1 (2015), 2–21 for one take on the philosophical/cultural debate.
- ⁵⁶ See for example work by Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) or *Sound Effects: The Object Voice in Fiction*, ed. by Jorge Sacido-Romero and Sylvia Mieszkowski (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015).
- ⁵⁷ See for example: Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Shelley Trower, *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (London: Continuum, 2012); *Reverberations: The Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics of Noise*, ed. by Michael Goddard, Benjamin Helligan and Paul Hegarty (London: Continuum, 2012); David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (London: Continuum, 2010).
- ⁵⁸ Paul St. Amour, 'Ulysses Pianola', *PMLA* 130.1 (2015), 15–36 (p. 15).
- ⁵⁹ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, p. 19.
- ⁶⁰ Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 122–35 (p. 124).
- ⁶¹ See William Wordsworth's 'The Power of Sound' (1828).

- ⁶² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', in *Coleridge: Poems and Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), p. 29.
- ⁶³ Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. by Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 307.
- ⁶⁴ Ezra Pound, 'Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch', in *Ezra Pound and Music*, ed. by R. Murray Schafer (London: Faber, 1977), p. 42.
- ⁶⁵ Ezra Pound, *How to Read* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1931), p. 25.
- ⁶⁶ Pound, *How to Read*, p. 28.
- ⁶⁷ See also Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).
- ⁶⁸ A brief sample of these approaches: Werner Wolf, *The Musicalisation of Fiction: A Study of the History and Theory of Intermediality* (1999); Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry* (1984); Richard Begam and Matthew Wilson Smith (eds.), *Modernism and Opera* (2016); Sebastian Knowles (ed.), *Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce* (1999); Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music* (2013); Delia da Sousa Correa, *George Eliot, Music and Victorian Culture* (2002); Martin Stoddard, *Wagner to The Waste Land: A Study of the Relationship of Wagner to English Literature* (1982); Nathan Waddell, *Moonlighting: Beethoven and Literary Modernism* (2019); Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860–1900* (2016).
- ⁶⁹ Benson, *Literary Music*, p. 3.
- ⁷⁰ Benson, *Literary Music*, p. 4.
- ⁷¹ Nathan Waddell, 'Modernism and Music: A Review of Recent Scholarship', *Modernist Cultures* 12.2 (2017), 316–30 (p. 317).
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PART I

Origins

CHAPTER I

Hearing and the Senses

Sam Halliday

Introduction

In 1877, Grant Allen entered a growing debate over what the title of his book called *Physiological Aesthetics*. The book's purpose is 'to exhibit the purely physical origin of the sense of beauty, and its relativity to our nervous organization.'¹ Accordingly, Allen's study is largely devoted to sensory anatomy and function, alongside particular art forms identified as corresponding with individual senses: painting and sculpture with sight, music with hearing and so on. But the centrepiece of Allen's study is another art form, poetry, which he identifies as distinctive precisely as *not* dependent on any one sense, or even a collation of them, but rather as an art of the 'ideal':

The most conspicuous difference between Poetry and the other fine arts is this, that while they appeal directly to the eye or ear, and aim only in a minor degree at emotional or intellectual pleasures, Poetry appeals very little to the senses, and owes most of its effectiveness to ideal factors.²

The most prestigious art, in some respects, is thus the one that lies furthest from art's sensuous, organic roots. Poetry, though adduced in support of Allen's claims about the 'physical' origins of beauty, is the art least obviously dependent on bodily capacities.

What should we make of this swerve, or double-back, which takes from the body and the senses with one hand what it gives with the other – in the name of 'beauty', in both cases? For a start, it helps identify Allen with the discourse of idealism, dominant throughout the nineteenth century, and insistent that art (like other 'higher' human practices) is best conceived and practised as a transcendence of organic and other forms of finitude.³ Insofar as this discourse is at odds with materialist modes of explanation, it sits uneasily alongside Allen's avowed interest in evolutionary biology, flagged up early in his book as a warrant of scientific merit and emblem of

his own modernity. But while noting this unease, we should also consider Allen's attempts to soothe it, precisely in the context of explaining how poetry can be rooted in the senses and yet detached from them at the same time. Though it may appeal 'very little' to the senses, Allen says, poetry succeeds best when it *evokes* them – and does so, moreover, not just individually but as an ensemble: thus, poems that refer to 'the greatest possible numbers of agreeable sights, sounds, smells, tastes and other sensations' are 'the most poetical of all.'⁴ Sight is the most important sense in this respect, but hearing is important too, especially in relation to music's vocabulary ('*clear, ringing, silvery, musical, sweet, melodious, rich*'), which is said to have an intrinsically poetical effect.⁵ Contributing to poetry's sense-spanning capacities is the fact that terms appropriate for one form of sensation are often appropriate for others; accordingly, 'words denoting varieties of sounds are frequently transferred from other senses, and so carry with them much of the associated feeling which is gained in their original sphere.'⁶ And in all these instances, the 'hinge' between the physical and extraphysical, the poeticised and poetry, is the word. As Allen writes, 'each class of sensations will enter efficiently into poetical composition just in proportion as it is capable of being easily and distinctly recalled into consciousness on the suggestion of the words which symbolise it.'⁷ The route to the ideal from the organic lies through language. Though poetry may appeal but little to the senses, sensations are the things to which poems paradigmatically refer.

Allen's theory is clearly circumscribed by assumptions about poetry that would come to seem old-fashioned, if not obsolete, by the early decades of the twentieth century. Yet in many respects, Allen proves a surprisingly sure guide to this later period, including debates attending poetry and other artistic media formative of literary modernism. As we shall see, key modernists such as T. E. Hulme and T. S. Eliot were similarly concerned with relations between poems and sensations, and the connected issue of how sensations relate to one another. In this, they shared concerns with other writers, less clearly identifiable with modernism, such as Vernon Lee and Henry James. As we shall see, all these and other writers shared concerns with non-literary thinkers, from the nineteenth-century German scientist Hermann von Helmholtz to the twentieth-century English linguist Richard Paget.

To show this, the present chapter charts five successive courses through a period roughly demarcated by the 1850s, at one end, and the 1930s, at the other. It traces shifts of intellectual temper and conviction but also stresses the range of conceptual possibilities that remained available throughout

the period reviewed, those shifts notwithstanding. For this reason, the first section, especially, moves backwards as well as forwards through time – connecting one of Lee’s contentions, for instance, with the earlier psychology of Herbert Spencer. This section is largely devoted to the natural sciences, but it also shows how these inspired aestheticians (as the example of Grant Allen has indeed already shown) and how certain themes within this science anticipate the early twentieth-century linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. The chapter’s second section focuses squarely upon poetry, partly via the aforementioned Hulme and Eliot and partly via their anti-modernist opponent R. C. Trevelyan. In the third section, I switch attention to fiction, as theorised by Henry James within the prefaces to the New York edition of his works. The fourth section focuses on theatre and claims by W. B. Yeats and others that many early twentieth-century playwrights took a cavalier attitude towards the human voice. This voice features also in my final section, which begins with Paget’s theory of the origin of languages and ends with discussion of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Throughout the chapter, I follow many of my protagonists in emphasising a distinction between sound and sense, or sensuousness and semantic value, with respect to language. That distinction is pivotal to Saussure’s linguistics but appears earlier, in nineteenth-century physiology.

Specific Energies and Popping Popguns

A cornerstone of scientific understanding of the senses since its announcement in 1838 is Johannes Müller’s discovery that nerves responsible for sensory impressions each have a ‘specific energy.’ Accordingly, hearing, say, is dependent on neural and other anatomical structures receptive to sound and nothing else; vision, smell and so on are entirely unaffected by the same impressions. As Müller writes, ‘one nerve of sense cannot perform the function of the nerve of another sense.’⁸ The nerves themselves, meanwhile, are to be understood less as the conduits or vessels of sensation than as sensation’s progenitors or artificers. Thus, sensation yields ‘a knowledge of certain qualities or conditions, not of the external bodies, but of the nerves of sense themselves.’⁹ To hear is to have a particular portion of one’s body exercised in a particular way. What we sense is a contingency of how we are made, as much as of what happens in our presence.

If the senses are thus discrete, and incommensurable, they are not, as it were, entirely self-sufficient. As late nineteenth-century writers, especially, emphasise, sensation is not ‘in’ the senses but in the brain that collates

and interprets them. As Julius Bernstein, a German physiologist, puts it in *The Five Senses of Man* (1875; English translation 1876), 'All sensory nerves are only intended to communicate the fact of an excitement of the nerve from the termination of the nerves to their centre in the brain.'¹⁰ What we call 'sound' is identified as such only via a process of mentation. The British commentator R. S. Wyld concurs: 'all sensation is now known to be localised in the brain, and to be a mental and not a corporeal affection.'¹¹ Their specific energies notwithstanding, the nerves are not where sensation 'happens.' The ear and its attendant nerves respond to sound, but it is the brain that *hears*.

A correlative of this is an understanding of sensation as continuous with, if not identical to, 'higher' mental operations such as 'perception', 'conception' and 'cognition.' As the most influential British thinker of the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer, writes of vision, in 1855: 'the mere passive reception of [a] visual image or group of sensations produced by an object, does not constitute a perception of it: a perception of it can arise only when the group of sensations is consciously coordinated and their meaning understood.'¹² A major contributor to later neurophysiology, Charles Sherrington, agrees, adding that in any given instance of perception, '[t]he object experientially regarded as a single object excites a neural reaction that has its starting point in many spatially and qualitatively distinct receptive points' throughout the nervous system.¹³ He continues: 'In the psychical result of the reactions thus set going there is amplification and modification by conditions memorial, affective, judicial, conative, etc., obtaining in the mind and not due immediately to the stimulus.'¹⁴ An object is thus 'thought' in a far more thoroughgoing way than tends to be apparent when it seems simply to be 'sensed.' The thought involved, moreover, is extremely ramified, with awareness of whatever may be immediately at hand shot through with, in Sherrington's terms, 'memorial' recollections of other objects, 'affective' investments in still others and so on.

This need not lead to solipsism, of a kind believing sensations to have no relation to the world outside the mind. As Sherrington says, of sentience in creatures generally, the brain's role is 'broadly to increase the animal's grip on the world around it, and hardly less the grip of the external world upon the animal': our neural apparatus as a whole, in other words, is not so much what comes between us and the world as what makes sure we are enmeshed with it.¹⁵ The extension of such views is acknowledgement that relations between sensations and sense objects do not involve straightforward correspondence. And to Hermann von Helmholtz, perhaps the

single most influential nineteenth-century physiologist of all, the way in which they relate to one another echoes that connecting signs to referents in language. In a lecture delivered in 1878, Helmholtz describes 'the symbol system of our sensory impressions', arguing that sensations are better thought of as '*meaning*' or representing their objects than as embodying or reproducing them.¹⁶ Further distinguishing the 'symbol' from the 'image', he emphasises how sensations manifest the former's characteristics, rather than the latter's: 'For an image some kind of identity with the portrayed object is demanded', whereas a symbol 'does not have to possess any kind of similarity with the object which it represents.'¹⁷ This does not lead Helmholtz to a view of sensory 'language' precisely anticipatory of the one posthumously advanced in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916).¹⁸ For in the latter, famously, linguistic signs are constituted arbitrarily, whereas for Helmholtz, sense impressions are 'forced on me by the nature of my organ[s] of sense' and the commensurate nature of the brain.¹⁹ But Wyld adopts a more clearly proto-Saussurean position without reservation: 'Sensations, like all arbitrary signs, serve their purpose; they direct the attention, not to themselves, but to the object which they represent.'²⁰ Invoking the key Saussurean category 'arbitrariness', Wyld thus makes sensation analogous to the reading of a text: 'just as in reading a book the mind is engrossed with the subject matter wherein treated, while the letters and the words,—without which we could know nothing of the author's aims,—having served their purpose, drop from the mind and are forgotten, so it is with our sensations.'²¹

These ideas find echo amongst dedicated aestheticians. For Vernon Lee, amongst the most interesting writers to bring detailed knowledge of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century physiology to bear upon artistic matters, aesthetic experience is enjoyed at the expense of any conscious awareness of the physical and mental processes making it possible. '[S]o long as we are attending to whatever absorbs our attention and not to our processes of attending', she writes, in *The Beautiful* (1913), the latter are 'replaced' in that attention 'by awareness of the very facts [...] resulting from' those processes' 'activity.'²² Aesthetic pleasure *is* the veiling of its very causes. The keystone of what Lee calls 'psychological aesthetics' is thus due acknowledgement of the 'difference between mental processes and their results.'²³ For Spencer, another sort of difference separates the aesthetic *per se* from the more urgent class of experiences associated with utility and physical survival. In the case of hearing, there is an especially 'wide scope for pleasures derivable from superfluous action' of the relevant sense, as hearing is, allegedly, only rarely decisive in dividing life

from death (this allegation, one might think, is not unassailable).²⁴ Grant Allen and, independently, the English psychologist James Sully, identify a particular quartet of poems, John Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726–1730), as exemplary of how literature may batten onto and recapitulate pleasures experienced by readers in their non- or pre-readerly lives: since it is barely conceivable that any reader will *not* have experienced the seasons, and their sensuous manifestations, prior to their reading of the poems, any reader may, in principle, find echo of their experience in the sense evocations of the texts.²⁵ For Lee, though, the link between verbal evocation and readers' past experience is a challenge to effective writing as well as an aid to it. A word like 'sea', she observes, will evoke so many things in any given reader's mind that 'in order to awaken the particular impression' sought after, the writer must 'shut the doors to impressions' she or he does not want and 'canalise, in a particular direction', those she or he does.²⁶ Writing is thus an exercise upon the reader's brain, coaxing from the latter prior sense impressions consonant with the writer's aims, and leaving those divergent from those aims untouched. Thus, an inter-art analogy: the writer 'play[s]' upon the reader's mind as a pianist plays a keyboard.²⁷

And so, to Helmholtz's theory of hearing, in which the piano features prominently.²⁸ Here, a screw is turned on Müller's doctrine of specific energies: not only is hearing understood as distinct from the other senses; it is said to be subdivisible by minute increments of musical pitch, each corresponding to a particular branch or set of nerves (this is why Helmholtz's is sometimes known as a 'piano' theory: each pitch is said to be perceived by a specific nerve or set of nerves in the same way that each key on a piano keyboard strikes a particular set of strings). Hearing, for Helmholtz, is in consequence both analytic and synthetic: analytic in its ability to break down composite phenomena, like musical chords, into their elementary components; synthetic in its ability to hear such things *as* chords, whose elements are intrinsically rather than accidentally related. As Benjamin Steege comments, this means that Helmholtz posits two distinct modes of audition, 'one that respond[s] uninhibitedly to physical forces acting upon it, and a second that in effect repress[s]' the first, winnowing aside auditory chaff so that the listener may attend more closely to whatever she or he may wish to.²⁹ If music is paradigmatic of what one might listen to in this fashion, this reflects the centrality of music to Helmholtz's theory, not just as an object of investigation but as a means as well.³⁰ For if his physiological conclusions reveal a 'musically' subdivided ear, music constitutes a kind of relief map of that ear's effective territory, revealing, for

those capable of understanding it as such, the nature of our ability to hear at all. Sully, one of many English-language commentators on these ideas, glosses them nicely when he attributes to Helmholtz a view of ‘tones and harmonies as resting on a substratum of nervous structure.’³¹

These ideas were enormously influential in their own right, but – with some significant exceptions – had little direct impact on literary aesthetics.³² They are, however, occasionally echoed in literature itself. In Richard Pryce’s novel *Christopher* (1911), the titular protagonist, a young boy, visits London’s Crystal Palace. Upon hearing piano music, he understands the place as a totality of sound:

Almost at once he became aware of a very network of sounds enclosed under the glass roof. In the mesh you might distinguish the popping of a popgun [...] the boom and whirl of a humming top, the tinkle of many musical-boxes, with the sound of other pianos in distant places. There was a buzzing and a rattle of talk [...] Other sounds came from the refreshment places, whence proceeded a continual clatter of plates, knives and forks, cups and saucers, with the occasional shivering of glasses on a tray. The sound of teaspoons rattling into saucers was as recurrent as that of the drawing of corks. Through all, over all, under all, like the sound of the sea under other sounds, was heard the tramp or shuffle of feet on the boards.³³

This is Helmholtzian ‘analytic’ hearing with a vengeance – the ear drilling down through a thick array of sound in order to expose and identify its component strata. But it is also ‘synthetic’ hearing, consubstantial, or alternate with the other kind; hence Christopher’s awareness of the sounds he hears as a single, compound entity, a ‘network.’ The musical boxes, rattling teaspoons, and so on must be distinguished from each other if Christopher is to gain a grip on the environment in which he finds himself. The sounds also, though, bear witness to some kind of solidarity: born of many human acts, they may be far from synchronised, but do reflect a common purpose and occasion. Immediately before the passage previously quoted, Christopher is said to feel ‘admitted to the freemasonry’ of the Crystal Palace. These sounds place him in his element; his hearing them is *fun*.

From Hearing to Sound and Soundlessness

The fun, or pleasure, to be had in sound is a recurrent theme in Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), often identified as a key influence on later modernism.³⁴ Here, it is said that poems by Gérard de Nerval feature, ‘for the first time, words which create an atmosphere

by the actual suggestive quality of their syllables' – a thing that happens independently if not irrespectively of the literal sense these syllables help convey.³⁵ Paul Verlaine is celebrated on related grounds, for taking poetry as far as it can go towards becoming 'pure music', 'pure' here meaning relatively unfreighted by determinate meaning.³⁶ Using an inter-art analogy – according to Christos Hadjiyiannis 'a key feature of all avant-gardes' of this period – Symons credits the same poet for 'paint[ing] with sound' and, conversely, conjuring a 'line and atmosphere' of 'music.'³⁷ All of this is meant to offer some respite from what Symons calls the 'many imprisonments' of modernity.³⁸ Thus, in Symbolism as a whole, '[w]e find a new, an older, sense in the so worn-out forms of things; the world [...] becomes transfigured with a new light.'³⁹

As his championship of sonorousness, as distinct from sense, suggests, Symons believes the chief of our imprisonments to be by language. Symbolism *is* escape from this imprisonment, accomplished within and by the means of language itself, whose otherwise stultifying influence poets suspend by tearing words free from their familiar, everyday meanings. These views are echoed by a no-less influential later theorist, T. E. Hulme, whose 'Lecture on Modern Poetry' (1908) ups the ante on Symons's complaint and, in doing so, reveals why modernist poets typically assert not just the value of poetry but also the necessity of writing poetry of a distinct new *type*. There are, Hulme says, 'two methods of communication, a direct' and an indirect one: poetry is of the first type; prose, the second. Prose, predominant in most arenas of human activity, has become moribund, filled with 'images that have died and become figures of speech.'⁴⁰ Given this state of affairs, 'modern poetry' must shun such figures, generate new 'images', and contribute to the discrediting of old ones. What do sound and hearing have to do with this? Intriguingly, Hulme sidelines both, with an inter-art analogy that breaks with Symons's by *dissociating* poetry from music rather than the reverse:

Th[e] new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes. This material [...] is image and not sound. It builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured to influence him physically by the hypnotic effect of rhythm.⁴¹

This is thus a verse of space rather than of time, insouciant towards, if not disdainful of, 'rhythm.' Accordingly, it displaces aural regularity with quasi-visual 'shapes.' This helps explain why such verse diverges both from prose *and* the kind of verse we must assume Allen has in mind when he

approves the suitability for poetry of musical vocabulary. For in that verse, as we have seen theorists addressed above contend, everything, from the regularity of rhythm to the way words are selected (in part) for the associations they are assumed to *already* hold within the reader's mind, is fundamentally geared to the meeting, rather than confounding, of expectations. But in Hulme's view, this is nothing less than a betrayal of poetry's true vocation. Poetry should cause surprise, if not outright consternation.

This idea of poetry is typical amongst Hulme's contemporaries, but his seeming aversion to aurality is less so. To begin seeing why, we may turn to a now-forgotten but revealing spat between R. C. Trevelyan and Robert Graves, conducted via their respective books, *Thamyris, Or, Is There a Future for Poetry?* (1925) and *Another Future of Poetry* (1926). Both begin from another of Hulme's observations: what defines all modern poetry, however various otherwise, is that it is written primarily to be read in silence, rather than be sung or spoken. For Trevelyan, this is a tragedy, figuratively if not literally attributable to Satan – who is invoked, as in an 'old Teutonic legend', reciting poetry in such a way that all 'element[s] of song, and even of intonation' disappear.⁴² In this account, the restoration of sonority to poetry is prerequisite for poetry's future health. Unsurprisingly, the form Trevelyan would like such restoration to take involves a return to poets vocalising and audiences listening. But Graves sees this as a reactionary prescription. Arguing that the ear 'can never properly appreciate a difficult poem of remote reference, intricate structure, and unusual diction' on its own, Graves calls for a rapprochement between ear and eye, and suggests that Hulme's account of these senses as essentially opposed is misconceived in any case.⁴³ In fact, he says, both senses have 'inner' and 'outer' forms, capable of corresponding with one another in such a way that the inner form of one sense allies naturally with the outer form of the other. The inner eye assists the outer ear; the inner ear, the outer eye. Poetry written to be read in silence thus need not forsake aurality at all, provided that the baby, as it were, of 'inner' sound is not thrown out with the bathwater of its 'outer' counterpart. This is already evident, albeit patchily, in the work of Graves's avant-garde contemporaries, and may become so, more consistently, in future. As Graves concludes: 'The future of Poetry then will be concerned [...] with the problem of how the outward ear, which carries with it the inward eye, and the outward eye, which carries with it the inward ear, may be satisfied by the same poem equally.'⁴⁴

The sound-sense dialectic, so to speak, is thus intimately linked, in early twentieth-century poetics, to negotiation of related conceptual pairings: poetry as opposed to prose; poems written to be read aloud as

opposed to those intended to be read silently, and so on. To consolidate our sense of this, I conclude the present section of this chapter with three further commentaries, occasioned either by specific corpuses of poetry or by poetry in general. The first of these, James Weldon Johnson's preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), warns its imagined readers: 'It may be surprising to many to see how little of the poetry being written by Negro poets today is being written in Negro dialect.'⁴⁵ Previously, Johnson explains, African American writers had often used nonstandard orthography to convey the characteristic accents and pronunciations of 'black' speech – the word 'heard', for instance (to cite an example from Paul Laurence Dunbar's 'A Negro Love Song' [1895]), becoming 'hyeahd.' But now, he intimates, this is increasingly regarded as a cliché, and a concession to racial chauvinism. Though dialectic writing is valued as a means of documenting sound, it is deemed incapable of 'giving expression to the varied conditions of Negro life in America': for the latter to happen, there needs instead to be expression by 'symbols from within rather than symbols from without' – an elaboration of sense rather than a relatively superficial orthographic attempt at reproducing sound.⁴⁶ Backhandedly, Johnson thus confirms the efficacy of non-standard orthography as a *de facto* form of sound recording. As Graves might say, such orthography ministers to the inner ear via the outer eye.

A different valuation is placed on sound in T. S. Eliot's theory of the 'auditory imagination', which echoes Symons's suggestion that in Symbolism, 'an older' sense may be restored to worn-out things:

the 'auditory imagination' is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end.⁴⁷

By exercising this imagination, the poet performs a kind of time travel, passing beyond contemporary meanings in order to reach more ancient qualities contained by words. In this account, sound is what persists while other elements of language change: as such, it represents a portal through which the entire past of language itself becomes accessible. *Pace* Johnson, sounds do not need to be added to words, orthographically, but acknowledged as immanent to words in their native state. This does not entail opposing sound to meaning but does insist that poets hear words as distinct from understanding them.⁴⁸

And so, to Yeats's declaration, in 1937, that in his long career to date, he has been concerned with 'clearing out of poetry every phrase written

for the eye, and bringing all back to syntax that is for ear alone.⁴⁹ Though no less ‘modern’ a figure, Yeats thus inverts the sensory hierarchy Hulme had identified as definitive of ‘modern’ poetry. He also expresses a wish that his poems be ‘spoken on a stage or sung’, in the precise – and, as such, revealing – context of an introduction *not* to those poems themselves, but to his plays. As we will see later in this chapter, the appeal to aurality in poetry is thus linked to an alignment of poetry with drama. Write poems ‘for the ear’, Yeats remembers advising himself, and ‘you may be instantly understood as when actor or folk singer stands before an audience.’⁵⁰ In *this* iteration of the sound-sense dialectic, there is complete accord between the two terms, sound the guarantor of meaning rather than its rival.

‘Interlineated’ Sound as Fiction

Who else may write for the ear, rather than the eye? For Ford Madox Ford, this was the tendency, if not the vice, of late-life Henry James, the notorious difficulty of whose late works is attributable to the fact that James dictated them aloud to an amanuensis.⁵¹ Ford had memories of James to base this view on but probably grounded them as well in the memoir of that amanuensis, Theodora Bosanquet. Here, Bosanquet recalls how in her presence James’s works ‘became more and more like free, involved, unanswered talk.’⁵² She adds that ‘[m]ore often than not, the initial idea’ for any given fiction ‘came [...] through the medium of other peoples’ talk.’⁵³ James’s late fiction as a whole is conceived as a gigantic, if oblique and punctuated, conversation.

These claims are anticipated, in certain ways, by James’s prefaces to the New York edition of his work (1907–1909), perhaps the most significant statement on fictional technique of the period. Here, James repeatedly invokes the time and place of a given text’s original composition, recalled to him, many years hence, by the conjoined acts of re-reading and revision (James revised many of his earlier works extensively for the edition). Sound and hearing are often cited as accompaniments to composition, as are sight and vision. But their relation to the texts they accompany has a crucial element of indirection. Take the preface to *Roderick Hudson* (1875; revised 1907), wherein James describes how portions of that novel set in small-town Massachusetts evoke memories of Florence’s Piazza Santa Maria Novella. Here, sonic impressions succeed visual ones, in parentheses:

what the early chapters of the book most ‘render’ to me today is not the umbrageous air of their New England town, but the view of the small cab-stand sleepily disposed [...] round the rococo obelisk of the Piazza, which

is supported on its pedestal, if I remember rightly, by four delightful little elephants. (That, at any rate, is how the object in question, deprecating verification, comes back to me with the clatter of horse-pails, the discussions, in the intervals of repose under well-drawn hoods, of the unbuttoned *cocchieri* [coach drivers], sons of the most garrulous of races, and the occasional stillness as of the noonday desert.)⁵⁴

To the author, the place the novel recalls is thus not the one it represents but where parts of it were written. The latter is remembered via sense impressions evoking other ones: sounds and sights combining in the mind as they are remembered so-doing in the time and place of their original reception. These impressions matter now, primarily, because they are part of what went into the writing of *Roderick Hudson* in the first place. The New England town of the novel's early chapters is, partly, an echo or effect of Florence. That is why to read of the former is to so vividly recall the latter.

This 'transsubstantiary' theory of literary composition, as it were, is developed further in James's preface to *The American* (1877; revised 1907). Here, that text is imagined as a body of water, and memories imagined as animated in that water by a dredge:

It is a pleasure to perceive how again and again the shrunken depths of old work yet permit themselves to be sounded or—even if rather terrible the image—'dragged': the long pole of memory stirs and rummages the bottom, and we fish up such fragments and relics of the submerged life and the extinct consciousness as tempt us to piece them together. My windows looked into the Rue de Luxembourg [...] and the particular light Parisian click of the small cab-horse on the clear asphalt, with its sharpness of detonation between the high houses, makes for the faded page to-day a sort of interlineation of sound.⁵⁵

James had written *The American*, one gathers, while living in or near the Rue de Luxembourg, in Paris, and now remembers sounds characteristic of that location. As with *Roderick Hudson*, his re-reading of the text is what affords his recollection, the sounds having initially accompanied writing of the text itself. The 'interlineat[ed]' sounds of the street, however, do not find their way into the text directly: again, James posits a more circuitous process, whereby the sense impressions accompanying writing were not, in writing it, imported into his book in their 'raw' form but rather transfigured, so that, both then and now, they may bear no self-evident relation to the originals (it perhaps impedes immediate conveyance of this point that *The American* is set in Paris, in addition to being written there – a coincidence obviously not reflected in the opening of *Roderick Hudson*).

As James confesses: 'I have ever [...] found it difficult to write of places under too immediate an impression' of them. Better, then, is to have *had* such an impression, and then write about it subsequently, under the influence of others.⁵⁶ Influence is what impressions surely have. But in the process of becoming fiction, they are transformed.

This point becomes still clearer in light of comments James makes about fiction generally. In another preface, he asks, rhetorically, with respect to the suitability or otherwise of subject matter: 'is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life?'⁵⁷ Implicit in this question is thus the answer that a given subject is suitable only if it has been come by empirically, rather than by speculation. This view is reflected in a belief about what, in effect, the sources or objects of sense impressions *want*: 'the urgent appeal, on the part of everything, to be interpreted and, so far as may be, reproduced' suggests that their want is, above all, to be translated into fictions.⁵⁸ Lest the terms 'direct' and 'reproduc[ti]on' in these passages suggest a passive role for the writer, James elsewhere moves to dismiss this suggestion out of hand, evolving extended analogies between writing and practices characterised precisely by the transformative effects they have upon their raw materials: alchemy, chemistry, and cooking. For example, he affirms 'the "chemical" change wrought in the impression of life by its dedication to an aesthetic use.'⁵⁹ Art itself can thus be defined as the wringing of changes in things so that they acquire a kind of parallel existence, other than that possessed by them as found.

In sum, James believes sensations, including auditory ones, to be important to good writing but not sufficient for it. This reflects a view of 'impressions' – shared, as Jesse Matz has shown, by contemporaries such as Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford – as having a conceptual dimension, as much as and in addition to a sensuous one.⁶⁰ It is worth noting, though, that a rival view haunts early twentieth-century culture – one that sees people generally, not just writers, as functions or epiphenomena of their senses. As a character in Wyndham Lewis's *The Childermass* (1928) puts it: 'there is no *you* apart from what you perceive [...] The more highly developed the individual [...] the more the exterior world is part of him' or her.⁶¹ Here, the measured appraisal of perceptions we saw theorised earlier in this chapter by Herbert Spencer, say, disappears, and is replaced by a model of perceptions moulding their perceivers. No longer does the self wring changes in sensations; instead, sensations wring changes in the self.

Lip-Reading by Ear

As we have seen, Yeats's privileging of sound in poetry coincides with a conviction that actors and singers achieve the greatest success when they speak or sing distinctly. This point may seem self-evident, but is one Yeats feels compelled to make in the face of a trend towards *indistinct* speech that he, like other early twentieth-century commentators, considered a particular defect of contemporaneous theatre. Training texts for actors express this sentiment. Louis Calvert's *Problems of the Actor* (1919), for instance, deplores the fact that voice training is less part of actors' training than in the past, and quotes another actor, Ellen Terry, to much the same effect.⁶² Lane Crauford's *Acting* (1930) takes a slightly different tack, claiming that 'the very colloquial style of dialogue of the modern play' conspires against the 'rotund voices of old.'⁶³ As this complaint makes clear, culpability for the perceived decline in vocal excellence amongst actors was ascribed to the writers of plays, as well as to these plays' performers. 'Modern' playwrights give actors too demotic things to *say*. And what is wrong with this 'colloquial[ism]'? The answer recalls Hulme's depreciation of prose, and laudation of verse.

Such commentators believe that plays should be written in verse itself. Perhaps the most detailed exposition of this view is offered by Symons's *Plays, Acting and Music* (1903; revised 1909), a text replete with inter-art analogies, like his *Symbolist Movement in Literature*, but also, more than that earlier one, concerned with practical prescriptions for how the arts should interact. Poetry, Symons argues, 'is first of all song', and is superior to prose because 'only in verse can we render what is deepest in humanity of the utmost beauty.'⁶⁴ It follows that dramatists should favour verse over prose, as in Shakespeare's plays, where verse 'may sometimes seem to delay action' but ultimately 'deepen[s] it.'⁶⁵ Contemporary dramatists have forgotten this, the result being 'the play which is prose, and nothing but prose' (the specific target of this would-be devastating jibe is George Bernard Shaw).⁶⁶ Thus, when contemporary actors pronounce verse at all, they do so 'deplorabl[y]'.⁶⁷ A rare exception to this rule is French actor Sarah Bernhardt, who, in being so, suspends the rule opposing verse and prose. Thus, as Symons writes, with an especially florid inter-art analogy: 'Prose, when she speaks it, becomes a kind of verse, with all the rhythm, the vocal harmonies, of a kind of human poetry.'⁶⁸ Here, it is hard to tell if the things analogised are *just* analogised, or if Symons thinks that the differences between them – so much insisted on elsewhere – have been somehow been dissolved.

Symons's most interesting thought, meanwhile, is that the foundation of drama is not verbal at all, but gestural. 'Gesture on the stage is the equivalent of rhythm in verse', he explains, and there is nothing truly essential to drama that cannot 'be represented in dumb show.'⁶⁹ This leads us to a final theorist of interest to this chapter, though not of the arts but of language. For Richard Paget, in *Human Speech* (1930), vocalised language of the kind found throughout humanity (he is not concerned about literacy) is, genealogically, a kind of sign language, not intended for the ear but for the eye. In 'the early stages of human development', he surmises, 'mankind roared and grunted and sung, on the one hand, to express his emotions, and gesticulated and grimaced on the other to express his ideas.'⁷⁰ Once handheld tools became prevalent, those gesticulations, which the hand could no longer make, 'were unconsciously copied by movements or positions of the mouth, tongue or lips.'⁷¹ Coincidentally, humans discovered that the movements so-made were accompanied by sounds varied and distinct enough to signify these movements: so complete was correspondence between the two that hearing gradually displaced seeing as the privileged mode of attending to 'express[ions]' of all kinds. Thus, in what is surely one of the most counterintuitive theories of hearing of its period, this sense becomes, vis-à-vis language, a mere proxy for vision. As Paget concludes: 'the significant elements in human speech are the postures and gestures, rather than the sounds. The sounds only serve to indicate the postures and gestures which produced them. We lip-read by ear.'⁷²

As other scholars have discussed, there is at least one major literary figure who followed Paget's thinking closely: James Joyce.⁷³ And in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), the link between these two men is palpable, the word play sometimes having the effect of making the reader visibly contort her or his mouth, even when reading silently. But rather than explore this affinity further here, I conclude this chapter with a brief look at a novel Paget cannot possibly have influenced (because his chief work long postdates it), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Echoing Symons, the novel's male characters dilate on a specific woman's voice, that of Daisy Buchanan – this voice being, Nick Carraway contends, one 'that the ear follows up and down, as if speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again.'⁷⁴ If this account echoes Symons's paean to the voice as *de facto* musical instrument, Nick elsewhere echoes Symons's (and Eliot's, and numerous others') distinction between sound and sense, explaining that an 'exhilarating ripple' in Daisy's voice means that he must 'follow the sound of it for a moment, up and down, with my ear alone, before any words came through.'⁷⁵ *Gatsby* gets in on this act as well,

declaring Daisy's voice to be 'full of money', possessed of an appeal that is both quantitatively and qualitatively commensurate with his own self-fashioning as an embodiment of wealth.⁷⁶ In all these instances, the voice is valued in itself in the same act as it is identified with something else: music or money; a sonorous flourish, distinct from words. To appreciate this voice is to dissociate it from any given thing that it may say.

Gatsby's male voices, though, reveal this better still. On one occasion, listening to Gatsby, Nick is 'reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago.'⁷⁷ In response, he does as Paget might predict, by trying, not so much to think of words, as to enact them: 'For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable for ever.'⁷⁸ Here, gesture's status as the origin of speech is made all the more evident by the fact that, as it were, it has no sequel: unlike in more successful speech acts, sound does not well up and so render that origin obscure. Elsewhere, Nick declares that 'personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures', a statement one might gloss in Paget's spirit as meaning personality to be a matter of comprehended speech.⁷⁹ And as Nick elsewhere intimates, words sometimes fail in ways that vocal sound can only frame, and not present directly. One of Gatsby's associates tells him: "'You sit here and discuss your sports and your young ladies and your—'", before adding an 'imaginary noun with another wave of his hand.'⁸⁰ What is hearing in this instance? It is what the ear does, in intimate liaison with, if not ultimate reliance upon, the eye. This is fitting, as this chapter has tried to demonstrate that hearing's function and character are rarely considered in isolation from other senses, and indeed the senses as a whole.

Notes

¹ Grant Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877; New York: Garland, 1977), p. 2.

² Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, p. 245.

³ On idealism, see Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴ Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, p. 256.

⁵ Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, p. 252.

⁶ Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, p. 252.

⁷ Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, pp. 257–8.

- ⁸ Johanne Mueller [sic.], 'The Specific Energies of Nerves' [1838], trans. by William Braly, in *Readings in the History of Psychology*, ed. by Wayne Dennis (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), pp. 157–68 (p. 165).
- ⁹ Mueller, 'Specific Energies', p. 162.
- ¹⁰ Julius Bernstein, *The Five Senses of Man*, trans. uncredited (London: Henry King and Co., 1876), p. 4.
- ¹¹ R. S. Wyld, *The Physics and Philosophy of the Senses; or, the Mental and Physical in Their Mutual Relations* (London: Henry S. King, 1875), p. 458.
- ¹² Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1st ed. (London: Longman and Co, 1855), pp. 185–6.
- ¹³ Charles S. Sherrington, *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1906), p. 356.
- ¹⁴ Sherrington, *Integrative Action*, p. 356.
- ¹⁵ Sherrington, *Integrative Action*, p. 6.
- ¹⁶ Hermann von Helmholtz, 'The Facts of Perception', trans. by Richard M. Warren and Roslyn P. Warren, in *Helmholtz on Perception: Its Physiology and Development*, ed. by Richard M. Warren and Roslyn P. Warren (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), pp. 205–35 (p. 227).
- ¹⁷ Helmholtz, 'The Facts of Perception', p. 212.
- ¹⁸ The key claim in Saussure's work, in this respect, is that '[t]he bond between the signifier and the signified' in all linguistic signs is 'arbitrary', the signifier having 'no natural connection with the signified.' Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1916], trans. by Wade Baskin, ed. by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 67, 69.
- ¹⁹ Hermann von Helmholtz, 'Concerning the Perceptions in General' [1866], trans. by J. P. C. Southall, in *Helmholtz on Perception*, pp. 171–203 (p. 192 cited).
- ²⁰ Wyld, *The Physics and Philosophy*, p. 473.
- ²¹ Wyld, *The Physics and Philosophy*, p. 473.
- ²² Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 56.
- ²³ Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 57.
- ²⁴ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), Vol. I, p. 633.
- ²⁵ Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, pp. 261–2; James Sully, *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1874), p. 342.
- ²⁶ Vernon Lee, 'The Craft of Words', *New Review*, 11 (December 1894): 571–80 (p. 574 cited).
- ²⁷ Lee, 'The Craft of Words', p. 575.
- ²⁸ The key text is Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music* (1863), whose third edition (1870) was the first translated into English, in 1875.

- ²⁹ Benjamin Steege, *Helmholtz and the Modern Listener* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 14.
- ³⁰ Alexandra Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear: Musical Experiments, Experimental Sounds, 1840–1910* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 87.
- ³¹ Sully, *Sensation and Intuition*, p. 186.
- ³² One of these exceptions is the late work of George Eliot, as shown by John M. Picker in *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 3.
- ³³ Richard Pryce, *Christopher* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1911), p. 145.
- ³⁴ See, e.g., Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 8.
- ³⁵ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), p. 34.
- ³⁶ Symons, *Symbolist Movement*, p. 89.
- ³⁷ Christos Hadjiyiannis, 'Cultures of the Avant Garde', in *Late Victorian into Modern*, ed. by Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelsohn and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 85–102 (p. 87 cited); Symons, *Symbolist Movement*, p. 90.
- ³⁸ Symons, *Symbolist Movement*, p. 137.
- ³⁹ Symons, *Symbolist Movement*, pp. 137–8.
- ⁴⁰ T. E. Hulme, 'A Lecture on Modern Poetry' [1908], in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Patrick McGuiness (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), p. 65.
- ⁴¹ Hulme, 'A Lecture', p. 66.
- ⁴² R. C. Trevelyan, *Thamyris, Or, Is There a Future for Poetry?* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1925), p. 3.
- ⁴³ Robert Graves, *Another Future of Poetry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), pp. 8–9.
- ⁴⁴ Graves, *Another Future*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁵ James Weldon Johnson, 'Preface' to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), p. xxxix.
- ⁴⁶ Johnson, 'Preface', p. xli.
- ⁴⁷ T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism; Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. III.
- ⁴⁸ I say more about the primitivist, racialised component of Eliot's thinking here in *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 31.
- ⁴⁹ W. B. Yeats, 'An Introduction to my Plays' [1937], in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 529.
- ⁵⁰ Yeats, 'An Introduction to my Plays', p. 530.
- ⁵¹ Ford Madox Ford, *Portraits from Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), p. 26.
- ⁵² Theodora Bosanquet, *Henry James at Work* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 7.
- ⁵³ Bosanquet, *Henry James*, p. 24.

- ⁵⁴ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, with an introduction by R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 7–8.
- ⁵⁵ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 26.
- ⁵⁶ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 27.
- ⁵⁷ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 45.
- ⁵⁸ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 59.
- ⁵⁹ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 248.
- ⁶⁰ Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2.
- ⁶¹ Wyndham Lewis, *The Childermass: Section I* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928), pp. 222–3.
- ⁶² Louis Calvert, *Problems of the Actor*, with an introduction by H. B. Irving (London: Simpkin, Marshall Hamilton, Kent and Co., 1919), pp. 44–5, ix.
- ⁶³ Lane Crauford, *Acting: Its Theory and Practice, with Illustrative Examples of Players Past and Present*, with a foreword by H. Chance Newton (London: Constable and Co., 1930), p. 17.
- ⁶⁴ Arthur Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music: A Book of Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1909), pp. 178, 201.
- ⁶⁵ Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music*, p. 204.
- ⁶⁶ Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music*, p. 208.
- ⁶⁷ Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music*, p. 180.
- ⁶⁸ Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music*, p. 20.
- ⁶⁹ Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music*, pp. 7, 200.
- ⁷⁰ Sir Richard Paget, *Human Speech: Some Observations, Experiments, and Conclusions as to the Nature, Origin, Purpose and Possible Improvements of Human Speech* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1930), p. 132.
- ⁷¹ Paget, *Human Speech*, p. 132.
- ⁷² Paget, *Human Speech*, p. 174.
- ⁷³ See, e.g., Laurent Milesi, 'Supplementing Babel: Paget in VI.B.32', in *James Joyce: The Study of Languages*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 75–89.
- ⁷⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ed. with an introduction by Ruth Prizogy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 11.
- ⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 69.
- ⁷⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 96.
- ⁷⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 89.
- ⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 89.
- ⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 6.
- ⁸⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 58.

CHAPTER 2

Fragments on/of Voice

David Nowell Smith

Literature operates with voice, and voices – the voices of the author/poet, of the characters (and the poem’s ‘speaker’), and of the reciter and reader, who even in silent reading registers rhythms, inflections, and gestures through subvocalisation: an entire stereophony of prosodic and rhetorical expression (see [Chapter 11](#)). But literature also operates an extensive imaginary of voice. Voice is the ‘stuff’ of literature in two senses: its material support, and an abiding theme. And criticism itself involves so many ‘voicings’ of literary texts, as we test out the texts’ possibilities, their reverberations, their potential afterlives.

Both voice and its imaginary are historically mutable, shaped by phenomena as various as the social function of poetry in predominantly, or exclusively, oral cultures; the class and race politics of accent; and the technologies of sound recording, reproduction, transmission, and processing. And just as the imaginary of voice is shaped by the technologies and social circulation of voice and voices, so technologies and social circuits are possessed by the many imaginaries which have accreted over history. The voice that emerges from these imaginaries is plural, fragmented. To parse the imaginary of voice requires likewise that we think through fragments. Voice as origin to, as excess over, speech; the voices of muses and song, voices that come both from within and without us, voices that *possess* us; prosthetics of voice, written or machinic, where voices live on independent of their utterer; mnemonics of voice, where voice is not just memorable, but creates memory; but always, voice as extravagant, as *extravagance*, even.

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William Blake’s chimney sweeper from the ‘Songs of Innocence’ tells his tale:

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry ‘weep! ’weep! ’weep! ’weep!’¹

The infant's cry of 'weep' both prefigures the call 'sweep' that will be his fate, and embodies the weeping of the motherless, abandoned child; likewise, 'tongue' figures both sound production and the articulate speech he does not yet have. His voice, at this moment, is both prelinguistic and linguistic, or caught somewhere between the two.

Blake's tale of infant speech finds an echo in much later accounts of child language acquisition. The first cry of the newborn issues as the lungs first inflate with air, having been filled with fluid during pregnancy; but each subsequent cry serves as an initiation into vocal, and later verbal, communication. Guy Rosolato describes this process as the 'introjection of the "nutritive" voice, in the aura of the breast as primary object.'² The mouth is primarily the organ of breath and nutrition, and only later the organ of codified sound production; indeed, such sound production is designed to aid nutrition. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok chart a subsequent 'transition from a mouth filled with the breast to a mouth filled with words [that] occurs by virtue of the intervening experiences of the empty mouth.'³ Words are a supplement to food, to the breast: a filling of oral emptiness, and at the same time the means of articulating desires beyond the nutritive.

These narratives from 1970s psychoanalysis replay the speculative histories of the origin of languages that abounded in the eighteenth century, whether based in onomatopoeia (as for Johann Gottfried von Herder), or interjection (Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Jean-Jacques Rousseau). In each instance, the first languages are communicated through inflection, pitch, and melody, rather than reference. As language becomes more 'articulate', so it becomes more monotone. Writes Rousseau: 'it becomes more precise and less passionate; it substitutes ideas for feelings, it no longer speaks to the heart, but to reason.'⁴ For a century, philologists concerned themselves in ever-increasing numbers with speculative histories – to such a degree that in 1866 the Société Linguistique in Paris called for a moratorium on inquiries into the origin of language.⁵ But not before the philologist Ernest Renan offered one of the most provocative suggestions this age of speculation had given rise to: 'Primitive language, if we could have access to it, would be exuberance itself.'⁶

Yet Blake's chimney sweeper does not simply attest to a movement from voice into language; the two are enmeshed. It is more like Michel de Certeau's suggestion, from 1980, that language originates in glossolalia – vocal inventions of speech. 'For the infant,' he argues, 'it is the voice that opens (and circumscribes) a sphere of communication preparatory to the

spoken word... *a space of enunciation*: this space 'combines something prelinguistic, related to a silent origin or to the "attack" of the spoken word, and something postlinguistic, made from the excesses, the overflows, and the wastes of language.'⁷ Even when Blake's 'weep' has been incorporated into linguistic reference (in this case the polysemy of weeping and calling 'sweep' with a lisp), the sonorous performance remains, something more than language. It is more like babble in this regard: not an imitation of speech, but rather the infant testing out his vocal organs, at once, as Mladen Dolar noted in 2006, wholly solipsistic, and 'captured in a discourse.'⁸ Voice here seems both the origin to speech and an excess irreducible back into speech. If, as Adriana Cavarero has argued, the history of metaphysics is one of the 'devocalisation of *logos*',⁹ then Blake points to a vocal residue that refuses to be erased, to be consigned to nonmeaning. Voice is not simply exuberant but *extravagant* – more than mere sound, but also more than mere speech, characterised by ineradicable surplus. We might say: *voice is extravagance*.

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When the Muses were born, some men 'were ecstatic with pleasure, and were so busy singing that they didn't bother with food and drink, so that before they knew it they were dead.'¹⁰ This is not the only moment in Western mythology to posit a primitive vocal extravagance that is not just exuberant but deathly. Pliny told of contests between nightingales that would continue until one of the competitors perished. In his *Ars Poetica*, Johannes Aegidius de Zamora (1240–c.1316) adds one further myth: 'The nightingale wastes little time in eating so that she can enjoy the beauty of her own song. Thus she dies sometimes from singing, and in dying sings.'¹¹ Song interrupts the primary functions of mouth, larynx, lungs, diaphragm: communication, respiration, nutrition – nutrition especially; song begets starvation. The mouth can sing, or it can eat; it cannot do both (don't sing with your mouth full).

However, the men in Socrates' tale are transformed into cicadas, 'whom the Muses granted the gift of never needing any food once they were born; all they do is sing, from the moment of their births until their deaths, without eating or drinking' (259c). This is not the first time cicadas have appeared in the *Phaedrus*: indeed, the very setting for the dialogue is characterised by how 'the whisper of the breeze chimes in a summery, clear way with the chorus of the cicadas' (230c). The voices of the cicadas lull Phaedrus and Socrates, but Socrates warns against dozing in the afternoon sun: 'I think that as the cicadas sing and talk to one another in the heat about our heads,

they look down on us as well' (258e); if the two were to sleep 'under their spell', the cicadas would be in their rights to 'laugh' at them, but 'if they see us talking and sailing past them as if they were Sirens whose spell we had resisted, they might perhaps be pleased enough to give us the gift which the gods have granted them the power to give people' (259a–b).

The cicadas, emblems of deathly vocal excess, are now linked with another deathly emblem of voice: the Sirens. Whereas the cicadas had been 'men', who died singing at the behest of the female Muses, the image of the Sirens reverses this: woman singers leading men to their death. Socrates' myth – one of only two in Plato's entire corpus, according to Perceval Frutiger, for which no earlier source exists¹² – points to both the excesses of voice and to the containment of these excesses. If the Muses inspire such excess, it is also the Muses who subsequently regulate it, and channel it to good use: Socrates' and Phaedrus' philosophical dialogue proceeds in homage to Urania, Muse of philosophers.

This tension between excess and containment is integral to vocal art more generally: song, after all, is a deployment of phonetic matter in accordance with harmonic, melodic, textural repertoires that formalise pitch, tempo, timbre. Whether it be Bach or Berio, Schubert or Schoenberg, aria or *Sprechgesang*: voice is both the *medium* of song and mediated by song. Does this make the voice a musical 'instrument'? Emboldened by Hermann von Helmholtz's studies of tone colour, the prosodist Sidney Lanier argued in 1880 that 'for all purposes of verse, words are unquestionably musical sounds produced by a reed-instrument—the human voice.'¹³ It was, he suggested, most similar to the oboe, but able to vary tone colour as well as pitch, through alliteration and assonance. Helmholtz had provided accounts not of sound vibrations, not just of pitch, but also the 'musical qualities' (*musikalische Klangfarbe*) of different musical instruments, even of the vowels; yet attempts to distinguish vowels through their tone colour had absorbed physicists and composers alike from the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ When Ezra Pound in 1912 exhorted his readers 'to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome',¹⁵ this was not a modernist rejection of the nineteenth century, but in crucial ways a continuation of its logic (see [Chapter 3](#)). To all of which, Mallarmé's 'Crise de vers' (1896–7) offers a powerful rejoinder: 'it is not from elementary sounds [produced] by brass, woodwind, strings, but undeniably from the intellectual word at its apogee that music, as the ensemble of relations that exist in everything, must fully and openly result.'¹⁶ If voice is a musical instrument, then music needs to

be understood as something exceeding patterned sound, to be grasped through language itself, as the relation of relations.

But does the insistence on relation not dissolve vocal extravagance? Roland Barthes aimed to preserve the extravagance of voice by tying it to the corporeality of a voice's 'grain': a grain that is individual but not personal, he argues, as it refuses relation even to the subject that utters it, from whose body it emanates. He searched out a sonic something 'there, manifest and stubborn (one hears only *that*), beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form ..., the melisma, and even the style of execution.'¹⁷ Barthes admired the baritone Charles Panzéra for giving sound to the opacities of language, giving sound to the production of voice itself, but lamented that this had become outmoded: singing teachers would prioritise 'breath' and 'clarity of meaning', and recording practices increased the bias for clarity (something that digital remastering has only served to intensify). For Barthes, the voice's 'grain' was a thing of the past; yet Socrates' myth implies that it always was: the Muses had contained it long ago.

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In *Paradise Lost*, it was Urania to whom Milton turns as his 'Celestial Patroness.' It was she 'whose Voice divine / Following, above th'Olympian Hill I soar',¹⁸ she who 'dictates to me slumbering, or inspires / Easy my unpremeditated Verse.'¹⁹ This is more than a figure for poetic inspiration. Urania was Muse of not just philosophers but astronomy; Milton follows her 'Voice divine' not for poetic gift alone, but for understanding of the heavens.

Urania had been called the 'Muse Celeste' by Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas in 1583. In this poem, Urania appears to Guillaume and describes her vocation as to endow 'quintessence to the soul and make the poet, / Surpassing himself, pour forth a high discourse / Which, divine, can prick up the ears of the deaf, / Animate rocks, and stop rivers.'²⁰ Milton then further traces her theological origin:

Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old Olympus dwell'st, but Heav'nly borne,
Before the Hills appeared, or Fountain flowed,
Thou with Eternal Wisdom did converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
In presence of th'Almighty Father, pleased
With thy Celestial Song.²¹

Milton's becomes the intersection of plural voices – the poet's and the Muse's, the Christian and the Classical, the individual poem's and the epic tradition's. It blends a voice shaped by versification with the narrative and didactic voices of the poem's dual 'great Argument': the tale it recounts and its immodest task to 'justify the ways of God to Men.'²² Indeed, Milton's ventriloquism is tied to the poem's apparently presumptuous aspiration: 'Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole, / More safe I Sing with mortal voice', he writes, before beseeching Urania: 'still govern thou my Song.'²³ The Muse's voice does not simply give him the courage, and insight, to continue, but becomes a means of negotiating between the mortal and the divine.

Etymologically, inspiration is a breathing in, but the cognates of *spiritus* nod back to its Greek precursor, enthusiasm: *en-theos* literally denotes taking in the God. The voice of the poet would in fact be a divine voice that speaks through the poet, who comes to resemble the fabled Oracle at Delphi: 'toxic gases rising from a chasm ... a frenzied or drugged Pythia talking incoherently, cleverly ambiguous prophecies and remarkable predictions that prophets or attendant bards expressed in dactylic hexameter.'²⁴ Vocal possession involves both *ventriloquism* (the god/Muse speaking through the human) and a possession by *metre* – indeed, dactylic hexameter was employed in epic verse.

One might imagine that the ventriloquist model of poetic possession dates back to time immemorial. But in the Greek tradition at least, it was a relatively late development: according to E. R. Dodds, 'it is to Democritus [c. 460–370 BCE] ... that we must assign the rather doubtful credit of having introduced into literary theory this conception of the poet as a man set apart from common humanity by an abnormal inner experience, and of poetry as a revelation apart from reason and above reason.'²⁵ The first extant stories of the Pythian priestess prophesying in ecstatic enthusiasm date from a similar period.²⁶ The model of composition through inspiration was then deployed by Plato to undermine poetry's cultural supremacy: in the *Republic*, the poet's mode of composition demonstrates that they do not *know* what it is they tell; and in the *Ion* he argues that because the rhapsode is possessed by the poem, they cannot be said to have any knowledge of the poem, let alone of what the poem speaks. Possession, that familiar trope in the post-Romantic ideology of the poet-genius, was at its inception weaponised in an ideological struggle *against* poetry, and most particularly against *poets* and the authority their poetic gift might confer.

The intoxication of song is but one of many forms of possession at work within the *Phaedrus*. The first half of the dialogue revolves around three speeches, each on the subject of love: the first was composed by the rhetorician Lysias, but is read by Phaedrus himself; the second is Socrates' response; the third a 'palinode', or countersong, by Socrates, correcting his earlier speech. The imaginary of possession reverberates throughout. As Socrates listens to Phaedrus read the speech of Lysias, he comes 'to share the ecstasy of [Phaedrus'] enthusiasm' (234d): he comes to stand outside of himself (*ec-stasis*), and partake in Phaedrus' own taking-in of the god (*en-theos*). When he gives his first speech, Socrates warns: 'I might become possessed by the Nymphs as my speech progresses. As it is I'm already more or less chanting dithyrambs' (238d), but by the end he quips, 'I've stopped chanting dithyrambs and am now coming up with epic verse' (241e). Indeed, he believes that Phaedrus 'bewitched' him 'into being [his] mouthpiece' (242d): at once possession as ventriloquism and possession by metre. In each instance, they would fit one of the central arguments of the *Phaedrus*: that in rhetoric speakers divest themselves of responsibility for their speech's content, sacrifice truth for what is pleasing to hear.

The third speech, the 'palinode', is the most complex. On the one hand, he claims it is spoken through him by the lyric poet Stesichorus (243e–244a). Stesichorus was reputedly blinded by Helen, just as Homer had been, for claiming that she eloped to Troy; unlike Homer, however, he composed a 'palinode' retracting the calumny, and promptly regained his sight. His palinode begins, 'False is the tale I told'; and so does Socrates.' There is an element of ironic mockery here, at the expense of possession; yet Socrates' reason for composing the palinode is that he received a warning from his 'divine sign' (*daimon*): 'I seemed to hear a sudden voice telling me not to leave until I have purified myself from some offence or other which I have committed against the realm of the gods' (242c; it is this same 'divine sign' that Socrates will invoke in his defence oration, when on trial for corrupting the youth of Athens). More than this, in the palinode he offers a defence of love as *a form of divine possession*. His first speech had claimed that love leads to madness, and so should be avoided; but now he suggests that four kinds of madness are in fact beneficial: (1) the madness that leads to prophecy; (2) the madness arising from a historic family guilt that one needs to expiate; (3) the madness that leads to the composition of poetry; and (4) love itself, in which the soul is possessed by beauty and thereby led

towards true beauty, that is, the eternal Forms. Possessed by a voice, Socrates rethinks possession.

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It is not only a speaker who can be possessed by a voice. When, in Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, Nathaniel first encounters the automaton Olympia in the flesh (as it were), she is sat at the harpsichord, singing 'a *bravura* aria in a voice that was high pitched, bell-like, almost shrill' [*heller, beinahe schneidender Glasglockenstimme*], leaving Nathaniel 'enchanted.'²⁷ In this Nathaniel anticipates both hero and villain of Jules Verne's *The Castle of the Carpathians* (1893), one of the first novels to turn recently developed auditory technologies into plot devices. Both had been captivated by the soprano La Stilla; the Count Franz of Telek had been betrothed to her, but during the final performance she gave before marrying him, she collapsed dead onstage, mid-aria, singing the fateful phrase *voglio morire* ('I wish to die').²⁸ The evil Baron Gortz, inhabitant of the novel's eponymous castle, had watched every performance during her lifetime, and was surreptitiously recording her when she died. Franz attempts to break into the castle, for he can hear La Stilla's voice resonate beyond its walls, and he thinks her in fact still alive and imprisoned therein. This voice is 'like a breath exhaling from her lips, which seemed to be motionless.'²⁹ And indeed they are motionless: what he hears is in fact a phonograph recording of her final aria.³⁰ As with Olympia, what makes La Stilla uncanny is precisely that there is a *voice without breath*.

Verne presents his novel as a demystification of archaic superstition. The local villagers are convinced that the eponymous castle is haunted; but, Verne's narrator reminds us, 'this story occurred in one of the last years of the nineteenth century', during which time 'the use of electricity, which is rightly considered "the soul of the universe", had just been finally perfected. The illustrious Edison and his disciples had completed their work.'³¹ When one of the villagers announces, in the village inn, that he intends to visit the castle for himself and solve the question of its mysterious inhabitants, a voice warns him not to go, 'or misfortune will befall you!';³² and when indeed it does, he admits that 'The voice did tell me harm would come my way!'³³ But it later transpires that this was the doing of a telephonic device: the reclusive Baron Gortz had had a wire installed in the taproom of the inn, to eavesdrop on conversations, and it was through this wire that the disembodied voice emanated with its uncanny warning.

Nevertheless, Verne cannot help but evince fascination at the mystique of voice. Not only is La Stilla's song, like that of Socrates' men-turned-cicadas, deathly; the phonograph, replacing the live performance with an infinitely repeatable one, becomes bound up in that death. As Gortz listens to his recording, he falls into 'a paroxysm of ecstasy' (once again: ecstasis, outside oneself); he 'breathed in this voice like a perfume, he drank it in like a divine liqueur', in contrast to the breathless apparition from which the voice seems to emanate.³⁴ But for Franz, this vocal performance 'could make the cords of memory vibrate most strongly in Franz's heart.'³⁵

The echo of the 'vocal cords' in 'cords of memory' intimates that the phonographic voice serves as an *aide-memoire*. This may well emerge from one of the uses to which the new invention was put: to record the voices of famous people before they died. Florence Nightingale's recording shows intense awareness of this: 'When I am no longer even a memory, just a name, I hope my voice may perpetuate the great work of my life.'³⁶ Those great inventors of auditory technologies, Thomas Edison and Guglielmo Marconi, were evidently themselves possessed by this imaginary of voice. Edison had described his invention as a 'tongueless, toothless instrument, without larynx or pharynx, dumb, voiceless matter', which, despite its lack of embodied vocal apparatus (of 'grain', Barthes might say), 'nevertheless utters your words, and centuries after you have crumbled to dust will repeat again and again to a generation that will never know you, every idle thought, every fond fancy, every vain word that you choose to whisper against this thin iron diaphragm.'³⁷ And in later years, both he and Marconi aspired to invent machines that would capture the voices of those already dead.³⁸ In the imaginary of voice, the phonograph both captures the voices of the dead and brings death to the voice.³⁹

The imaginary of vocal memory finds a perhaps surprising analogue in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913). Aside from its satire on the politics of accent, the play displays that same fascination with the phonograph and gramophone (Shaw treats the devices interchangeably). Henry Higgins, as befits one at the vanguard of phonetics, uses the phonograph for research purposes; yet it also conditions his relationship with Eliza. When she leaves him, the phonograph attains the same spectrality as in Verne's tale of suspense. When Higgins protests that he'll miss her, Eliza ripostes that he has the gramophone: 'When you feel lonely without me, you can turn the machine on.' Higgins then exclaims: 'I can't turn your soul on.'⁴⁰ The musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady*, contains a final reconciliation scene where Eliza returns, at the very moment that Higgins, lonely without her, is listening to her recorded voice. She replaces this

recording with her living, ensouled voice. It seems that, for the musical at least, when one turns the voice on, the soul does return.

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The second ‘myth’ that Plato seems to have invented in the *Phaedrus* concerns the invention of a much earlier technology for recording voices: writing. The Egyptian god Thoth presents to King Thamous a new invention, a tool to notate speech, which he describes as ‘a potion [*pharmakon*] for memory and intelligence’ (274c ff.). Thamous is unimpressed: far from aiding memory, he argues, writing will ‘atrophy’ it (275a). It is this story that is so famously diagnosed by Derrida: when writing is called a *pharmakon*, the word is pointedly double-edged, at once a medicine to aid the memory and a poison that will hasten its decay. Writing is a prosthetic of memory, but thereby takes memory out of the mind. But, Derrida argues, the stakes are higher than this: it is a question not just of memory (*mneme*) but of truth (*aletheia*). For truth is nothing other than ‘living memory, of memory as psychic life in its self-presentation to itself.’⁴¹ Such living memory, Derrida sees Plato to be saying, can be preserved only in speech, in the *logos*, where the ‘father’ of the speech, the speaker, remains present in the act of speaking. The procedure of dialectic is nothing other than a means of bringing truth into the live memory of one’s interlocutor. Writing, by contrast, cuts speaker off from her speech, and thereby effects ‘the substitution of the mnemonic device for live memory, of the prosthesis for the organ.’ Derrida continues: ‘The boundary (between inside and outside, living and nonliving) separates not only speech from writing but also memory as an unveiling (re-) producing a presence from a re-memoration as the mere repetition of a monument; truth as distinct from its sign, being as distinct from types.’⁴² Living and nonliving at once: Derrida’s thought about writing thus replays the central imaginary of voice as intuited by Verne, Nightingale, Edison, and Shaw – though they are responding to a different kind of inscription: that of stylus on wax cylinder.

Early in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, Derrida had suggested that the ‘incompatibility between the *written* and the *true* is clearly announced at the moment Socrates starts to recount the way in which men are carried out of themselves by pleasure, become absent from themselves, forget themselves and die in the thrill of song.’⁴³ He does not specify why this should be the case, yet the tropes he gleans from the myth – ec-stasis, absence, forgetting – foreshadow the threats posed by writing. Vocal excess, it would seem, as well as writing, must be contained by *logos*. The two myths complement one another insofar as each attempts to defend *logos*,

one from the mouth that sings, the other from the hand that writes. But there is one further mnemonic prosthetic in the *Phaedrus*. Throughout, Socrates is possessed by *metre*.

In fact, voice complicates the binary logic around which Derrida's reading progresses. He understands the opposition of speech and writing to reinforce boundaries 'between inside and outside, living and nonliving', but voice is at once inside *and* outside, living *and* nonliving. In poem or speech we hear both the poet-rhetorician's voice and the voice that possesses the poet-rhetorician; both ventriloquism and impersonal metrical form (dithyrambs, dactylic hexameter). Derrida overlooks the excesses and exteriorities of voice: not just its self-forgetting in song but its remembering of something outside of self in verse. Before writing, and long before auditory recording, patterned vocal sound already belonged to a logic of prosthesis.

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When in 1932 Milman Parry and Albert Lord documented the peripatetic oral bards of southern Yugoslavia, it brought excitement that a modern Homer had been discovered. Parry went so far as to exclaim: 'When one hears the Southern Slavs sing their tales he has the overwhelming feeling that, in some way, he is hearing Homer.'⁴⁴ For just as Parry had intuited about Homeric composition, the Serbian bards improvised as they composed, from a preexisting store of formulae, which were deployed and redeployed in the act of performance. They were not 'poets' in the modern sense, nor rhapsodes, who memorise and perform another's poem. Rather, Parry and Lord called them 'singers', though contemporary terminology normally settles for 'minstrels' or 'bards.'

The 'formula' was Parry's great innovation as both classicist and ethnographer of oral poetries: 'a group of words which is regularly used under the same metrical conditions to express a given idea' – 'rosy-fingered dawn', 'the wine-dark sea', 'swift-footed Achilles' being some of the best known Homeric examples.⁴⁵ These are not the same as a 'phrase repeated for the sake of its poetic thought or wording';⁴⁶ indeed, Parry argued, the formula serves less an aesthetic than a *mnemonic* function, organising the oral poet's thinking around metre and syntax to aid him (it appears to have been almost exclusively a 'he') as he composes in performance: 'The Singers found and kept those expression which without change, or with slight change, fall into that part of the hexameter which is determined by the role they play in the sentence.'⁴⁷

For Verne, Shaw, and their contemporaries, voice is indelibly linked with memory: the memory of the hearer. But for the bards of antiquity,

voice itself was a mnemonic tool, aided by the formula and metre. The prosthetic for vocal memory is not the phonograph but the formula. As Eric Havelock put it, 'epic's patron muse is indeed *Mnemosune*.⁴⁸ When Plato deployed the motif of possession against the poets, it was precisely so as to establish dialectic as the place of 'true' memory, in which knowledge is present to itself, whereas, Havelock argues, in *Mnemosune* 'is symbolised not just the memory considered as a mental phenomenon but rather the total act of reminding, recalling, memorialising, and memorising, which is achieved in epic verse.' This 'total act' is far removed from 'verbatim' performance, and the very idea of verbatim is itself, Walter Ong has suggested since, a creation of literate cultures: a feature of 'secondary orality' (orality in a literate culture), grounded in the certainties of Platonic epistemology.⁴⁹

Yet Havelock also noted one way in which the analogy between the Serbian bard and Homer was not merely hyperbolic but misleading. Yes, the composition of long verse narratives by Serbian bards proceeded along the lines Parry had identified in Homeric epic; however, the mnemotechnics of the formula was not simply a compositional practice for poetry, but a site of social memory, and even social reproduction. As Havelock puts it, this comparison 'lumps together two poetic situations which are entirely different, that of the Balkan peasantry and the Homeric governing class.'⁵⁰ Bards held linguistic hegemony in the oral culture of Archaic Greece; in 1930s Yugoslavia, however, 'the central business of government and of social leadership ... [had] for centuries been transacted in letters.'⁵¹ The poetry of their later Serbian counterparts took places at the margins of society; formulaic memorisation was no longer an affair of the state.

That voice might have an inherent power is hardly alien to us today: perhaps the classic example of the twentieth century is the Wizard of Oz – a little man hidden behind a screen employing a loudspeaker. But the bard's power was linked to *mneme* rather than vocal sound. Marcel Detienne notes that the bard, both by memorising and by making memorable, was able to determine what is saved from oblivion, from *Lethe*; their linguistic power gives them privileged access to *a-letheia*: truth. What is true is what does not disappear; the bards' memorialising, both through their memorisation of the tradition and through the ritual performance of memory, makes them 'master of truth.' But Detienne too notes that this is not simply a result of mnemonic capacity but depends on their being a 'functionary of sovereignty, or he who praises warrior nobility.'⁵² On the one hand, the warrior caste retains its power thanks to the poets that praise it;

on the other, the poets' social role can continue only because it serves the interests of the warrior caste.

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In a certain sense, then, writing – and with it, 'literature' as a category of 'writing' – killed the poets. But it also created 'the poet' – and even 'the poet's voice.' Until Parry, the 'Homeric question' had absorbed much Hellenic scholarship. Was Homer a single bard, or a composite? Friedrich August Wolf had argued that, given the impossibility of composing works of such length orally and the discrepancy between the time that Homer was reputed to have lived (ninth century BCE) and the transcription of the poems (c. 650 BCE), they must have been stitched together of loose songs and rhapsodies only later brought into a single epic.⁵³ But how then to explain the coherence of the narrative and compositional style? Parry's solution was that both epics were the production of an oral tradition, with the practice of composition-through-improvisation allowing the work to be passed down and elaborated over generations. The transcribed text contains centuries of linguistic development, notably blending Ionic and Aeolic Greek, implying that earlier formulae endured where the more recent dialect did not offer a substitute that fitted the metrical and syntactic requirements of composition: 'by no wilful choice, but by the constraint of his technique of verse-making, the singer keeps the formula though its language has become archaic.'⁵⁴ The poems were the creation of a tradition, and 'Homer', whether a historical individual or not, was himself the retroactive creation of this tradition.

Could we then speak of Homer's 'voice'? Surely, the bard's voice is more concrete than that of the poet who composes in writing. And yet, equally surely, only a single poet can have an identifiable voice, whether as physiological sound or as a metonym for authorship. The most recent edition of the *Princeton Encyclopædia of Poetry and Poetics* starts its entry on voice with this warning: 'To define *voice* in written poetry immediately poses a problem, for there is no literal voice in the poem: voice is an oral metaphor employed in the description and analysis of the written word.'⁵⁵ But voice in the case of oral poetry seems to be no less a metaphor (or metonym). For here voice would indicate collective authorship, something far removed from our imaginary of voice as marker of individuality. Mikhail Bakhtin's account of the 'monologism' of poetic voice is representative of our contemporary imaginary: poetry's monologism issues not just from the dominance of a single speaker (the 'lyric "I"') but also from its rhythmic organisation, which 'destroys in embryo

those social worlds of speech and of persons that are potentially embedded in the word: in any case, rhythm puts definite limits on them, does not let them unfold or materialize.³⁶ This is a far cry from the bard's voice, which is collective not simply in that composition is collective but also insofar as it is guided in its compositional dynamics by collectively shared formulae, metre, and tropes. As Parry puts it, 'the style which [the bard] uses is not his at all: it is the creation of a long line of poets or even of an entire people.'³⁷ Modern rhythm is monologic, according to Bakhtin; but for these reasons, archaic rhythm would have been dialogism itself.

If lyric is today the dominant genre of poetry, and voice its ideological sign,³⁸ then it is worth noting that, in the European tradition at least, lyrics seem to have been composed in writing from their inception: the technology of script allows for a release of vocal sounds beyond the functions of mnemonics, allowing also for divergences from a norm, syncopations, and disparities between the abstract pattern and the individual poet (hence voice as metonym for individual expression, or signature style). Parry's comparison between Homer and Pindar is illuminating in this regard: 'Pindar is moving alone in his own thought, choosing in a way that is his alone from the grand words of poetry ... Tradition gave him his artifices, but it did not give him his phrases. These he must choose.'³⁹ Pindaric odes are renowned for their metrical irregularity, which would interrupt both formula and memorisation. The written form leads to a more multifaceted metrical performance, and to the singular articulation of poetic identity, where individual 'choice' leads to a distinctive poetic voice. The distinction here is not between oral and written composition, however. Being blind, Milton himself composed orally, declaiming his verses to his daughters who acted as scribes. But this practice still depends on writing as an available technology for storing the words, so Milton can compose a few lines a night, instead of improvising on the spot. From this blend of oral and written issues the notorious prosodic complexity of *Paradise Lost*. But already in the Pindaric form are set in motion many of the vocal motifs that, two and a half millennia later, would galvanise the development of free verse.

But writing also signals the emergence of an additional voice, this one wholly *literary*: the reader's. As Eric Griffiths has argued, 'the intonational ambiguity of a written text may create a mute polyphony through which we see rather than hear alternative possible voicings, and are led by such vision to reflect on the inter-resonance of those voicings.'⁴⁰ Reading always entails a plurality of voicings. And as these possible voicings continually

imply future soundings, the polyphony of reading, whilst 'mute', is continually registered in the lungs, glottis, and tongue.

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With writing, voice starts to become extravagant, both as it signals the singularity of the author's voice, and in the literary work's hedonistic exploration of its vocal range. Such extravagance belongs both to voice as material and to voice as imaginary. One might say, then, that it is *writing* that first conditions the imaginary of voice as excess; in subsequent material inscriptions of voice (wax cylinders, magnetic tape, mp3s), this has been repeated and intensified. Writing might, as Derrida contends, kill the self-present logos; but it unlocks energies and excesses in voice that such a logos would suppress. Literature, passing through its many aesthetic and technological transformations, continues to track these energies, these excesses, and over millennia has used them to unfold a multifaceted, fragmented imaginary of voice.

Notes

- ¹ William Blake, 'The Chimney Sweeper', in *The Poems of Blake*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971), p. 68.
- ² Guy Rosolato, 'La voix: entre corps et langage', in *La relation à l'inconnu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 37.
- ³ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 127.
- ⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Languages, In Which Melody and Musical Imitation Are Treated', *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* vol. 7, trans. and ed. by John T. Scott (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), pp. 289–332 (p. 296).
- ⁵ See Michael Sprinker, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins on the Origin of Language,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41.1 (1980), 113–28 (p. 113). The Philological Society in London followed suit in 1873.
- ⁶ Ernest Renan, *De l'origine du langage* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1864), p. 11.
- ⁷ Michel de Certeau, 'Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias', trans. by Luce Giard. *Representations* 56 (1996), 29–47 (pp. 39, 33).
- ⁸ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 27.
- ⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 214.
- ¹⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 45. (Stephanus 259b).

- ¹¹ Cited in Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 73. In an Appendix Leach provides a detailed comparison of Pliny's and Aegidius' accounts (p. 301).
- ¹² Perceval Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1930), p. 233.
- ¹³ Sidney Lanier, *The Science of English Verse* (New York: Scribener, 1880), p. 49.
- ¹⁴ See Julia Kursell, 'Experiments on Tone Color in Music and Acoustics: Helmholtz, Schoenberg, and *Klangfarbenmelodie*', *Osiris* 28.1 (2013), 191–211 (esp. pp. 199, 204–5).
- ¹⁵ Ezra Pound and F. S. Flint, 'Imagisme', in T. S. Eliot (ed.), *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by H. Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1992 reprinting), p. 367.
- ¹⁷ Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) p. 181.
- ¹⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alistair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 388–9 (VII.2–3).
- ¹⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 469 (IX.24–5).
- ²⁰ Guillaume de Saluste du Bartas, 'Uranie, ou Muse Celeste', in *Commentaires et Annotations sur la Sepmaine de la création du monde* (Paris: Abel Langelier, 1583), pp. 324–30 (p. 325). 'Je quinte-essence l'âme et fais que le Poete / Surmontant soi-même, enfonce un haut discours/ Qui, divin, par l'oreille attire les plus sours/ Anime les rochers, et les fleuves arrête.'
- ²¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 389–90 (VII.6–12).
- ²² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 60 (I.24, I.26).
- ²³ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 390–1 (VII.23–4, VII.30).
- ²⁴ Joseph Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. xiv. Fontenrose's caricature is part of a lament that this cliché should persist, despite all the archaeological evidence that the oracle never existed in this form.
- ²⁵ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 82. Ironically, for Milton the invocation of the Muse for inspiration allows him out of his isolation, and into a community of epic poets.
- ²⁶ Fontenrose attributes this to Herodotos' story of Croesus, from the mid-fifth century BCE (*The Delphic Oracle*, pp. 111–13). As Steven Connor has observed, 'perhaps the real story is the depth of our own infatuation with the Delphic oracle, and by the fact that the myths surrounding the Delphic oracle should have lingered long enough even to continue to need refutation.' Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 49.
- ²⁷ E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'The Sandman', in *Selected Writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann vol. 1*, ed. and trans. by Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 137–67 (p. 158).
- ²⁸ Jules Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania* (Le Château des Carpathes), trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Melville House, 2010), p. 137.

- ²⁹ Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, p. 209.
- ³⁰ Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, pp. 220–1.
- ³¹ Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, pp. 194–5.
- ³² Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, p. 59.
- ³³ Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, p. 89.
- ³⁴ Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, p. 209.
- ³⁵ Verne, *The Castle in Transylvania*, p. 210.
- ³⁶ The transcript can be accessed online at publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-voice-of-florence-nightingale/. Last accessed 6 August 2017.
- ³⁷ Thomas Edison quoted in Douglas Kahn, 'Death in Light of the Phonograph: Raymond Roussel's Locus Solus', in Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 69–103 (p. 78).
- ³⁸ See Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 82.
- ³⁹ This is an ironic shift, insofar as Aristotle had argued that what distinguished voice from mere sound was indeed the presence of soul in the (not yet verbal) utterance Aristotle, *De anima*, trans. by J. A. Smith, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 2001), pp. 353–603 (II.8, 421a).
- ⁴⁰ George Bernard Shaw, 'Pygmalion' in *Androcles and the Lion, Overruled, Pygmalion* (London: Constable, 1916), p. 185.
- ⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 105.
- ⁴² Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 108–9.
- ⁴³ Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁴ Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, ed. by Adam Parry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 378.
- ⁴⁵ Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 272.
- ⁴⁶ Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 274.
- ⁴⁷ Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 307.
- ⁴⁸ Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 91.
- ⁴⁹ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologization of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 56ff. There is dispute on this question, however. Ruth Finnegan indicated forms of oral poetry which do appear to be subject to verbatim performance, notably Somali poetry. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 72–5. Of the Somali poets, F. Fiona Moolla puts it succinctly in her 'When Orature Becomes Literature: Somali Oral Poetry and Folktales in Somali Novels' (*Comparative Literature Studies* 49.3 (2012), 434–62): 'in the context of Somali poetry, it is not formulae that are memorized. Poems are memorized verbatim' (p. 442). The Somali poems are lyrics, but often running to hundreds of lines, and with exceptionally complex rhythmic and alliterative structures.

- ⁵⁰ Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, p. 93.
- ⁵¹ Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, p. 94.
- ⁵² Marcel Detienne, *Les Maîtres de vérité dans la grèce archaïque* (Paris: François Maspero, 1967), p. 27.
- ⁵³ Adam Parry, 'Introduction', in Parry, p. xv.
- ⁵⁴ Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 332. See also p. 315.
- ⁵⁵ Roland Greene et al. (eds.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 1525.
- ⁵⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422 (p. 298).
- ⁵⁷ Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 270. Again, the Somali context complicates this account. As Moolla says, 'Somali oral verse foregrounds composition by a creative, critical, verbally gifted artist more visibly than other African and global oral poetic traditions and perhaps in a way that compels one to readdress the assumptions held about these traditions' (p. 446).
- ⁵⁸ cf. Paul de Man, 'Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory', in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond the New Criticism*, ed. by Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 55–72; Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- ⁵⁹ Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 284.
- ⁶⁰ Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 60.

CHAPTER 3

Sonic Forms

Ezra Pound's Anti-metronome Modernism in Context

Jason David Hall

The sonic form that modernist poetry most vociferously opposed was characterized memorably by Ezra Pound in 1912 as 'the sequence of a metronome.'¹ With its symmetrical ticking or beating, the metronome became for Pound and some of his contemporaries an apt figure for the outmoded Victorian metrical tradition with its succession of regular beats. Pound himself would posit 'the musical phrase' as its antithesis,² and the energies of *vers libre* appeared to rival a metronomic poetics that eschewed sonic variety. As the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé would write in 1897, 'the ear, set free from an artificial counter, discovers delight in discerning on its own all the possible combinations.'³ Pound's own assertion of an 'absolute rhythm', which 'corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed',⁴ provided an alternative to the metrics of the metronome in that it did not demand that poets 'chop [their] stuff into separate iambs.'⁵ That the metronome should come to signify the sonic form that modernist poets desired to overhaul is not surprising; in fact, Pound's recourse to this trope has a history to which it is worth attending. What I suggest here is that we might well read Pound's attempt to diminish a metrical tradition by reducing it to a simple ticking device as a self-conscious gesture to a history of verse voicings linked with both monotonous, metronomic practices that inculcated sing-song verse-speak and the metronome device itself, which often functioned as a material reinforcer of this regime. The figure of the metronome, I argue, had been structuring debates about the appropriate sonic form of poetry for roughly a century before Pound issued his pronouncement about it. From the early decades of the nineteenth century, when Johann Maelzel's musical chronometer began to offer a standard of temporal measurement for musical and vocal compositions, the metronome and practices attuned to its ticking featured regularly in elocutionary and prosodic literature. Advocated by some as a beneficial aid to the marking of time in verse, the metronome struck others as too regular a time-beater. Throughout

the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth, from the first tick of Maelzel's machine to the modernism of Pound, a dispute about the practice of reading and reciting verse, as well as composing in it, found an apt correlate in the figure of the metronome. Thus, rather than seeing Pound's statement as a point of departure, we should appreciate his anti-metronome modernism as the culmination of longstanding suspicion about sing-song and deliberately repetitive prosody.

The Metronome of Maelzel

Musically challenged persons like me will appreciate the difficulty of keeping time with a song. Whether slapping a knee with a hand or tapping the floor with a foot, it does not take long to get out of sync. Even for talented and trained musicians, keeping the tempo can be greatly aided by a mechanical time-beater that can enable a reliable count of beats per minute. That is exactly what the metronome does. And even accomplished and innovative musicians have appreciated its time-keeping beat. Though his music is characterized by its dynamism and emotional intensity, the great German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) is nevertheless known to have appreciated the regular cadences of the metronome, scoring much of his work to its evenly spaced beats. In an 1819 letter, Beethoven informs his composer friend Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838), 'You shall receive by the next post the *Tempi* of the Sonata marked in accordance with Maelzel's metronome.'⁶ In fact, Beethoven was among the early advocates of 'Maelzel's metronome', the name of the first standard model produced by Johann Nepomuk Maelzel (1772–1838) in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Though another similar device – the clockwork time-keeper of Dietrich Nikolaus Winkel (1777–1826) – is known to have predated Maelzel's device, a 'confluence of important factors led to the widespread adoption of Maelzel's machine' – notably its inventor's 'keen business sense and skill for self-promotion.'⁷ As an inventor and sometime showman with an interest in automata, Maelzel was well placed to unite music with mechanics, and his metronomes, manufactured in Paris from 1816, quickly established themselves as indispensable instruments to both composition and performance. But Maelzel's affiliation with musical automata and androids – such as Wolfgang von Kempelen's notorious chess-playing Turk⁸ – is indicative of one potential drawback of the metronome: its tendency to produce robotically regular rhythms.

With its 'conveniently small size' and system of 'numeric mediation', Maelzel's metronome offered a reliable means of keeping time.⁹

'The metronomic scale', as one contemporary commentator wrote, 'is *founded on the division of time into minutes*.' As such, 'its divisions are thereby rendered intelligible and applicable in every country: an *universal standard measure for musical time* is thus obtained, and its correctness may be proved at all times by comparison with a stop-watch.'¹⁰ The function of the device is described in the following 1840 extract from the *Musical Magazine*:

This machine consists chiefly of a pendulum, the length of which admits of being changed. Of course the lower the weight hangs or the longer the pendulum is, the slower will be its vibrations. Mr. Maelzel has therefore graduated the pendulum-rod, and placed against each mark of division the corresponding number of beats, which the pendulum will make in a minute. Thus a means is furnished of measuring the time of a piece [of music].¹¹

The pendulum, ticking from side to side, establishes a rhythm that can be made faster or slower, its regularity an abstract guide to which the musician or singer can entrain (or slightly offset) his or her instrument. But slavish entrainment, following the abstract ticking of the metronome too closely, could produce a mechanical measure, turning musicians into automata and subordinating artistic 'freedom' and 'feeling' to the metronome's monotonous beat. 'There are many persons', as Richard Storrs Willis wrote in the *Musical World and New York Musical Times* in 1853, 'who mistakenly think, that the intention of the metronome is, to have its unvarying beat followed throughout an entire piece, denying all freedom to the play of feeling.'¹² During the nineteenth century, as the metronome became more widely used, this problem of unvaried regularity of beats would persist. Moreover, it would find its way into discussions of poetic versification, where the related subjects of time-keeping and measuring were being avidly debated.

Keeping Time in Verse

In *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry* (1852), the journalist and sometime literary theorist Eneas Sweetland Dallas describes how marking poetic meter might inspire movement in the body: 'if [the reader's] thoughts are very lively engaged, he will beat time with his fingers or with his feet.'¹³ For Dallas, meter in verse is essentially 'time heard', so tapping out the time of the measure was a natural, somatic response to rhythmic recitation. Towards the end of the same decade, the poet-prosodist Coventry Patmore would extend Dallas's meditations on time-keeping with regular beats, establishing links

between poetic meter and music and enshrining in metrical 'law' a temporal metrics based on the beating of the *ictus*, or metrical stress. Partly a response to early nineteenth-century accentual theories, such as the one advanced by Edwin Guest in his 1838 *A History of English Rhythms*, and partly an elaboration of temporal, quasi-musical theories, such as those of Joshua Steele and Dallas,¹⁴ Patmore's 'Essay on English Metrical Law', first published in 1857 and reissued several times throughout the author's life, asserts that meter is properly a measurement of 'the time occupied in the delivery of a series of words.' For Patmore duration, instead of accent, is the proper 'integer' of the English verse line. Lines of poetry are divided into units of equal time, or 'isochronous intervals.'¹⁵ 'By giving the perception of measured cadence', time enables the metrist to distinguish one metrical interval from another and to judge whether intervals are in fact isochronous, by establishing the measure between beats of the *ictus*.¹⁶

Where Dallas found a material correlative of meter's beating in the movements of the reader's body, Patmore theorised meter as an abstraction. For him the *ictus* was not a real but an 'imaginary' beating, a mental ticking against which one might measure the actual sonic delivery of a verse line. Several commentators from the period, however, shared Dallas's more embodied aesthetic, not only recommending an audible beating but actively promoting the metronome as an appropriate metrical time-keeper. The elocutionist J. C. Zachos, for example, endorsed a deliberate practice of reading poetry in time to a metronome's ticks as an aid to 'distinct, fluent, and harmonious syllabic reading', 'each syllable being accompanied by a distinct beat of the metronome.'¹⁷ Dissociating himself from 'the ordinary mechanical prosody' associated with the classical tradition and its division of lines into feet, Zachos adumbrates a metrics more in keeping with Patmore's theory of isochrony, preferring a reading that appreciates how verse is divided into '*precisely equal intervals of time*' that a metronome can help a speaker to observe. But from an elocutionary perspective, Zachos was interested not so much in metrical theory as in cultivating the speech of readers more generally, and verse-speaking was regarded by him and many of his contemporaries as a good means of training the voice. Reading and reciting verse in time to a metronome's beats was part of a larger understanding of 'sounds in regard to their duration', as Andrew Comstock outlined in his 1862 *A System of Elocution with Special Reference to Gesture, to the Treatment of Stammering, and Defective Articulation*. Especially for those with difficulties speaking clearly and rhythmically, such as stammerers, metronomically aided verse-speech could form part of an ameliorative technology.¹⁸

Across the nineteenth century, opinion was divided about the advantages and disadvantages of scanning aloud and the related practice of reciting verse in time to a metronome. Several elocutionists and medical practitioners suggested the artificial imposition of meter and its external time-beaters as a means of training the voice and instilling a good sense of rhythmical timing. As one commentator remarked, 'Let the stammerer take a sentence, say this one, "Leander swam the Hellespont", and pronounce it by syllables, scan it, keeping time with his finger, if necessary letting each syllable occupy the same time, thus Le—an—der—swam—the—Hel—les—pont, and he will not stammer.'¹⁹ Physicians such as James Yearsley also recommended an 'application of rhythm to the voice.' Scanning in speech, as well as in breathing, might help to reduce 'the violent spasmodic action of the larynx.' Further, reminiscent of Dallas's knee-tapping metrics, Yearsley advocated beating time with the body to accentuate the rhythmical modulation of the voice, noting that metrical delivery 'may be still more facilitated by marking time with the foot, the hand, or the head.'²⁰ But not everyone agreed with this approach. Though he appreciated the body's responsiveness to metrical time-keeping, Dallas himself worried that 'recourse to modulated expressions' in actual speaking, whether the speech is accompanied by bodily movement or not, often rendered a speaker's utterances too 'mechanical'; in fact, a 'poor speaker' who gets carried away with modulation lets 'his voice [lift] into an unchanging sing-song, ding-dong.'²¹ The problem here is when an inclination to modulated speech asserts itself 'unconsciously', not only exaggerating the metrical features in the recitation of a poem but also in a delivery not intended to be in verse in the first place. One might 'unwittingly' slip into sing-song speech, reading prose as if it were 'blank verse.'²²

Sing-Song Prosody

The regular beating of the metronome is but one instantiation of a more pervasive culture of mechanistic, sing-song prosody. Its audible tick-tocks externalized not only the abstract and 'imaginary' beating of the *ictus*, as theorised by Patmore in the 1850s, but also other forms of monotonous metrical mouthing associated with orthodox 'scholastic prosody' and a popular Victorian mode of poetic delivery. But its history goes back further than that. Long before the application of oral prosody exercises in nineteenth-century classrooms, as discussed below, varieties of scanning aloud structured pupils' encounters with verse. As Andrew S. Becker

observed in a 2004 article, the practice of vocalising meter with an accompanying beat formed a part of ancient prosodic tuition:

As young Roman (or provincial) students began to make sense of the rhythm of a Virgilian line, the teacher would tell them to scan the verse (*scandentes*) by beating out the *ictus* (*percutientes*). Our sources describe scanning as giving acoustic emphasis to the beat by snapping the fingers (*crepitus digitorum*), or tapping the thumb (*ictus pollicis*), or striking the rhythm in some audible way (*ferire*). All of these words describe ways to teach students to measure and divide the line into feet, marking a verse-beat ... The teacher is asking the student to scan the line not visually, but aloud, in an oral/aural classroom.²³

As Derek Attridge has shown, such practices of teaching meter, often involving an artificial and deliberate division of lines into their metrical units when speaking and writing verse, would figure centrally in English schools' teaching of the classical poets and their meters. One particular feature of Renaissance classical pedagogy was 'a "stressed-ictus" reading', where readers 'ignore[d] the normal placing of the word-stresses' in favour of stresses placed on 'the first syllable of each [metrical] foot.' This method and related 'attempt[s] to emphasise the quantities' of verse were complexly associated with modes of teaching pronunciation that, while not exactly insisting on pronouncing verse so as to call out its metrical values, similarly demanded a division of lines into discrete syllabic units. Attridge quotes an early seventeenth-century grammar that advises young persons on 'breaking or dividing every worde duely into his severall syllables.' Exercises in classical scansion, which involved an exaggeration of such a practice of dividing lines into 'syllable-quantities', were thus throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries encouraging pupils to conceive of meter as a matter of marking and dividing, the general drift of which was away from the normal rhythms of spoken English.²⁴ Yet as Attridge points out, these syllabic exercises, though often mechanistic, were not typically characterized by the 'regularities of stress' that later came to structure metrical education. Especially from the early nineteenth century, the processes of learning pronunciation and scansion became more mutually reinforcing. Whereas an Elizabethan schoolboy might have learned to pronounce syllabically, voicing his words in a metronomic sing-song pattern, and while his metrical exercises, involving a similar dividing of syllables, would often call attention to metrical patterns for their own sake, the two modes typically belonged to different phases of instruction. Later, however, they would coincide, and the unification of the two modes – pronouncing syllabically and voicing verse with explicit attention to its meter – would only heighten

the mechanistic and metronomic qualities that these two related yet erstwhile separate tasks encouraged on their own.

From the early decades of the nineteenth century – precisely when the Maelzel's device was beginning to structure sound to a precisely timed, regular beating – a more coercively metronomic imperative was structuring debates about meter and associated pedagogies and practices. Much of the educational energy of the late eighteenth century had prioritized syllabic forms of reading and pronunciation. And by the 1810s, especially as evidenced by the so-called Monitorial methods of Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster, sing-song modes of speaking were gaining an almost universal currency. Imagined as a technology for educating working-class children in great numbers, Monitorial teaching disseminated syllabic pronunciation on a scale designed to replicate Britain's burgeoning factory system. Both Bell and Lancaster, in their distinct yet theoretically similar systems of mass-education, advocated the division of words into syllables. As its methods spread, the Monitorial methods looked for a time like a pedagogical panacea, and even elite institutions began to take up its principles. Here, among the successors to the classical schoolboys examined by Attridge, sing-song speech and the instruction of meter combined in such a way as to exacerbate the metronomic elements of scholastic scansion. As a new run of classical grammars, primers, and prosody texts – such as the one compiled by John Russell, headmaster of London's Charterhouse School (1811–32) – began to associate speech and verse aspects such as quantity, a redoubled monotony characterized classroom recitations and scansion exercises. Reading and scanning exercises conspired to produce a perfect storm of sing-song sound: a child trained in such system, who 'is—ne-ver—al-low-ed—to—pro-nounce—two—syl-la-bles—to-geth-er', developed a habit of 'monotone' reading, assigning 'a sameness of sound [to] successive syllables.'²⁵

At the same time, certain elocutionary fashions further accentuated this metronomic 'sameness of sound.' If learning to pronounce and scan poems, particularly in the classical tradition, was structured by practices that emphasized monotony, then so too was advice on the delivery of English verse based on styles that promoted a measured sameness of sound. One text from the 1860s advised pupils to read section CVI ('Ring out, wild bells') of Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* thus:

Delivery. The tone should be a pure orotund, animated and expressive, with imitative modulation, mostly in the middle pitch. The falling inflection should be used at nearly all grammatical pauses, and at the end of every line. In the last, there should be a reverential pause after *in*.²⁶

Here the author recommends a particular monotone mode of delivery ('pure orotund') accompanied by even modulation ('in the middle pitch'). The orotund, a well-established mode of speech, concentrated on a full, evenness of vowel sounds and, like the monotone mode of delivery generally, it smooths sounds into a well-spaced metronomic, drawling sing-song: 'a long, and even protracted, vowel sound, with a peculiarly full "median stress", which absorbs the attention, and occupies the ear, to the exclusion of [...] differential sounds.'²⁷ Tennyson himself was known to have declaimed his verse with attention to these effects, 'mouthing out his hollow oes and aes'²⁸ and, according to those who recall his parlour readings, 'hang[ing] sleepily over the syllables, in a rough monotonous murmur.'²⁹ Tennyson's own monotonous mouthing was undoubtedly at once responsive to contemporary elocutionary fashions and fashion-informing. It was also, as I have discussed elsewhere, part and parcel of the Victorian metrical apparatus, associated with a wider culture of syllabic reading, scansion practices, and techniques that promoted a mechanical, metronome-like segmentation of speech and recitation. In the educational practices of the century, as in the speaking of the poets, one hears a distinctive measuring of meter. That the century's most iconic poet should find himself associated, by Pound, with this culture of verse-speech is not at all surprising. Yet before modernism's most iconoclastic poet would set himself and his prosody against this synecdochical 'Tennysonianness of speech', a backlash was already beginning to articulate the problems of an overly metronomical system.

Segmentation vs. Flow

Pound's aversion to Tennysonian speech goes hand in hand with his distaste for a prosody that encouraged poets to 'chop [their] stuff into separate iambs.' Both aspects of metronomical metrics are framed by an evolving debate about practices of speech segmentation and an alternative of rhythmic 'flow', which promoted a blending of sounds into a continuous articulative act. While we have seen how various elocutionary and pedagogical methods advocated a deliberate verse-speech that emphasised syllables and feet by insisting that readers either read in time to the metronome's ticks or keep an approximate beat with their bodies or in their minds as they read, not all nineteenth-century proponents of verse theory or related matters, such as vocal physiology, demanded such overdetermined time-marking and the speech segmentation associated with it. For example, Gilbert Austin, in his 1806 book *Chironomia*:

Or, a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery, disapproved of readers deliberately dividing or ‘precipitat[ing words] syllable over syllable.’³⁰ In keeping with Austin’s advice, Daniel Adams’s *Monitorial Reader* of 1841 distinguishes between ‘grammatical’ reading, on the one hand, and ‘rhetorical’ reading, on the other. The former, very much akin to the Lancaster-Bell syllabic approach, ‘requires nothing but proper words, in grammatical order, to express it’, while the latter ‘supposes *feeling*’ and admonishes readers to introduce ‘modifications and inflections of the voice.’ A child trained in a metronomic system of disarticulated syllables punctuated by pauses ‘is—ne-ver—al-low-ed—to—pro-nounce—two—syl-la-bles—to-geth-er’ and is likely to slip into a habit of ‘monotone’ reading, assigning an exaggerated Tennysonian ‘sameness of sound [to] successive syllables.’³¹ Thus, when David Stow set out his so-called training system of education in an 1836 book of that title, he promoted ‘distinct articulation’ and ‘sensibl[e]’ pausing while avoiding the ‘monotonous tone’ associated with segmented syllabification. As a guard against ‘drawling or *singing*’ – where the monotonous singling out of syllables establishes an inflexible, ‘sing-song’ rhythm – Stow advises pupils to ‘open [their] mouth[s] well, and move [their] lips freely.’ While ‘[e]very syllable ought to be fully articulated’, the ‘formality’ of such recitation ‘will quickly soften down into a clear enunciation’ if the trainer correctly teaches pupils to attend to the ‘motion and expansion of the mouth and lips.’³²

The worry of many educators and verse theorists was not simply that segmented pronunciation, often practised in schools, would mangle the verse line but that it would make the speaker sound like a machine – a kind of vocal counterpart to the metronome’s mechanical ticking. Verse exercises that encouraged schoolboys to ‘chop up’ their measures were particularly harmful because boys were being made into curious automations. In 1846 the Latinist Francis Newman complained about the practice of ‘read[ing] by scansion’ and ‘the debasing process of *learning artificial rules for right pronunciation, without the least intention of ever pronouncing aright*.’³³ In the 1860s, Alexander Melville Bell, elocutionist and inventor of ‘visible speech’, explicitly cast the scanning schoolboy as a machine:

Like the pins in the barrel of an organ, his accents come precisely in the same place at every revolution of a sentence, striking their emphasis, at one turn, upon a pronoun or conjunction, and, at another, impinging sonorously on an article or an expletive... The little green twigs in the Grammar School are sedulously bent into the organ-barrel shape, and pegged to play their destined tune by the systematic teaching of the school;

and when the tiny twig-barrel has swelled into a full-grown cylinder, and rolls forth its cadences in far-sounding pitch, the old pegs are still there, striking the old chords in the old way.

By training pupils in the 'monstrous' practice of scanning, where lines are spoken so as to call out their metrical divisions, schools, Bell averred, are erecting 'barriers of nonsense in the way of sense', turning boys into unthinking, gibberish-producing devices.³⁴

Reading in the segmented way promoted in many nineteenth-century classrooms not only resulted in nonsensical sounding utterances but also subordinated the flow of ordinary speech rhythms to the regular beating of the metronome of metre. Critiques of this practice often link mechanistic mouthing with forms of disarticulation. Because there was considerable interest, around the same time, in the development of speaking machines – devices that attempted to synthesize human speech – and because such devices had a notable difficulty in reproducing unsegmented, flowing speech, there was a feeling that exercises designed to 'cut up' speech by evening the spaces between the beats of the ictus or by exaggerating accents were giving speakers an uncanny automaton-like speech pattern. One obstacle frequently encountered in relation to machine-generated speech was the difficulty of producing sounds that went convincingly beyond the mechanistic, monochromatic vowel drone or 'bleating' of the glottis. Machine 'speech' generally, especially as embodied by the synthetic voice technologies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had a tendency to exaggerate the drone, creating vibrations that approximated spoken vowel sounds but that failed to simulate joined-up or *articulate* speech and, by extension, the prosodic modulation of phonemes and syllables. For example, Wolfgang von Kempelen's 1791 talking machine, which produced vowel sounds when the operator manipulated 'pair of organ-bellows', was unable to link the sounds of letters 'into syllabic combinations and words': 'the sounds of the letters would not flow into each other without a clatter or pause. If too slowly enunciated, they would seem like a child repeating his alphabet.'³⁵ Later improvements on the device, undertaken in the 1830s by the British telegraph inventor Charles Wheatstone, would inspire Bell to investigate the possibility of a 'musical telegraph.'³⁶ Early speech synthesizers, in keeping with the segmented beating of the telegraph, tended to break up a message into its component parts – speech did not *flow* continuously as it would via the means of later voice recording and transmission devices such as the phonograph and telephone. The 'vowel synthesizer' created by Hermann von Helmholtz in the 1850s offered a modicum of flow between 'one composite

sound to another',³⁷ using electromagnets to control the vibrations of tuning forks in order to produce vowel sounds. Yet even this device, while a sophisticated mechanizing of speech-sound harmonics, tended toward a breaking up of sounds, not emphasizing a 'uniform phonetic flow' but instead 'replacing the singular stream [of voice sound] with a pointillistic sound-world of discrete vibrational patterns.'³⁸

The broken-up soundscape of the speaking machine was precisely what a metrical education, for its many detractors, was inculcating pupils to produce. As the American poet and verse theorist Edgar Allan Poe himself was aware, just as the machine age did not always produce salutary technologies for rendering melodious speech, so it did not often train up mellifluous human verse-speakers, largely because too little attention was given to delivery intonation. Instead, many of the methods in place prioritized a sort of abstract measuring more in keeping with the metronome's even ticking. When Poe examined the state of modern versification in his essay 'The Rationale of Verse' (1848), which he published not long before figures such as Patmore and Dallas began to articulate their positions on regular beating in verse, he lamented the absence of attention to voice. Unlike Patmore, however, for whom meter was only marginally about speaking verse and more about measuring imaginary intervals, Poe proposed that versification needed to offer clear guidance not only on the principles that inform metrical measurement generally – and here he inclined towards Patmore in downplaying accent in favour of an analogy with musical temporality – but also on the practices of *enunciation* through which those principles are mediated. These two halves of the prosodic equation had become decoupled, argued Poe, to the extent that a 'learned prosodist' from the future looking back on nineteenth-century metrics might draw curious conclusions about the relationship between contemporary scansion, on the one hand, and pronunciation, on the other: 'because we lived a thousand years before his time, and made use of steam-engines . . . , we must therefore have had a very singular fashion of mouthing our vowels.' In particular, the orthodoxies of 'scholastic scansion', which were at the core of nineteenth-century liberal education, tended to mitigate against smooth articulation and a rhythmically nuanced modulation of metrical 'law', to borrow Patmore's term, and expressive verse-reading. The application of metre to speech, particularly in nineteenth-century education scenarios, resulted in a form of exaggerated syllabification that did not merely counterpoint but frequently countermanded what Poe called 'the rhythmical, musical, or reading flow' of verse.³⁹ The regular, metronomic beating of the metrical modulus, in other words, might overwhelm expressive flow of speech.

This debate – between the metronome of metre and the rhetorical ‘flow’ of speech – went back and forth across the nineteenth century. If the rhythms of the body provided an organic time signature that, as the anonymous author of 1839 proposed, ‘run[s] on in a continuous flow’, they were counterpointed with the abstract, regular time-beating of metre – a machine-like segmenting of ‘flow’ that found expression at once in Patmore’s theories of isochrony and the ‘scholastic prosody’ exercises that structured so many poets’ (and future readers’) experiences of verse movement. While for some the flow of rhythm *should* ‘control’ metre, it was often the case that metrical theorists (such as Patmore) posited metre as the controller of rhythm, interrupting the flow, breaking it up into ‘fixed and unbending’ segments. By letting the abstract ticking of meter dominate organic rhythms, there was a risk of divorcing poetry from somatic experience and from its origins in music – a critique that Pound was by no means the first to advance. That the ‘arbitrary’ and ‘artificial system of metrical feet and monotonous quantities’ was allowed to constrain the ‘plastic principle of rhythm’ was an unfortunate consequence of contemporary metrical culture, which was dominated ‘by the pedantry of the Prosodians’ whose methods, as we have seen, favoured segmented, telegraphic, unflowing prosody.⁴⁰

Rules and the ‘Flow of Rhythms’

As Meredith Martin has demonstrated in *The Rise and Fall of Meter* (2012), the dialogue about metrics, speech, education and many related matters straddles the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴¹ By the time Pound entered the debate in the 1910s, there was a considerable literature devoted to questions of segmentation, flow, time intervals and other verse elements associated with the logic of the metronome. If the metronome has a ‘sequence’ – for which we might read ‘order’ or ‘repeated pattern’ – then it is one of regularly occurring ticks, beats that mark the time of a line in a way similar to that of the isochronous beating of Patmore’s imaginary ictus. It might seem ironic that Pound should oppose this rigid beating to ‘the sequence of the musical phrase’ when the metronome was invented to aid time-keeping in musical compositions, supplying a beat to follow or subtly avoid. Here Pound imagines music as an ostensibly ‘freer’ rhythm, against which the successive ticking of the time-keeper sounds overly mechanistic. Perhaps this is what Pound means, in the ‘Rhythm and Rhyme’ section of ‘A Few Don’ts’, when he admonishes poets who would ‘rely’ on a poem’s music that ‘that music must be such as

will delight the expert⁴² – not the novice who slavishly brings his verse's tempo into agreement with the metronomic pulse of metre. After all, that is part of what distances Pound from Patmore, who understood the need for departures from the modulus of metre as a guard against a too monotonous measure – but who also effectively promoted a verse theory that subordinated the departures from the modulus to the governing beats of the isochronously spaced ictus. Pound's aversion to the 'chopping' of lines into iambic units, his wariness of 'each line stop[ping] dead at the end' and his similarly motivated suspicion of the hazards presented by caesurae, his preference, instead, for lines marked by 'the rise of the rhythm wave'⁴³ – all these features of his anti-metronome poetics find a resonance with preceding objections to metrical segmentation, broken-up speech, arbitrary time-keeping and domination of the flowing, wave-like character by the mechanical ticking of metronomic metre. Thus, there is a sense in which Pound, in attempting to establish a new code of sonic rhythm for modernist poetics, does not depart from but rather synthesizes aspects of the Victorian versification he was at the same time proclaiming to oppose.

At the same time, Pound is not alone among his contemporaries in returning to these debates. Nor does his rejection of metronomic cadences seem as revolutionary when read alongside other interrogations of metre's metronome. That Pound prefers to offer intimations of this larger poetics rather than a detailed and documented analysis seems in keeping with the expressionistic imagism of 'shade[s] of emotion.' However, in light of other pieces on the poetics of the metronome, from roughly the same time, one sees how elements of Pound's rhythmic ruminations were receiving a more conventional verse-theory treatment. In 1918, C. E. Andrews, a Professor of English at the Ohio State University, was turning his attention to the new poetics of free verse. Though not exactly hostile to experimental poetry, he found it often too 'casual' and rhythmically 'haphazard.'⁴⁴ Especially in its rejection of the periodic forms of metred verse, free verse, particularly from the pens of 'weaker members of the school', tries too hard to eschew the 'ideal pattern[s]' and 'equal time-divisions' on which metred verse is based.⁴⁵ Insisting that even '[p]rose has rhythm' and that it can achieve 'an emotional quality' from not altogether abandoning the patterns and time groupings of verse, while at the same time avoiding the temptation to monotony encouraged when a poet tries to fit 'words [...] into the pattern too perfectly', Andrews feels sure free-verse poets can achieve a more emotionally resonant and disciplined vehicle.⁴⁶

That same year, Andrews published *The Writing and Reading of Verse*, where he dwells on similar subjects, with an emphasis on the potential for metred verse to introduce monotonous rhythms. And, like Pound, Andrews seizes on the figure of the metronome. Among the various points covered are the relationships between poetry and music and the question of marking time. While nominally disputing metre, Andrews concedes that it designates the units into which one can divide lines of verse. In particular, he discusses lines divided into equal time units – that is time units that appear equal when a line is ‘read metrically.’ The parallel between verse and music, then, is based on their shared notion of temporal rhythm: ‘*a line is metrical* when it is divided into sensibly equal time *parts*.’⁴⁷ So far, so much like Patmore’s theory of metrical isochrony. But Andrews leans away from Patmore’s insistence on the regular beating of the ictus when he admits that both verse and music may sound too ‘stiff’ if the intervals of time are observed too strictly in a reading: ‘We may carry the parallel [between verse and music] further by reading the lines to the rhythm of a metronome, the ticks of which occur at exactly equal intervals of time. The reading will sound stiff and expressionless.’⁴⁸ Like Pound, Andrews wishes to maintain the connection between verse and music, but without the rigid sequencing of metronomic time-keeping. For both, and for many of their predecessors as we saw above, the flow of rhythm, its ability to lend expression, is what brings verse to life. ‘Expression in good reading or in good playing’, writes Andrews, ‘may necessitate frequent slight departures from an exact equality of time divisions, but the departures must not be so considerable as to destroy the feeling that rhythm is present.’⁴⁹

In Andrews’s text we find a curious meeting ground – a halfway house between the metronome tuning of Patmore’s temporal metrics and the anti-metronome modernism of Pound. We hear, in his recourse to a longstanding signifier of abstract time-keeping, the echoes of a dialectic between a more free-flowing rhythmical form and a poetics driven by a relentless even ticking. To hear Andrews as an intermediary between Pound and Patmore is to establish points of concord and dissonance between Victorian and modernist poetics that often get lost in the noise of over-rigid periodizing. But they belong to the same musical phrase, variations in the key. If Pound’s anti-metronome modernism is the start of a twentieth-century, avant-garde poetics, it is also the culmination of a preoccupation with beating, spacing and measuring that had been ticking with ever greater intensity ever since Maelzel set his device in motion at the start of the nineteenth century.

Notes

- ¹ Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 3.
- ² Pound, 'A Retrospect', p. 3.
- ³ Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crise de Vers', in *Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle*, ed. and trans. by Rosemary Lloyd (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 228.
- ⁴ Ezra Pound, 'Credo', *Poetry Review*, 1/2 (February 1912), 73.
- ⁵ Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry*, 1.6 (1913), 204.
- ⁶ Ludwig van Beethoven to Ferdinand Ries, Vienna, April [March?] 30, 1819, *Beethoven's Letters (1790–1826)*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. by Grace Jane Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 40.
- ⁷ Roger Matthew Grant, *Beating Time and Measuring Music in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 200.
- ⁸ The chess-playing Turk was a popular spectacle from late eighteenth century. Manufactured by Kempelen (1734–1804), the device appeared to be a clever automaton, when in fact it worked by secreting a human chess-player inside the apparatus.
- ⁹ Grant, *Beating Time and Measuring Music in the Early Modern Era*, p. 200.
- ¹⁰ [Anon.], 'Maelzel's Metronome', *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 3 (1821), 303.
- ¹¹ [Anon.], 'Substitute for Maelzel's Metronome', *Musical Magazine* 31 (29 February 1840), 68.
- ¹² Richard Storrs Willis, 'On Musical Tempo', *Musical World and New York Musical Times*, 6.6 (11 June 1853), 82.
- ¹³ E. S. Dallas, *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1852), pp. 171, 159.
- ¹⁴ Joshua Steele's *Prosodia Rationalis* (1779) was an influential text for many later (especially nineteenth-century) writers about metre, music and accent. A good overview of the questions involved, in relation to the works of Patmore and Guest, can be found in Donal Wesling's *The Scissors of Meter: Grammetrics and Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 11–14.
- ¹⁵ Coventry Patmore, *Coventry Patmore's 'Essay on English Metrical Law': A Critical Edition with a Commentary*, ed. by Mary Augustine Roth (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1961), p. 15.
- ¹⁶ Patmore, 'Essay on English Metrical Law', p. 15. For more on Patmore and metrical abstraction, see Yopie Prins, 'Victorian Meters', *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 89–113; Jason R. Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009); Jason David Hall, *Nineteenth-Century Verse and Technology: Machines of Meter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
- ¹⁷ J. C. Zachos, *Analytic Elocution: An Analysis of the Powers of Voice, for the Purpose of Expression in Speaking* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1868), p. 72.

- ¹⁸ There are some good accounts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century stammering in Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).
- ¹⁹ [Anon.] 'How To Cure Stammering', *Medical and Surgical Reporter* (29 July 1871), 111. The same text is reprinted in the *Maine Journal of Education*, 7, 8 (1873), 318.
- ²⁰ Yearsley, 'Stammering, Its Causes, Varieties, and Treatment', 291. There is an enduring legacy of Yearsley's 'scanning speech' in the rhythmic speech cueing recommended as part of neurologic musical therapy. Stefan Mainka and Grit Mallien outline a therapeutic method for improving speech in cases of dysarthria: 'In RSC [rhythmic speech cueing] the patient speaks to an auditory stimulation In metric cueing a pulsed auditory stimulation is used (usually produced by a metronome).' See Stefan Mainka and Grit Mallien, 'Rhythmic Speech Cueing (RSC)', *Handbook of Neurologic Music Therapy*, ed. by Michael H. Thaut and Volker Hoemberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 150.
- ²¹ Dallas, *Poetics*, pp. 158, 159, 160.
- ²² Dallas, *Poetics*, pp. 158, 160.
- ²³ Andrew S. Becker, 'Non Oculis Sed Auribus: The Ancient Schoolroom and Learning to Hear the Latin Hexameter', *Classical Journal* 99.3 (2004), 315–16.
- ²⁴ Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 13–14, 31, 34, 38.
- ²⁵ Daniel Adams, *The Monitorial Reader, Designed for the Use of Academies and Schools* (Concord: Roby, Kimball, and Merrill, 1841), no page. For a fuller treatment of segmented speech, rhythm and education, see Hall, *Nineteenth-Century Verse and Technology*, pp. 61–110.
- ²⁶ Epes Sargent, *The Standard Fifth Reader* (Boston: John L. Shorey, 1867), p. 117.
- ²⁷ William Russell, *Orthopony; Or, the Cultivation of the Voice in Elocution*, 5th ed. (Boston: William D. Ticknor and Company, 1848), p. 226.
- ²⁸ Alfred Tennyson, 'The Epic', in *Tennyson's Poetry*, ed. by Robert W. Hill (New York and London: Norton, 1999), pp. 112–14.
- ²⁹ Edmund Gosse, qtd. in Paul F. Mattheisen, 'Gosse's Candid "Snapshots"', *Victorian Studies* 8.4 (1965), 341.
- ³⁰ Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia; or, a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (London, 1806), p. 38.
- ³¹ Daniel Adams, *The Monitorial Reader, Designed for the Use of Academies and Schools* (Concord: Roby, Kimball, and Merrill, 1841), no page.
- ³² Adapting the Bell-Lancaster model of group instruction, Stow emphasizes what he terms a 'simultaneous gallery method', whereby children are arranged in tiered rows and time-saving exercises involve every child at once: 'whatever one reads, all read; and each and all may in less time read audibly ...' See David Stow, *The Training System of Education, for the Moral and Intellectual Elevation of Youth, Especially in Large Towns and Manufacturing Villages*, 7th ed. (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1846), pp. 135, 136, 134, 137, 129, 137. Lancaster's own mechanism for discouraging sing-song reading was founded

on humiliation: 'When a boy gets into a singing tone in reading, the best cure that I have hitherto found effectual, is by force of ridicule.—Decorate the offender with matches, ballads, &c. and, in this garb, send him round the school, with some boys before him, crying 'matches,' &c. exactly imitating the dismal tones with which such things are hawked about the streets in London, as will readily occur to the reader's memory.' See Lancaster, *The British System of Education: Being a Complete Epitome of the Improvements and Inventions Practised at the Royal Free Schools, Borough-Road, Southwark* (London, 1810), p. 36.

- ³³ Francis William Newman, 'On the Pronunciation of Greek', *Classical Museum: A Journal of Philology, and of Ancient History and Literature* 3 (1846), 403.
- ³⁴ Alexander Melville Bell, *The Elocutionary Manual: The Principles of Articulation and Orthoepy, the Art of Reading and Gesture; Illustrated by Tables, Notations, and Diagrams; with Exercises in Expressive Delivery, and a Copious Selection of Emphasized Extracts, Embodying the Language of the Passions*, 3rd ed. (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1860), pp. xxi–xxii; see also J. Edmund Barss, 'A Few Pedantries in Classical Teaching', *School Review* 10.4 (1902), 290–1.
- ³⁵ See the entry for 'automaton' in *The London Encyclopaedia or Universal Dictionary of Science, Art, Literature, and Practical Mechanics* (London: Thomas Egg, 1839), p. 314.
- ³⁶ For a related musical experiment, the 'metronome-telegraph' of Hector Berlioz, see Alison Winter, *Mezmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 316–17.
- ³⁷ [Anon.], 'The Voice, the Ear, and Music', *Dwight's Journal of Music* 28.22 (1869), 377.
- ³⁸ Benjamin Steege, *Helmholtz and the Modern Listener* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 184.
- ³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Rationale of Verse', in *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, 4 vols, ed. by Rufus Wilmot Griswold (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1950–6), 2:249. Poe was, of course, not the first to point out this fault of readers remaining 'mechanically' faithful to scansion in their delivery of poems. Fifty years earlier, an anonymous contributor to *The Monthly Magazine* expressed the point thus: 'The measure may be mechanically true, but the flow and cadence, the harmony, accent, and emphasis, so defective, that it will be verse only to the scanning, and neither verse nor prose to the ear.' See [Anon.], 'To the Editor of the *Monthly Magazine*', *Monthly Magazine* 3.16 (April 1797), 258.
- ⁴⁰ [Anon.], 'Greek Metres and English Scholarship', *Foreign Quarterly Review* 23.46 (1839), 252, 253, 272, 254.
- ⁴¹ Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- ⁴² Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', p. 203.
- ⁴³ Pound, 'A Few Don'ts', p. 204.

- ⁴⁴ C. E. Andrews, 'The Rhythm of Prose and of Free Verse', *Sewanee Review* 26.2 (1918), 183.
- ⁴⁵ Andrews, 'The Rhythm of Prose and of Free Verse', p. 184.
- ⁴⁶ Andrews, 'The Rhythm of Prose and of Free Verse', pp. 186, 185.
- ⁴⁷ C. E. Andrews, *The Writing and Reading of Verse* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co., 1918), p. 8.
- ⁴⁸ Andrews, *The Writing and Reading of Verse*, p. 7.
- ⁴⁹ Andrews, *The Writing and Reading of Verse*, pp. 7–8.

*Classical Music and Literature**Gemma Moss*

In literature, music often stands in for what cannot be put into words. While language creates meaning through differences, associations, and complex chains of signification, music also affects the body: it vibrates the organism, stimulating physical sensation and emotion. For many writers, classical music seemed to offer a different sort of communication: more direct than language, transmitting meanings directly to the listener, and transcending language by communicating through form. For Schopenhauer, music contained the essence of human emotion, offering not a representation of ‘joy, sorrow, pain, horror, exaltation, cheerfulness,’ but expressing these things ‘as such in themselves, abstractly.’¹ Brad Bucknell writes that modernists held a similarly ‘romantic belief in the expressive potential of music and in its capacity to go beyond the mere rationality of language.’² Music was integral to the poetics of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and important to novelists such as E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Ford Madox Ford, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce. Since the path-breaking early studies of music and literature by Alex Aaronson, Werner Wolf, and Eric Prieto, scholars have noticed that writers using music were often engaged in attempts to communicate the abstract: to slip the bonds of language or add another layer of meaning by attending to the sonic effects of words and textual form.³

Anglophone literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries works with a specific musical tradition that we broadly term ‘classical music,’ which encompasses a set of intellectual, aesthetic, historical and cultural ideas. David Deutsch notes that ‘classical music’ is a term loosely employed by most recent theorists of music and literature, who treat it as a set of interconnected ideas rather than a specific compositional style.⁴ Emma Sutton uses the term ‘as a synonym for “art music”’ while for Lawrence Kramer it is a ‘conception regardless of its nominal style or genre.’⁵ It usually refers to music thought to have great emotional, intellectual and spiritual content. Beethoven’s music is often treated as the prime example,

and Nathan Waddell explores the extent of his influence in modernist literature.⁶ Edward Carpenter encapsulates a common way of thinking about Beethoven's music: 'He freed the human spirit from innumerable petty bonds and conventions, he recorded the profoundest experiences of life.'⁷ For Carpenter, Beethoven's music communicates something intensely human; at the same time, it transcends the human condition. Similarly, for Wagner, music has the potential to be transcendent and otherworldly, and Beethoven, he wrote, gave 'to melody its ever valid type, and restored to music its immortal soul.'⁸

Nowhere is the idea of music more fully delineated by a composer than in the work of Wagner, and his music has had perhaps the greatest influence on literature.⁹ Wagner provides a focal point for discussions of classical music and literature in this chapter, especially around the role of the leitmotif and the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – his attempt to join channels of artistic communication – in modernism's negotiations with sensation, memory and consciousness. Laura Marcus argues in *The Tenth Muse* that literary modernism took on filmic devices.¹⁰ This chapter argues that it did the same with music. Newly conscious of forms, languages, systems, and somatic effects, modernist writers turned to music, particularly Wagner, as a paradigm of artistic expression. Wagner reappears in writing – especially by Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, and Ford – that eschewed traditional narrative arcs and literary realism, attempting to re-interpret and re-represent human experience with attention to form and style. Reading Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* informed by Wagner's conception of the leitmotif as an affective, temporal device, and taking into account what Tim Armstrong calls the modernist 'preoccupation with the non-linear nature of human time',¹¹ shows how Woolf's characters are constructed by a complex of affects, contexts, and memories.

Classical music has influenced literature in a number of different ways and has duly been approached through a number of methodologies in scholarship. It has shaped literary forms, styles, and its experiments with sound. Hope Mirrlees incorporated a musical score into 'Paris: A Poem', which was originally typeset by hand by Virginia Woolf for the Hogarth Press in 1919.¹² Ezra Pound, who in 1913 encouraged poets to compose 'in the sequence of the musical phrase', incorporated a musical score into Canto 75 in 1944.¹³ Joyce's extensive musical references in *Ulysses* have been charted, and his claim to emulate fugal form in the 'Sirens' chapter has sparked numerous attempts to map specific musical forms onto the text and explain their effects.¹⁴ Michelle Fillion has explored the numerous ways music is woven into the novels

of E. M. Forster, who often considers new and receding approaches to music at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁵ For Daniel Albright, modernist art is inherently interdisciplinary and intermedial, while Peter Dayan sees interactions between words and music stretching back into the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Delia da Sousa Correa has explored musical references in George Eliot through a feminist lens, and Phyllis Weliver and Katharine Ellis have investigated the connections between words and music in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ The variety of interactions between music and literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has inspired interdisciplinary work and collaborations. The chapters in the edited collection *Phrase and Subject: Studies in Music and Literature* employ a variety of methods to unpack musical and literary texts and performances, and interdisciplinarians like Albright and Dayan appear alongside musicologist Lawrence Kramer, and Mark Byron's work on literary modernism.¹⁸ Aside from the classical, modernist interactions with contemporary music – from Schoenberg and George Antheil to jazz, popular music, and music theatre – have been explored by Josh Epstein and Nathan Waddell.¹⁹ When music and literature are discussed together, Wagner is often close at hand. Raymond Furness and Martin Stoddard have explored his influence in a wide range of literature, while Emma Sutton has explored the influence of British Wagnerism (in the sense of an enthusiasm for Wagner) on Aubrey Beardsley and Virginia Woolf.²⁰

While there are many ways that classical music has influenced literature, in this chapter I focus on philosophical explorations of the kinds of response and thought produced by music. Writers who drew on classical music as an aesthetic paradigm tested how far different art forms could be combined, and Wagner's inter-art aesthetic provided a foundation for literary experiments with music. It is now a commonplace that Wagner had an impact on the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique used by Joyce and Woolf.²¹ Raymond Furness and Timothy Martin point out that Joyce drew on Edouard Dujardin, who took the idea of a continuous, flowing prose from Wagner's 'infinite melody.'²² This chain of influence can also be explained theoretically and stylistically. Wagner's writing about how music creates meaning, the leitmotif and infinite melody can illuminate Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*, and Wagner's ideas themselves can be more fully explored through Andrew Bowie's philosophical writing, and Matthew Bribitzer-Stull's musicology.²³ Wagner and Woolf share a desire to find new ways to communicate things they felt were of distinct human importance. Wagner does this

through musical form, while Woolf sought new ways of writing fiction. Before reaching Wagner's influence on the literary technique referred to as stream-of-consciousness, this chapter will explore what writers felt music offered literature, and what Wagner's ideas about music opened up to modernists interested in narrative forms that sought to examine character and the 'soul' through sensation and memory.

From Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* to Walter Pater's claims about music as the 'consummate' art form to which all else 'constantly aspires',²⁴ classical music as an aesthetic paradigm has not just offered literature a set of cultural reference points, but philosophical ways of thinking that shape its aesthetic experiments and styles. Music has often been thought of as an art form that might help to answer metaphysical questions about the nature of reality and essences – particularly human essences like the soul, or emotions. Edgar Allen Poe maintained the 'absolute essentiality' of music for poetry, claiming that it was able to express spiritual truths: 'It is in Music perhaps that the soul most nearly attains the great end', so that 'in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development.'²⁵ While the connection between poetry and music is well-known, in the twentieth century scholars have noticed music's influence on prose and the novel.²⁶ Seeking ways to investigate the complexity of consciousness and workings of the mind, writers have looked to classical music as a model for emotional and spiritual communication.

The 'high art' status classical music enjoyed at the beginning of the twentieth century only came into being during the late eighteenth century, as Carl Dahlhaus has shown in *The Idea of Absolute Music*. 'If instrumental music', Dahlhaus writes, 'had been a "pleasant noise" beneath language to the common-sense aestheticians of the eighteenth century, then the romantic metaphysics of art declared it a language above language.'²⁷ The elevation of music without words occurred during German Romanticism, when philosophers such as Karl Philip Moritz advocated the autonomy of art, objecting to its use as a vehicle for conservative moral guidance. For Moritz, the purpose of art was to facilitate meditation on beauty, which 'draws our attention completely to itself, it shifts away from ourselves for a while, and makes us seem to lose ourselves in the beautiful object.'²⁸ Music without attached narratives seemed to offer a medium for purely aesthetic contemplation – something that gained significance following Kant's conviction that philosophy should focus on the experience of phenomena, because of the impossibility of accessing essences or a solid, objective reality.

Kant introduced a gap between the object and the way it is experienced – ‘the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be’²⁹ – that brought sensory experience, perception and interpretation to the fore in European philosophy.

The role of sensory experience and sound became central to the poetics of Stéphane Mallarmé, and to the French Symbolist movement more broadly. Mallarmé wanted to save language from the influence of ‘low’ forms of writing such as newspapers and attempted to reinvigorate it with music. He placed particular emphasis on the sounds of verse as he sought to create an immersive aesthetic experience, and his poetry also drew from music the importance of form and internal structure. Writing about his techniques in ‘Crisis in Poetry’, he claimed that poetry should notice that ‘for every sound, there is an echo. Motifs like patterns will move in balance from point to point.’³⁰ Mallarmé’s was a poetics of wholeness; he sought a ‘rhythmic totality’ through the union of music and the ‘intellectual and written word in all its glory’ to produce ‘Music of the perfect fullness and clarity, the totality of universal relationships.’³¹ For Mallarmé, poetry should not offer precise descriptions of the world: ‘allusion is sufficient’ because things that exist in the material word are not the subject of verse. Arthur Symons described French Symbolism as seeking ways that ‘the soul of things can be made visible.’³² Repeated references to the ‘soul’ – in descriptions of Beethoven, or literature that aspires to be like music – show a persistent connection between music and essence: music, it is commonly held, can say things of vital importance that language cannot. Dahlhaus notices that this meta-physical endeavour underpins the German tradition, too. For the major art theorists of the nineteenth century, such as ‘Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche, music was considered to be an expression of the “essence” of things, as opposed to the language of concepts that cleaved to mere “appearances.”’³³ Symons saw similarities between Mallarmé’s and Wagner’s aims to create a complete, fully immersive artwork, and declared, ‘Carry the theories of Mallarmé to a practical conclusion, multiply his power in a direct ratio, and you have Wagner. It is his failure not to be Wagner.’³⁴

Wagner is the archetypal intermedial (in the sense of combining different media) artist and theorist. He developed the prominent place music attains in German Romantic thought where absolute music is elevated to the status of pure communication. Wagner’s answer to absolute music was the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where abstract, musical meaning was paired with language to produce definite, comprehensible statements. These were necessary because his goal was social transformation, to combat the decline of art and society since the high point of Ancient Greek tragic theatre.

In 'The Art-Work of the Future' (where he explains the rationale for the Total Art-Work) Wagner describes 'the splintering of the common Tragic Artwork' and 'the shattering of the Greek religion,' claiming that 'from the wreck of the Grecian Nature-State' has emerged the modern, atomized 'Political State.'³⁵ David Roberts explains that for Wagner, 'having lost all connection with public life and the people, art has become the private possession and purely narcissistic practice of an artistic class in the service of the market.'³⁶ In Wagner's thought, art – once the common property of all citizens – had become the private property of an elite, driven by market forces, and separated into categories like the alienated, atomised state in which people lived in a capitalist society.

Wagner's claim that the arts should be reunited intensified among modernist writers, who shared his sense of a critical need to address problems in the world.³⁷ Ford Madox Ford, whose father Frances Hueffer authored several books on Wagner, saw an increasingly mechanised society reaching new extremes during the First World War, when human bodies were used as instruments for the preservation of a social and political elite – something he explores at length in his *Parade's End* tetralogy.³⁸ There is a growing consensus about Ford's work as inherently intermedial, being intimately informed by music and the visual arts.³⁹ Ezra Pound disapproved of Wagner's music, but was similarly convinced that there was a connection between aesthetic and social decline. For Pound, as for Wagner, the atomisation of the arts had brought about a sick society, which might yet be saved by great art that could teach and regenerate the population. It was up to the arts, Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe in 1915, to provide the 'guide and lamp of civilization.'⁴⁰ Propelled by his conviction about the social importance of art, Pound wrote about his techniques extensively. Wagner, similarly convinced by the social importance of his work, did the same, so that his essays and letters as well as the operas provide insights into the development of his intermedial aesthetic, which has had a lasting influence on literature.

Wagner developed theories about why music's manner of creating meaning is important, how classical music and language can be compared, and the role of sensation and memory. Wagner took from Schopenhauer the notion that music can communicate essential truths about the world: that it is metaphysical. In 1854, Wagner wrote in a letter to Liszt: 'I have of late occupied myself exclusively with a man who has come like a gift from heaven, although only a literary one, into my solitude. This is Arthur Schopenhauer, the greatest philosopher since Kant.'⁴¹ It is widely known that Wagner's 1870 commemorative essay on Beethoven includes particularly Schopenhauerian

references to music as the manifestation of an abstract, emotional essence that the philosopher termed the Will.⁴² Wagner describes music as an ‘affect of the Will’ which means ‘we understand without any mediation by concepts what the shout for help, the cry of complaint, or the shout of joy says.’ The composer, Wagner says, ‘does not express his views of the world, but the world itself, in which pain and well being, joy and suffering interchange.’⁴³ The extracts resemble Schopenhauer’s quotation with which I opened this chapter, the whole of which reads: ‘It [music] does not express this or that individual or particular joy, this or that sorrow or pain or horror or exaltation or cheerfulness or peace of mind, but rather joy, sorrow, pain, horror, exaltation, cheerfulness and peace of mind as such in themselves, abstractly.’⁴⁴ For Wagner, if this understanding of music’s expressive power is correct, it must be harnessed and used for (what he sees as) social good.

Another crucial aspect of Wagner’s thought for literary writers is the notion that music can contain meanings that act analogously to, or relate to, the social world. Andrew Bowie has noted that Wagner derived this idea from Liszt, who wrote ‘The unlimited changes which a motif can undergo via rhythm, modulation, temporal duration, accompaniment, instrumentation, transformation constitute the language by means of which we can make this motif express thoughts, and, as it were, dramatic action.’⁴⁵ For Liszt and for Wagner, the movement and changes of the musical motif could be compared to the actions of people, and the changes they undergo in a social context. Ideas about the relationship between musical form and social life have become indispensable to contemporary musicology since T. W. Adorno interpreted the structure of the ‘classical symphony’ (of which Beethoven’s are the primary examples) as ‘the activity of the vigorous subject, reflecting socially useful work.’⁴⁶ Carolyn Abbate, Carl Dahlhaus and Michael Halliwell have argued that music can function as a narrator – in other words, convey ideas.⁴⁷ For Karen Painter, ‘a symphony depicts a struggle in the first movement, most tangibly in the contrasting two themes of sonata form, but also in character and tone’; symphonies ‘portray the actions and emotions of a heroic figure, and therefore of an individual who [speaks] for the collective.’⁴⁸ Scott Burnham notes that ‘programme critics’ repeatedly interpret Beethoven’s symphonies ‘as a deeply engaging psychological process not unlike the archetypal process depicted in mythological accounts of the hero’s journey.’⁴⁹ Emma Sutton rightly notes that Wagner’s essays contribute to the history of ideas that have resulted in these interpretations of music.⁵⁰ In *Opera und Drama*, Wagner stated that ‘The orchestra indisputably possesses a faculty of speech.’⁵¹

That musical forms can contain meaning and imply action provides an essential point of connection between musical form and literary narrative, offering starting ground for novelists interested in utilising musical devices or structures in their work.

Wagner's music was part of cultural life in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain and Ireland. Woolf and Joyce were much exposed to Wagner's operas when they were growing up around the turn of the century.⁵² Sutton writes that Wagner's 'works were among the first operas [Woolf] encountered as a young woman in the 1890s.' In 1908 she was attending the opera 'almost nightly' and writing her first novel, *The Voyage Out*.⁵³ Richard Ellmann describes a meeting between Joyce and Arthur Symonds in 1902, when 'he played for Joyce the Good Friday music from *Parsifal*', transmitting to him his admiration of Wagner.⁵⁴ Joyce had read Symonds's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* when it was published in 1899, which discusses Mallarmé's Wagnerian aspirations, and the work of Swinburne: both were immersed in late nineteenth-century French Wagnerism, and published poems about Wagner in Edouard Dujardin's *Revue wagnérienne*.⁵⁵ Joyce also had a comprehensive musical education and was an accomplished singer. Timothy Martin reminds us that 'In 1909, in a concert program in Trieste, Joyce performed in the quintet form *Die Meistersinger*.'⁵⁶ Martin also identifies the chain of influence that connects Wagner with Joyce's use of the 'interior monologue', via Dujardin:

Joyce did not make the personal acquaintance of Dujardin until shortly after he came to Paris in 1920. But he had bought *Les Lauriers son coupés* at a railway kiosk in 1903, and, after *Ulysses* had made the "interior monologue" famous, he was always careful to credit Dujardin's book as its inspiration. Dujardin, it turns out, got the idea from Wagner's "infinite melody".⁵⁷

The common understanding of the connection between Wagner, Dujardin and Joyce (which we will develop below) is this: being derived from a Wagnerian conviction that music and language can be compared, and that literature can borrow from musical forms, Wagner's 'infinite melody' provided Dujardin with the stimulus for the idea of a continuous, free-flowing prose that was able to represent meanderings of internal thoughts. Wagner's influence extends into Woolf's writing, both from her own knowledge and her interest in Joyce's prose techniques. In 'Modern Fiction' (1919) she praised Joyce's focus on the 'spiritual' – 'the flickerings of the innermost flame' – rather than the material world. Her own

focus on spiritual flickerings intensifies in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), which, like *Ulysses*, is set on a single day in June.⁵⁸ In the latter novel, Woolf's attention to internal processes of thought is immediately apparent: we are plunged into Clarissa's reminiscence of being 'a girl of eighteen', while the particulars of her appearance and the physical setting of the narrative are avoided.⁵⁹ Woolf weaves a continuous narrative in *Mrs Dalloway* that seamlessly shifts between tenses and memories. The novel's opening sentence – 'Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself' – indicates the gist, but not specifics, of what Clarissa said, sometime earlier, about what she will do in the future, before she thinks about preparations for the party – 'The doors would be taken off their hinges' – which precedes her memory of how, as a young girl, she had 'plunged at Bourton into the open air.'⁶⁰ The opening paragraphs of *Mrs Dalloway* interlace past, present and future into a continuum, demonstrating the meanderings and interconnectedness of time in the mind.

Joyce and Woolf are acknowledged as especially musical novelists, with *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses* being, as Laura Marcus identifies, 'exemplars of the literary city symphony.'⁶¹ Explicit references to music are less frequent in *Mrs Dalloway* than in Woolf's previous novels: there are two lines of a song from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, and Peter is a lover of Wagner. Emma Sutton has explored the significance of Peter's Wagnerism in post-War Britain.⁶² The novel is often approached as particularly sonic-minded because it pays close attention to the mechanical sounds of the city. Elizabeth F. Evans has argued that *Mrs Dalloway* – like *Jacob's Room* and *The Years* – is a novel especially 'attuned to London's acoustic markers', from traffic to Big Ben, aeroplanes to street singers.⁶³ Sam Halliday notes the importance of sound for Septimus and shell-shock in the context of post-war London.⁶⁴ In what follows, I focus on the stream of consciousness technique to show yet another way of treating the novel as interdisciplinary.

While it is acknowledged that Joyce developed the stream of consciousness technique from Dujardin, and that Woolf was influenced by Joyce and Wagner, the similarities between these musical and prose techniques can be further probed. Music, which seems able to communicate inner thoughts and feelings, is claimed to inspire these literary forms that are concerned with the workings of the mind. Yet there is more at stake even than this. Wagner's 'infinite melody', on which it is claimed these writers drew (directly or indirectly), is more complex than its name might suggest. Taken simply, it might be interpreted as a continuous or recurring tune. Attending to Wagner's attempt to communicate – not

just thoughts – but what *cannot* be put into words can illuminate further similarities between Wagner's aims and the aims of modernist novelists who were concerned with representing the inner life. Wagner writes:

In truth, the measure of a poet's greatness is that which he does not say in order to let what is inexpressible silently speak to us for itself. It is in the musician who brings this great Unsaid to sounding life, and the unmistakable form of his resounding silence is infinite melody [*unendliche Melodie*].⁶⁵

Whether a piece of writing or music is successful, for Wagner, relies as much on what is left out as on what is included: what the writer 'does not say' can allow something new to come into being. Here, the 'inexpressible' can 'speak', and the 'unsaid' is sounded through the 'resounding silence' of the 'infinite melody.' Wagner's contradictory statements, rather than undermining each other, demonstrate the difficulty of an artistic project that seeks to bring the non-existent into being, and the difficulty of discussing this project when there is not yet the language through which to do so. Wagner was interested in ways of achieving through form things that could not otherwise be communicated. In this formulation, the infinite melody is much more than a continuous sound – it is a melody whose significance extends outwards from itself, into silence and unknown territories, to communicate the otherwise unknown and unknowable.

Woolf's literary techniques, like Wagner's infinite melody, do more than try to express internal thoughts: they attempt to communicate the recessed memories and associations that give rise to thoughts, and what cannot but put into words. It is, Woolf says, 'the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this *unknown* and uncircumscribed spirit.'⁶⁶ For Woolf, the traditional novel was akin to ill-fitting clothes, and 'Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide.'⁶⁷ Woolf refers repeatedly in 'Modern Fiction' to truth and the spirit. These are not just unspoken thoughts, but aspects of the human condition that cannot ordinarily be conveyed through novelistic conventions.

Modernist writing's interest in the unknowable and non-verbal means that these novels are often described as 'stream-of-consciousness', which shares more with Wagner's infinite melody than with the interior monologue. Jeri Johnson distinguishes between interior monologue (which often describes a character's conscious thoughts) and stream-of-consciousness, writing that the latter term is 'descriptive only of fictions which share a preoccupation with representing character through pre-verbal or unspoken

“thoughts”’. For Johnson, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses* both attempt to represent the inner workings of the mind, even though *Ulysses* uses interior monologue, while *Mrs Dalloway* is ‘written as dialogue, third-person narrative, and free indirect discourse’ but ‘has as great a claim to the stream-of-consciousness trademark as has *Ulysses*.’⁶⁸ The term was first used to refer to literature in May Sinclair’s 1918 review of the (then three volumes of) Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*.⁶⁹ She borrowed the term from William James, who had previously used it to describe thought – ‘let us call it,’ he wrote, ‘the stream of thought, or of consciousness’ – emphasising the flowing rather than ‘jointed’ nature of consciousness.⁷⁰ Anne Fernihough has identified the likelihood that Woolf was aware of James’s text, since in ‘Modern Fiction’ she uses the same unusual term – ‘halo’ – that James uses to describe consciousness.⁷¹

Like Wagner’s infinite melody, Woolf’s and Joyce’s fiction has an interest in what is ‘not said’ and what is ‘inexpressible.’ Johnson’s reference to the ‘pre-verbal’ carries echoes of Freud, whose considerable impact on modern culture means that discussions of consciousness are filtered through an understanding of it as mediated by thoughts and desires that are not fully conscious.⁷² According to Toril Moi, ‘For Woolf, as for Freud, unconscious drives and desires constantly exert a pressure on our conscious thoughts and actions. For psychoanalysis the human subject is a complex entity, of which the conscious mind is only a small part.’⁷³ Following Freud, the difference between interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness is often couched in terms of the difference between the expression of the conscious mind (thoughts to which an individual has access), and the pre-conscious (that which is not immediately available to the conscious mind) or unconscious (the repressed) – to use the terms from Freud’s first topography, which was in wider circulation at the time Woolf was writing.⁷⁴ Stream-of-consciousness, then, is informed by a Freudian conceptualisation of consciousness, and is useful to describe literary attempts to communicate things of which characters are not fully conscious, such as the way that partially forgotten memories, past experiences or the repressed return to affect the present.

At the opening of *Mrs Dalloway* more space is given to thoughts and memories than the external world of appearances and action. Woolf often focuses on the way sensations can prompt recall of memories, rather than conscious recollection. When Clarissa thinks ‘what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach!’ it is the quality of the air that prompts her reverie about childhood at Bourton: ‘How fresh,’ she thinks, ‘how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the very early morning.’

Clarissa's sensory experience in the present stimulates her recollection of past experiences. The air is 'chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling, as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen.'⁷⁵ Standing at the window, fifty-two year-old Clarissa momentarily becomes her eighteen year-old self, so that the feeling of the air and the memory attached to it precipitates a kind of time travel, in which the young woman returns to provide the present-day Clarissa with the memory through which she experiences the present day. Woolf's narrative form follows Clarissa's consciousness through memories provoked by affect and sensation rather than by conscious remembering. This manner of achieving immersion in a fictional world is also remarkably Wagnerian.

Wagner developed an understanding of how music can contain meaning that is located in affect, memory and context:

Music cannot think; but it can realise thoughts, i.e. manifest their affective content as what is no longer remembered but is made present: but it can only do this if its own manifestation is determined by the poetic intention and this in turn is not revealed merely as what is thought, but is first clearly presented by the organ of understanding, verbal-language.⁷⁶

Music's meaning, for Wagner, is sensory, while language is able to present specific ideas more clearly. In Wagner's thought, music stimulates emotional affects, but its meaning is also determined by experiences and contexts that coincide with its affect: people experience and remember sensations to which they attach meaning. This emphasis on the affective and the immediacy of sensation is one way in which modernist literature becomes informed by music, with its apparent capacity to create meaning directly via its effect on the body. Sutton identifies that in Woolf's *The Voyage Out* there is 'faith in music's immediacy and totality of expression' when Rachel says music 'goes straight for things' instead of talking about them.⁷⁷

In *Mrs Dalloway*, sensations are often represented as more durable and significant than language or conscious thought. Clarissa thinks of a moment of romance with Sally Seton in her youth, and decides, 'No, the words meant nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of the old emotion. But she could remember going cold with excitement.'⁷⁸ When words have no effect and emotions cannot be recalled, what Clarissa can recollect is the bodily sensation of being 'cold' with anticipation, of 'doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy', 'all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!'⁷⁹ Woolf's writing investigates the

importance of sensation, which in literature is always necessarily combined with verbal language. For Wagner, combining music's affective capacity to induce sensation with the language could create a particularly powerful meaning, both sensory and verbal. Wagner's conviction about the benefits of uniting music and words had, as I have discussed, a considerable impact on literature, but it is specifically the way he understands musical meaning that I want to investigate and expand upon here.

Bowie explains Wagner's stance on musical meaning by writing that 'Music conveys its own kind of thought, because what is signified by the melody is not just an object which is referred to but also an affective relationship to whatever is at issue in the object, which depends on the object's relations to other aspects of the world in which it occurs.'⁸⁰ Musical meaning is, then, constituted by memory and has a temporal aspect, reaching backwards into the past situations through and in which the meaning arose, and recreating those feelings in the present in a way that might anticipate the revival of the associated emotions or sensations in the future. Music is able to have these affective meanings because people make connections based on context and memory. For Bowie, Wagner employs an 'affective temporality' (where affect is broadly defined as an organism's response to external stimuli).⁸¹ In other words, then, Wagner aims to create emotional affects that have a connection with context and the past. His operas seek to tap into the ways musical meaning arises – through context, sensation and memory – and reproduce these effects consciously, in an organised and intentional manner.

This understanding of how musical meaning is produced underpins Wagner's development of the leitmotif, which was used to produce new musical structures. The leitmotif was an integral part of creating the fully immersive aesthetic experience of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, through which he sought to reunite the separate spheres of art to provide a moral and aesthetic education. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull describes the leitmotif as '[d]evelopmental associative themes that comprise an integral part of the surrounding musical context.'⁸² Rather than simply 'musical ideas' (or 'leading musical ideas', as the term *leitmotif* might suggest) that are traditionally understood as the smallest component of a complete musical piece, the Wagnerian leitmotif is a complete idea in itself, but undergoes transformation and development in its use and meaning. Bribitzer-Stull writes that the leitmotif has an 'evolving associative capacity': 'With each re-statement of a theme there exists the possibility that added perspective

will colour the emotional associations we have with it, much like the experience of revisiting childhood haunts as an adult.⁸³ Throughout an opera, once the effect of a motif has been established, it can build up and intensify over time, or alter as it is used differently, extending outwards into other sections and situations in a tentacular effect: sensations and memories of earlier emotions can creep into new scenes, bringing reminders of the past, imbuing the present moment with suspense, or altering the atmosphere.

Bribitzer-Stull's invocation of emotional association and childhood experience as a way of understanding the function of the Wagnerian leit-motif gains new resonances when we consider that modernists were also working in relation to new theories of time and memory, particularly from Henri Bergson and Freud. Bryony Randall has explored modernist negotiations with time,⁸⁴ and Tim Armstrong has noted Bergson's significance in the first two decades of the twentieth century, including the influence of his concept of duration – the human experience of time affected by sensation and emotion – on Henry James.⁸⁵ Fernihough writes that 'Bergson's notion of *durée* (duration) was a major influence on the cultural climate from which the stream-of-consciousness novel emerged.'⁸⁶ Maud Ellmann has explained Freud's emphasis on the centrality of childhood experiences in the construction of adult subjectivity – and notes that Leonard Woolf wrote about childhood in 'the first discussion of psychoanalysis in a British literary context.'⁸⁷ The idea that past experiences shape subjectivities in the present (from Freud), and that emotional responses shape perceptions of time (from Bergson), is something that connects in *Mrs Dalloway* with a Wagnerian interest in sensation and memory.

References to Clarissa's youth carry a similar 'evolving associative capacity' to that which Bribitzer-Stull describes for the leitmotif. Clarissa has, we are told, 'the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now.'⁸⁸ Feeling that she is 'not even Clarissa anymore' but only 'Mrs. Richard Dalloway' her thoughts frequently return to her childhood, twice reminiscing in the opening pages about being 'a girl of eighteen.'⁸⁹ Once the idea of Clarissa's youth is established, her recurring reveries about her eighteen-year-old self function like a motif, the meaning of which changes as it combines and contrasts with the present, or with thoughts about other moments from her life. Merely a reminiscence of youth on the opening page, the memories become tinged with regret: they are entangled with her loss of her own

identity in the present, 'this being Mrs. Dalloway', acquiring a sobering tone in contrast with their new context.⁹⁰

Clarissa is overcome with the feeling of her own waning social and personal significance when she learns that she has not received an invitation to join Richard for lunch with Lady Bruton, and as she stands in her bedroom she returns again to her 'girlhood' and the course of her life thereafter:

Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment – for example on the river beneath the woods at Cliveden – when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And again at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For *that* she could dimly perceive.⁹¹

As Clarissa thinks about the trajectory of her marriage, sensation and memory colour her understanding of her present situation. Her memory of some error 'on the river' precedes language associated with water through which she attempts to understand problems with interpersonal relationships: there was 'something warm' which 'rippled' and 'broke up surfaces' of human interactions, like something thrown into and disturbing cool, calm water. When Clarissa cannot formulate the idea concretely, her language includes metaphors associated with physical sensations, so that her understanding of the present is mediated by affect and memory: the memory of the river is connected to how Clarissa understands problems between people, being, the text suggests, where she thinks those problems began in her marriage.

Clarissa's memories invariably lead back to her early adulthood, of being 'just grown up'.⁹² Like a palimpsest, we see Clarissa's life written over the traces of her earlier self, which are still palpable, and often reappear to her as sensations rather than straightforwardly verbal ideas. As the novel progresses, the meaning of her 'lovely' girlhood emerges, in the context of her present disappointments, as the finest moment of her life. The significance of her memory of youth expands: it becomes clearer that this was the moment where everything held positive potential, with events since contributing – as she can only 'dimly perceive' – to her current feeling of insignificance, and of something gone wrong. From this departed youth, Clarissa constantly but only semi-consciously measures her progress. Woolf conveys thought through narrative form: via the recurring motif of her youth, Clarissa's anxiety that her life has been wasted is palpable; that

from the age of eighteen she made wrong decisions, because she has never since been as happy. Her past and her present are informed by each other, and the memories of her youth – which are more affective resonances than conscious remembrances – take on an increasingly sober tone in this scene, contrasting as they do with the dissatisfactions and insecurities of the present.

Woolf turns to affect, memory and sensation in the face of a language and novelistic conventions that cannot accommodate all. Like Wagner, Woolf wanted to do more than merely communicate thoughts: she explores how thought might work. While there have been many examples of how Woolf uses specific references to Wagner's operas, storylines and characters, there is also in Woolf's fiction a strong reliance on memory and the sensory for understanding how people create meaning from and understand their lives. Critiquing the original usage of stream-of-consciousness, Fernihough points out that 'When Sinclair writes, of *Pilgrimage*, "It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's stream of consciousness going on and on", she fails to convey any sense of meaningful accumulation.'³³ Woolf's stream of consciousness achieves this sense of accumulation when seen through a Wagnerian lens of recurrence, situation, memory and affect. Using the recurring theme of her youth in a manner comparable to a Wagnerian leitmotif, Woolf represents consciousness as a stream that often brings recessed memories to the surface, and shows how past sensations combined with feelings in the present accumulate meaning through repetition and context.

Thinking about Wagner's influence on Woolf's writing in this way is just one method of approaching music, which has influenced literature in complex and multifaceted ways. References to composers, sounds and pieces of music are common in modernist poetry and novels, which are often inherently intermedial. At other times, musical forms and ideas are intimately connected to modernist literary techniques like the stream of consciousness and free verse. In either case, modernist texts do not simply reflect pieces of music or their composer's ideas: writers can often be seen critically analysing how music creates meaning and participating in intricate negotiations with the kind of thought music makes available. Woolf does not passively reflect Wagner's ideas, but translates them into literary form, engaging them in a text that explores interconnected issues of memory, gender, relationships, childhood and class. Modernist writers often looked to music to inspire new sentence and verse structures, to get out of worn out ways of thinking, and explore the depths of human consciousness.

Notes

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- ² Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, Stein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 2–3.
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- ⁷ Edward Carpenter, 'Introduction' to Romain Rolland, *Beethoven*, trans. by B. Constance Hull, 3rd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench: Trubner, 1919), pp. ix–x (p. ix).
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- ⁹ See Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), and John Louis DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, and London: Associated University Presses, 1978).
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- ¹⁴ David W. Cole, 'Fugal Structure in the Sirens Episode of *Ulysses*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 19.2 (1973), 221–6. A. Walton Litz, *The Art of James Joyce: Method and Design in 'Ulysses' and 'Finnegans Wake'* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 66–70. Don Noel Smith, 'Musical Form and

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- ⁴¹ Wagner to Liszt, September 29th 1854. Richard Wagner, *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt* (New York: Haskell House, 1897), p. 53.
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- ⁴³ Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 10 vols (Leipzig: Siegel, 1907), IX, pp. 71, 100. Cited in and trans. by Bowie, *Music, Philosophy and Modernity*, p. 227.
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- ⁷² English translations of Freud were available in the USA from 1910, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press published English translations by James Strachey. John Forrester and Laura Cameron explain that 'The first English translations of Freud's work were done by A. A. Brill in the United States following his agreement in 1908 to be Freud's translator; so it was imported books, *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Psychoneuroses* (1910/12), *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory* (1910), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1914), and *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1916), that Strachey and others were

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- ⁹⁰ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 11.
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- ⁹³ Fernihough, 'Consciousness as a Stream', p. 69.

*Aesthetics, Music, Noise**Brad Bucknell*

The history of musical aesthetics and modernism is fairly well-known.¹ However, if we were to look a bit more closely, we would see that there is a good deal of disagreement among musicians, writers, and painters about the place and meaning of music in their respective practices. While agreeing on the importance of music, these artists also give shape to the ongoing problem of what it is music actually means. If it is a kind of transcendent art form perfectly able to express itself, and us, even without language (as in 'absolute' music), why then would others believe that music on its own is never enough, that it must be joined with language, gesture, and indeed, the whole panoply (including at times armour) of theatrical and literary devices in order to reach its full expressive potential? Some poets, such as Stéphane Mallarmé, would insist that poetry is actually the true music, while others, such as Ezra Pound, thought that music and language had a natural, though broken, connection which had to be set right.² Some might attempt to turn language into music (the Dadaists, James Joyce) while others, such as the Futurists, or George Antheil, would attempt to adopt or celebrate the sounds and noise of the modern world directly in their works. Even to this day, many of these early experiments in music, painting, and writing seem somehow dissonant, even 'noisy' to our ears, eyes, and minds.

In any case, what lurks beneath or behind most modernist experiments with or uses of music is the paradox that Vladimir Jankélévitch pointed out some time ago: 'music is at once expressive and inexpressive, serious and frivolous, deep and superficial; music has a meaning and does not have a meaning.' It could be a 'form of deception' or a 'principle of wisdom.' In many ways, for the moderns, music appears to be both at once.³

Jankélévitch's conception of music perhaps echoes a good many modern, and modernist, tensions. 'Modernity', and its complex nexus of rationality, science, technology, capitalism, and 'progress,' is, by the end of the nineteenth century, dramatically changing material experience in the

Western world. For instance, Stephen Kern mentions the very concrete effects of the time and space 'management' studies of Frederick W. Taylor and Frank B. Gilbreth. Taylor was interested in decreasing the amount of time that a worker took to perform a certain task, while Gilbreth concentrated on the most productive use of space and of movement in that space.⁴ Bodies needed to be more like machines; the advances of machine speed (automobiles, trains) impinged not just on bodies, but on the nature of time itself. The past, or the memory of the past, now seemed like something far too slow.⁵

However, Kern also points out that 'in contrast to all this active mobilization for the future some people voiced passivity and fatalism, focusing their thoughts on the concept of degeneration.' These latter feared the 'deterioration of the quality of urban living, [the] breakdown of health, decline of Western civilization, [and] extinction of life on the planet.'⁶ (Such a list may sound fairly current to us now.) However, while love for and fear of mechanized progress seems a neat enough opposition, it is not easy to tell just from listening in to the Western modernist musical world what specific music might be on which side. As such, (to recall Jankélévitch) it is even harder to say what kind of music might be deceiving and what might be the 'pinnacle of wisdom.' Just what kind of music could encompass the tensions of modernity, its propensities toward deception, or wisdom, or both? From certain points of view, Arnold Schoenberg's atonal and twelve-tone works can be heard as the end of Western music, though he himself believed he was taking the next logical step in that very tradition.⁷ His intention was not to destroy music as such. Indeed, his innovations left the instruments and temperaments of the tradition intact, while totally revising the means of composition. He sought to 'emancipat[e] the dissonance' which tonality had always tried to keep in check, but which had become ever more prominent during the nineteenth century due to the increasing chromaticism of the Romantics and of Wagner. The logic of Schoenberg's next step seemed to him a kind of progress laid out by the very tradition of music that he would disrupt.⁸

The Italian Futurists, who will be my focus here, seemed to have somewhat different ideas about any kind of tradition. The Futurists did not produce all that much music, but at least rhetorically, they did put forward the idea that noise, especially the noises of modernity, could be used for compositional purposes. Many might have thought that Schoenberg and his pupils were creating noise, but the Futurists, or at least Luigi Russolo, were more specific. Russolo's 'The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto' (1913) opposes 'nature' which, except for 'hurricanes, tempests, avalanches, [and]

waterfalls...’ is silent, with the noisy world of humans.⁹ In fact, the ‘art of musical evolution parallels the growing multiplicity of machines, which everywhere are assisting mankind.’¹⁰ Russolo here explicitly links mechanization, the concept of progress, and musical development in a very conventional opposition with ‘nature.’ He even suggests that the discordant sounds of the varieties of new music, the ‘most complicated successions of dissonant chords,’ ‘prepar[e] in a general way for the creation of MUSICAL NOISE.’¹¹ Before arriving at this conclusion, Russolo has been roughing out, and in a much less rigorous way than perhaps Schoenberg and the serialists would, a history of Western musical development, and like so many histories, it brings him to the present and to a new and ‘necessary’ sense of technological and harmonic possibilities. Russolo’s sense is that the other kinds of new music are just as ‘noisy’ as anything he has in mind. At the same time, he is after precisely the thing that Schoenberg has left intact: timbre, the tempered pitches of conventional instruments. And in doing so, he is joining his musical conceptions directly to the technologies of modernity itself.¹² For Russolo, it is the new world of technology that will transform our ways of hearing. He urges us to *listen* to the modern space of the city: ‘today, with perhaps a thousand different kinds of machines, we can distinguish a thousand different noises,’ but as the number and kind of machines increase ‘we shall be able to distinguish ten, twenty, or thirty thousand different noises, not merely to be imitated but to be combined as our fancy dictates.’¹³

F. T. Marinetti, the founder of Italian Futurism, seems to make clear in his 1909 manifesto, ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,’ that it is the new world of progress and machines which must be affirmed: ‘the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car ... a roaring automobile that seems to ride on grapeshot – that is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.’ This love of speed easily joins with his love of war ‘the only hygiene of the world,’ along with ‘militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchists ... and contempt for women.’¹⁴ The connections among mechanization, nationalism, and even misogyny hardly seem surprising here in Marinetti’s proto-fascist sensibility. Marjorie Perloff, though, suggests that Marinetti’s misogyny is more apparent than real, pointing out that his scorn was really for ‘traditional bourgeois marriage arrangements.’¹⁵ Speed and machines do not replace natural beauty, though it is clear that nature should be dominated; but ‘Nature,’ is simply a supplement to another kind of beauty made by ‘man’ himself, and the violence here, and in many statements made by other Futurists, is aimed mostly at established, man-made institutions: ‘museums, libraries, academies of every sort ...’¹⁶ Marinetti

and other Futurists seem to see no connection between these 'passéist' institutions and modernity itself – that is, 'progress.' Indeed, elsewhere, in 'Electrical War' (1911), Marinetti envisions such a highly technologized world that '[h]unger and poverty [will] disappear...' and that there will be no 'need for wearisome and debasing labors...' ¹⁷ This naive faith in the future of technology marks the inception of Futurism, just as it still defines so many of our present beliefs. Futurism is very close to us. ¹⁸

Thus, Russolo's own sense that technology can extend musical beauty has its echoes in the founding documents of Futurism. Russolo, too, will at least rhetorically reject concert halls (while still performing in them) and the usual constraints of their predictable instruments: '...we are revolted by the monotony of the sensations experienced, combined with the idiotic religious excitement of the listeners, Buddhistically intoxicated by the thousandth repetition of their hypocritical and artificial ecstasy.' ¹⁹ Russolo desires a music that will reflect and also shape the modern, urban, and technological world. He wants to broaden the soundscape of music, to create a space for sonic modernity itself. In this regard, Russolo goes much further in some ways than any other Futurist musician, for he actually invents his own instruments, his 'intonarumori,' or 'noise intoners,' that he will deploy to recreate the sounds of modernity.

In the 'Noises' essay, Russolo quotes a long passage from a letter sent to him from Marinetti who was in Adrianopolis, reporting on the First Balkan War. In the letter, Marinetti spends much space inventing words and deploying non-verbal signs to imitate the sounds of war: 'Bulgarian battalions on the march crooc-craaac (lento) Shumi or Karvavena TZANG-TUMB-TUUUMB toctoctoc (rapidissimo) crooc-craac (lento).' Marinetti calls this kind of onomatopoeic language 'words-in-freedom' in his essay from 1913, 'Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom.' ²⁰ Words-in-freedom are part of what Marinetti describes as the 'wireless imagination': 'I mean the absolute freedom of images or analogies, expressed with disconnected words, and without the connecting syntactical wires and without punctuation.' ²¹ Such a disconnected syntax echoes Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897); but where Mallarmé's text seems to create a kind of silent falling of language, Marinetti's is designed to fill the space of the page with the speed and near chaos of battle. ²² Indeed, Marinetti's design would be influential for the Dadaists, for Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, Russian Constructivists, among others. Even Pound's *Cantos* deploys a non-linear syntax, but one which often *includes* the past, via Chinese characters, and a variety of languages both past and current. Jaroslav Andel suggests that the Futurists' concern

with synesthesia and their attempts at simultaneity led them to reject 'traditional printing formats [in order to] develop [...] the page's visual character as a simultaneous vision enabling the reader to comprehend the message in a single glance.'²³ Andel considers the Futurists as 'the progenitors of today's multimedia artists.'²⁴

Marinetti's wireless syntax presents us with some significant complexities. Clearly, if we read the poem in English translation, we are missing some of the sound, particularly that of intonation, that an Italian reader would be able to hear internally.²⁵ Still, even in the small portion I have quoted above, the onomatopoeic emphasis seems to cross language barriers, as do the interpolated musical descriptors ('lento', 'rapidissimo'). The musical terms can be seen as both descriptive and instructional: that is, these insertions describe both how the language might be read and how the events or objects described might actually sound. Moreover, the typography and many of the onomatopoeic words used seem to indicate no clear language of origin, other than the sounds they describe. As such, they are eminently translatable. 'TZANG-TUMB-TUUUMB' is not only a repetition and variation of the title; it also could be a description of a cannon firing, its shell landing, and the echo of this explosion. The 'improvised,' yet imitative, language often breaks spelling conventions, and, as I note above, is distributed across and around the page with a startling visual/verbal aggression. Indeed, at some points, Marinetti eschews letters altogether. In Russolo's 1916 book, also called *The Art of Noises*, there is a whole chapter dedicated to the noise of war, but it is in the chapter on consonants as linguistic noise that Russolo again turns over to Marinetti a great deal of space. Here Marinetti further explains, and with perhaps more nuance, his words-in-freedom. He speaks of 'onomatopoeic chords' which he suggests will reach further levels of abstraction,²⁶ and it is here that he turns not only to typography, but to non-alphabetical signs as well. Some of his examples point to a concurrence of sounds:

BLEU!) doublemsnnorring of a reservist + biplane
(high)HHRRaa
hrrrrrr (low)

Here, the sonic image does encompass both the snoring and the passing of the biplane; however, other examples operate more by associations which might only exist for the writer. For example, in a passage which works both vertically and horizontally, the apparent concurrence of sounds is not completely 'external.' Marinetti stacks in a vertical row on the left side of the page the sound of three different speeds: '80 Km/ an hour/ TRrrrrrrrrrrrr.'

The next is 95, and the third is '100 km/ an hour/ **TRRRRRRR**.' Next to each speed, stacked vertically on the right, and with a large bracket meant to contain the language to each increment, is a summation of the sensations, or thoughts, that occur as each successive speed is achieved. For 100 km an hour we read

Pressing with right foot accelerator
distances + 1000 profundities +
3000000 resistances of the earth to
the ssssliding speeds offer themselves
*pan-pan-traaaak tatatraaaak*²⁷

The numbers and the '+' signs are not about sound as such, but rather the perception of speed's intensity: the 'ssssliding' is 'sonic' as a word, but is perhaps not so much an imitation of sound as one of sensation. The passage does return to onomatopoeic imitation at the end.

It is clear, however, that Marinetti is attempting to take his words-in-freedom beyond mere imitation; this is a struggle which will concern Russolo too, as we will see. Marinetti is concerned with 'the psychic nomatopoeitic (sic) chord' or 'abstract verbalizations of forces in motion.'²⁸ So, with the same right-left division as described above, he lays out on the left the '**Verbalization dynamique de la ruote**,' while on the right-hand side we are given the untranslatable 'mocastrinar frailingaren doni doni/ doni **XX + X** vronkap **X**... bimbim nu ranu = = = = +/- raruma viar.'²⁹ Curiously, Marinetti speculates just after this passage about the origins of language existing in the imitation of sounds that the 'first men' heard. The speculations on the origins of language as practical and imitative are set athwart this untranslatable selection, as though the origins of expressive consciousness must be linked to, but not identical with, imitation. Thus, Marinetti may be making a connection between imitation and expression which removes the untranslatable from the criticism of being merely subjective. Poetic noise is not, then, merely noise at all. Indeed, at its non-lexical limit, a limit Marinetti approaches here via the non-linguistic signs, language, even in apparent imitation, comes very close to music.

Here, at this ostensible borderline between music and language is where Russolo introduces the problem of noise. If we return to the 'Noises' essay of 1913, Russolo claims of Marinetti's 'unfettered language,'³⁰ born in imitation of the sounds of modern war, that

[w]e must fix the pitch and regulate the harmonies and rhythms of these extraordinarily varied sounds... [This] does not mean to take away from them all the irregularity of tempo and intensity that characterizes their

vibrations, but rather to give definite gradation or pitch to the stronger and more predominant of these vibrations. Indeed, noise is differentiated from musical sound merely in that the vibrations that produce it are confused and irregular... Every noise has a note – sometimes even a chord – that predominates the ensemble of its irregular vibrations. Because of this characteristic note it becomes possible to fix the pitch of a noise...³¹

Modernity and nature both produce sounds and noises, but it is through the application of technology that the sounds of the contemporary world can be turned into music. The *intonarumori* are Russolo's attempt to regulate nature, culture (even its violence), and the noises they make.

The *intonarumori* are a hybrid of engineering, craftsmanship, modernity (as technologically realized), and modernism, this last, especially because these instruments are somehow meant to establish a kind of aesthetic control over an overwhelming present. It is the 'artist,' after all who is meant to shape this music of present and future. Indeed, Russolo toured as the artist of noise. The first performance in Milan (21 April 1914) turned into a brawl (noise begot noise), but as time went on, the performances improved and so did audience acceptance, especially in England.³² Douglas Kahn says that '[a]ccording to one report a total of about 30,000 spectators were in attendance over the course of twelve performances at the London Coliseum, and the tour was just beginning.'³³ However, the extensive European tour had to be cancelled because of the war; the very thing that the Futurists found so inspirational for their art would now block Russolo's performances. The irony seems unimportant to Russolo since he thought himself 'lucky enough to fight in the midst of the marvelous and grand and tragic symphony of modern war.'³⁴ There is a hint of the sublime in this notion of the 'marvelous' symphony of war, and something a little ominous as well. Marinetti, Russolo and other Futurists volunteered to fight; Marinetti and Russolo were also badly wounded, and many of their comrades were killed. But it is unclear what effect this had on their view of technology and war. As Kahn puts it, '[a]lthough Russolo would eventually become antifascist, during the second decade of [the twentieth] century he was never antiwar.'³⁵ In a close comparison of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and Russolo's chapter on the noises of war in *The Art of Noises*, Kahn notes that, unlike Remarque's text, Russolo's chapter 'concentrates almost entirely on ordnance and ignores the sounds of dying humans and animals.'³⁶

There is, then, a potential occlusion in this music, even though Russolo's formal justification of noise as a musical element is based upon its harmonic inclusiveness, its richness. In the *Art of Noises* Russolo challenges

equal temperament and its suppression of potentially noisy overtones. He states that 'the *real* and *fundamental* difference between [musical] sound and noise can be reduced to this alone: *Noise is generally much richer in harmonic than sound*. And the harmonics of noise are usually more intense than those that accompany sound.'³⁷ The point is to 'open up' a 'formerly restricted field': 'Life offers us an enormous number of noises (and the number is still growing), and therefore the number of noises that can be discovered is infinite.'³⁸ As Kahn points out, Russolo's desire to control noise still leaves it well within the bounds of the musical: 'Once so controlled, noise has the advantage of coming from life and recalling it and thus could exceed music while remaining within it.'³⁹ Russolo also establishes himself as an inventor, and this inventor-artist – as is the case with so many other moderns who choose selectively from the past to invent themselves and establish precedents for their work – chooses as his precursor none other than Leonardo Da Vinci.

Luciano Chessa, in his important study of Russolo, makes a convincing case for Russolo's, and in fact, the Futurists', fascination with Leonardo. Chessa outlines Russolo's life-long interest in Leonardo, pointing out that Russolo worked on the restoration of *The Last Supper*, and eventually became familiar with Da Vinci's work on mechanical musical instruments.⁴⁰ Chessa makes it clear that Russolo and other Futurists were largely silent about their admiration for Leonardo since their own self-presentation was so intensely defined against the past: 'One could not admit loving Leonardine thought, let alone applying it: the futurists could admire Leonardo privately but had to censure him publicly.'⁴¹ Chessa reproduces Leonardo's drawings and Russolo's patent applications and convincingly shows the strong similarities between Leonardo's music machines and Russolo's.⁴² Chessa lists many connections, including 'a way to control dynamics through the pressure of a wheel or belt against a string; ... rotating sound generators; ... the continuous mechanical beating of a drum; continuous sound.'⁴³ It may be these last two traits which are most crucial. While Russolo did not merely copy Leonardo's drawings, it is clear that they offered him a model for how to create the continuous, or 'enharmonic' sound that was so important to him, and, it seems, to Leonardo as well.

In 'Futurist Music: Technical Manifesto' (1911), written by composer Francesco Balilla Pratella, the term 'enharmony' is used to define what we might now recognize as micro-tonality. Pratella means to go beyond atonality, since it is limited to 'all the sounds contained in a scale.' The '*enharmonic mode*' 'contemplates still more minute subdivisions of a tone.'

These can be heard ‘in the false dissonance of an orchestra when the instruments play out of tune and in the spontaneous popular songs that are sung without musical training.’⁴⁴ Perhaps the first kind of dissonance is ‘false’ because it is unintentional. Again, all the ‘conservatories, lyceums, and academies’⁴⁵ must be abandoned, and musical form must **‘follow [...] from and [be] dependent on the generative emotional motifs.’** As well, (and again), such new emotions contain **‘all the new attitudes of nature, always tamed by man in different ways through incessant scientific discoveries.’**⁴⁶ We can see the expected blend of the artist/ scientist and dominated nature. However, Pratella’s music does not really sound as revolutionary as we might expect, given his language here. In the 1914 opera, *L’Aviatore Dro*, Pratella does use some of Russolo’s intonarumori, and there are poly-rhythmic moments in the opera, and in the Piano Trio, Op. 28 of 1919, but by this time Pratella seems to have stepped away from the Futurists, as Russolo did as well.⁴⁷ There is, however, nothing that sounds quite like Russolo’s intonarumori.⁴⁸

Russolo’s notion of enharmony is very close to Pratella’s, but Russolo’s version emphasizes a greater continuity with all the sounds in the world (especially mechanical ones) and their re-invention by the new instruments that Russolo is himself making. The intonarumori are able to sound ‘the change from one tone to another, the shading, so to speak, that a tone makes in moving immediately above or below.’⁴⁹ This means that potentially all gradations of sound are in some sense ‘present.’ In his book, *The Art of Noises*, Russolo is also careful to describe the writing of this music. In fact, there are only seven bars of his *Risveglio di una Città* that survive, and they seem to come from this publication. These can be taken as a kind of ‘flip side’ to Marinetti’s attempt at language in freedom; in Russolo’s version, however, language is cast aside and the noise is inscribed on a modified musical staff. The staff is the familiar five lines for bass and treble clefs, and beside each staff are listed the various intonarumori (the ululatori (howlers), the rombatori (roarers), crepitalori (cracklers), etc.)⁵⁰ used in his *Risveglio di una Città* (The Rising of a City).⁵¹ The notation consists of lines which rise up and down horizontally, with each bar divided into three vertical lines to mark duration (Figure 5.1).

There are no recordings of the original machines; however, the 1977 Danielle Lombardi reproduction of the seven surviving bars of *Risveglio* demonstrate that Russolo’s commitment to enharmonic music – that is, to ‘tuning’ noise – was very serious and effective.⁵² Luciano Chessa suggests that for Russolo, and for many other Futurists, this commitment was not simply (or only) to be disruptive or even shocking. Indeed, the focus of



Figure 5.1 Luigi Russolo, *Risveglio di una Città* (The Rising of a City).³³

Chessa's book is how Russolo attempted to combine the mechanics, the materiality of his view of Futurism with a specifically spiritual (and spiritualist) view of the *intonarumori* and the sounds they made. And here, we return again to Leonardo.

Leonardo seems to have believed that painting was superior to the other arts; he believes this is because painting could encompass all 'continuous properties.' As Da Vinci puts it, "Painting deals with all the continuous quantities and also with the qualities of the proportions [degrees] of shades and lights and, thanks to perspective, distances as well." Thus, Russolo's and Leonardo's music machines are linked in their approach to enharmony, which has the property of being intervallically infinitely divisible. Chessa suggests that '[t]hough music unfolds in time, it is active – either harmonically or melodically – in pitch space.'³⁴ By pitch space Chessa means the infinitely divisible space between intervals which, in his view, releases music

from the opposition between vertical, or harmonic intervals, and melodic, or horizontal ones. There is then no priority of one kind of interval over another. Hence, '[t]he relationship with continuous quantities confers spiritual properties on music because continuity, addressing infinite divisibility, is linked to divine perfection.'⁵⁵ Pythagorean balanced proportions are now elided by increasingly small, perhaps not even perceptible, divisions.

It is a remarkable claim that the *intonarumori*, with their uncanny ability to re-play the sounds of the world, especially of the mechanical world of speed and industry, could participate in such a pervasive, and apparently divine, sonority. From this point of view, modernity itself might be somehow sacred. And note how the artist has been transformed: he/she is the one who can re-create nature and culture in the image and likeness of the very machines that aurally, and otherwise, now dominate the present. The artist sees the divine in the most unlikely places, though these places might be so all-encompassing as to give him or her no choice.

At this point we might recall that the expressionists of the early part of the twentieth century also had their own sense of the spirituality of form. There is Wassily Kandinsky, and of course, Schoenberg as well, especially in his *Blaue Reiter* phase. Kandinsky explicitly acknowledges his own interest in theosophy, saying that for Mme. Blavatsky, Theosophy is 'eternal truth.'⁵⁶ Kandinsky goes on to link poetry, music, and painting as the 'most sensitive spheres in which the spiritual revolution makes itself felt.'⁵⁷ However, as T. M. Baudouin suggests in an essay summarizing a diverse group of modern abstract artists, including the Futurists, 'Theosophy' simply reflects the 'complex occult milieu' of the time.⁵⁸ In different ways, this occultism has a certain romantic tinge to it, in that it sees art as 'the universal language,' and the 'Promethean artist... as heralding the "New Era"...' ⁵⁹ More significant, though, is the way this movement toward the 'spiritual' is mixed with a kind of confused connection to science:

Attractive from an artist's point of view was the insistence upon an alternate, astral, possibly four-dimensional reality, in which particular geometrical forms, lines, and colours, of a 'sacred' nature, act as carriers of universal and spiritual truth. Further, Theosophy intermingled occult ideas with the science of the day: promoting the occult fourth dimension/astral Realm, thought-vibration in the form of waves propagating through that realm, occult ether as the conducting agent, and clairvoyant x-ray vision.⁶⁰

Russolo's notion of enharmony, conceived as a harmonic space of infinite divisibility – borrowed from Da Vinci though it is – seems to re-imagine the artist as a kind of spiritual engineer. The paradox

here is clear, and it is perhaps defining of the modernist (and maybe the current) historical moment. It is not simply that art or the aesthetic must struggle against, or somehow adapt to, the all-pervasive presence of modernity, its saturation of all our senses and experiences of being alive. Modernist artists do indeed struggle with this omnipresence of capitalism, technology, science as explanatory, and in ways, reductive presentation of being alive.

In a way, then, the means of finding more depth, significance or 'meaning' beyond or behind or within the mere brute experience of the world is somehow to remold the very material of that world. In a way, that is precisely what Leonardo does with his sense of painting's ability to refashion, or re-present the world with a greater continuity among its diverse elements. Thus, when Russolo adapts Da Vinci so that even apparent noise can be mastered and brought to serve some kind of human purpose, we cannot be surprised that the adaptation becomes predominantly formal. 'Formal,' in Russolo's case, means something closer to a direct confrontation with the fact of sound as such, how to shape it, and give it meaning that in its ordinary randomness it seems not to have. The enharmonic possibilities of the noise machines are indeed their most significant material/ formal dimension. It is a bold, even stunning move to turn directly toward the onslaught of sound, of noise itself, in order to see what it might tell us beyond its ineluctability. However, one of the problems for Russolo, and perhaps for anyone shaping sound in any way at all, is that the mere imitation of noise risks the collapse of the confrontation. If a listener thinks that the *intonarumori* are simply good at reproducing the sound of cars, or airplanes, or the wind in the trees, then the effect is nice, but not important. Nothing is transformed, it is only reproduced.

Barclay Brown points out that Russolo from the outset was concerned that simple imitation was not enough.⁶¹ At the closing of the book, *The Art of Noises*, Russolo attempts to assert the singular *artistic* virtues of his production of noise. He admits that his machines 'borrow[...] the timbres of sounds directly from the timbres of the noises of life,' however, 'the ear must hear these noises mastered, servile, completely controlled, conquered and constrained to become elements of art.'⁶² Thus, even noise must 'lose its accidental character' in order to become 'abstract element[s] of art.'⁶³ The unlinking of noise from its ordinary sources and its domination, make noise worthy of the category of 'art.' It is interesting that, of the passéist notions so derided by the Futurists, the mastery of the artist should still survive. And there is something clearly romantic in his firm belief that the 'artistic coordination of the chaos of noise in life' can become

'our *new acoustical pleasure*.'⁶⁴ The artist can still give shape to an otherwise, and increasingly, incoherent world. It is worth pointing out that later in the century, John Cage would also accept 'noise' as an element of composition; but in Cage's case, 'noise' is accepted into the work, because the artist/ composer now stands away from the piece, offering it up to chance compositional procedures and the artist's apparent lack of domination. Russolo means to take control of at least a piece of modernity itself, its sonic excesses, and to shape them into 'pleasure.'

Thus, in a way, Russolo's language of conquering and controlling noise has a very early twentieth-century – in fact, a pre-World War I – ring to it. 'Progress,' musically and artistically, seems still possible for Russolo. However, Russolo's genius seems to have been in invention, and less clearly in composition or the actual organization of noise for the new acoustical pleasure. Brown tells us that Russolo continued to invent instruments: a *rumorarmonio* "noise harmonium," an enharmonic bow, which could be used on any string instrument, and by 1927, a 'single noise harmonium that could produce the timbres of all his earlier instruments.'⁶⁵ Russolo, however, was not a composer, and, other than his own improvisations, he was dependent on others for his pieces. This was less than satisfying for him; and so he arrives, perhaps without quite knowing it, at the problem that plagued atonal music in its first years: how could a piece of truly *new* music be composed? And, whether or not such a piece uses conventional instruments or Russolo's noise machines, upon what basis could its sounds be organized, made intelligible, if not pleasurable?

For the atonalists, taking the next logical step within a tradition, the problem had to do in part with building larger form structures which had formerly relied upon keys and their relations to make the structure cohere. Without this reliance upon tonality, even small structures such as songs had to depend on external devices such as texts to guide both composer and listener through the piece. For Schoenberg the solution was the twelve-tone system, whose rules for setting out the initial row, the use of its inversion, then the retrograde, and the retrograde inversion would allow for a true compositional discipline. It would also give, at least to the composer, an intelligible means of construction. The ramifications, say, for a composer such as Webern, were that 'the ultimate logic of atonality implied a collapse of narrative structure, and pointed towards the theoretical endpoint of a non-narrative and therefore non-temporal music taking place in a single moment without extension.'⁶⁶ As Wouter Hanegraaff points out, such a recognition could only lead to silence.⁶⁷ However, Schoenberg seems to have come to a similar sense of a new

spatiality for music and he solves the problem differently. Hanegraaff quotes a fairly famous passage from Schoenberg which takes its lead from Swedenborg:

*The unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception. In this space, as in Swedenborg's heaven (described in Balzac's *Seraphita*) there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward. Every musical configuration, every movement of tones has to be comprehended primarily as a mutual relation of sounds, of oscillatory vibrations, appearing at different places and times.*⁶⁸

This sense of space is not quite the same as Chessa's idea of pitch space with its microtonal possibilities of infinite pitch divisibility; however, Schoenberg's dissolution of music's quasi-narrative movement, and his 'heavenly' dismissal of melodic and harmonic opposition bears a striking similarity to Russolo's spiritualistically inspired sense of enharmonia. This spiritual transformation of sound, both well (good?)-tempered or derived from the new sounds of the new world seems to require a kind of new domination of aurality based, perhaps surprisingly, on occult or spiritualist principles – whether or not those principles themselves are obvious or audible.

But such a turn towards space, and in some cases, abstraction, is prevalent in the modern period: whether it is Pound's symbolic echoes across history, Joyce's rigorously overlapping narrative spaces and languages, or Gertrude Stein's spatial presentation of history in *The Geographical History of America*, or the opera, *The Mother of Us All* (and this is to mention very few examples, and only some written in English). Time and space become mixed, even mixed up in the twentieth century, and the kinds of music we have discussed here reflect that. However, we have not answered or really clarified the expressiveness or inexpressiveness, the truthfulness or the deception of these sounds. If the methods of making noise and atonal works have echoed further on into the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, it may still be unclear, in any absolute terms, just what they mean. It is true that noise, in very much Russolo's 'tuned' sense, has melted into musical culture and beyond: Varese's microtonality is evidence, as well as Cage's openness to all sounds. And we hear it as well in the work of Jimi Hendrix, Adrien Bellew, and certainly Brian Eno. Even the other day, an acquaintance described the sound of a very expensive Ferrari (I know little about cars, and even less about Ferraris), and he said that the sound of the motor at 10,000 rpms 'sings.' One can imagine, and a very expensive song it must be. Indeed, whole random concerts must be heard at every car

race, stock car to formula one, all around the world, all the time. Perhaps the meaning of this music is much clearer in its corporate creation. In less rarified and select contexts, the quieter beginnings of dissonance and noise specifically *as* music may still perplex us, though perhaps they point the way to an ongoing need for a different grounding of meaning itself, one which continues, at least in this material world, to elude us.

Notes

- ¹ See, for example, Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 11–36.
- ² See Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. by Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 41–84 on Mallarmé; and Ezra Pound, ‘A Retrospect’ in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. and with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1954), pp. 6–7.
- ³ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. with an introduction by Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 7.
- ⁴ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 115–16.
- ⁵ Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, p. 29.
- ⁶ Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, p. 104.
- ⁷ Speaking of the artistic revolutions occurring in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, Charles Rosen states that ‘[t]he artists, Schoenberg as much as any, were above all aware of taking the next reasonable and logical step, of doing work that was already to hand and that had to be done. To a certain extent, the stylistic revolutions of those years were merely the exploitation of already existent possibilities within artistic languages, the drawing of unavoidable conclusions’ in Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 8.
- ⁸ Since we are speaking of oppositions here, it is worth noting that not everyone was excited by the possibilities of dissonance and noise. Emily Ann Thompson points out that noise abatement was crucial issue in the modern city. She also inadvertently ruins my opposition between atonalists and Futurists by including jazz musicians in the new world of noise: ‘Jazz musicians and avant-garde composers created new kinds of music directly inspired by the noises of the modern world. By doing so they tested long-standing definitions of musical sound, and they challenged listeners to reevaluate their own distinctions between music and noise. Some of these listeners met the challenge and embraced the new music, while others refused to listen.’ Emily Ann Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

- ⁹ Luigi Russolo, 'The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto', in *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. by Daniel Albright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 177–83 (p. 177).
- ¹⁰ Russolo, 'The Art of Noises', p. 178.
- ¹¹ Russolo, 'The Art of Noises', p. 179, emphasis in original.
- ¹² Robert P. Morgan, "'A New Musical Reality": Futurism, Modernism, and "The Art of Noises"', *Modernism/modernity* 1.3 (1994), 139–51, notes that Futurism shared much with other avant garde movements of its time, and that Russolo's call for new musical resources had echoes from the early nineteenth century. However, Morgan also says that Russolo's attempt to make all sounds viable for music, and even perhaps his 'lack of professional [musical] training enabled him to extend his vision beyond the most distant regions of what had previously been musically imaginable.'
- ¹³ Russolo, 'The Art of Noises', p. 183.
- ¹⁴ F. T. Marinetti, 'Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) pp. 49–53 (p. 51).
- ¹⁵ Marjorie Perloff, 'The Audacity of Hope: The Foundational Futurist Manifestos', in *The History of Futurism: The Precursors, Protagonists, and Legacies*, ed. by Geert Buelens, Harald Hendrix and Monica Jansen (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), pp. 9–30 (p. 17).
- ¹⁶ Marinetti, 'Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', p. 51.
- ¹⁷ F. T. Marinetti, 'Electrical War', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman, pp. 98–104 (p. 102).
- ¹⁸ Perloff will point out just how prescient Marinetti is in many of his statements. See Perloff, 'The Audacity of Hope', pp. 17–18.
- ¹⁹ Russolo, 'The Art of Noises', p. 179.
- ²⁰ In Marinetti, *Futurism*, pp. 143–51.
- ²¹ F. T. Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 146.
- ²² A simple google search of *ZANG Tumb Tuumb* will lead the reader to several examples of Marinetti's page design.
- ²³ Jaroslav Andel, *Avant-Garde Page Design, 1900–1950* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002) p. 105, p. 110.
- ²⁴ Andel, *Avant-Garde Page Design, 1900–1950*, p. 105.
- ²⁵ We can hear Marinetti's reading of a portion of the poem on *Musica Futurista: The Art of Noises*. Salon, LTMCD 2401, 2004. Liner notes by James Hayward, CD. The recording was made in 1924.
- ²⁶ In Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, trans. by Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon, 1987), p. 58.
- ²⁷ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 59.
- ²⁸ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 60.
- ²⁹ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 60.
- ³⁰ Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 180.
- ³¹ Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 181.

- ³² In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, pp. 33–5.
- ³³ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) p. 62.
- ³⁴ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 36.
- ³⁵ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, p. 66.
- ³⁶ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, p. 63.
- ³⁷ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 39. Emphasis in original.
- ³⁸ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 40.
- ³⁹ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, p. 81.
- ⁴⁰ Luciano Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 174.
- ⁴¹ Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult*, pp. 206–7.
- ⁴² Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult*, p. 174, pp. 178–80.
- ⁴³ Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult*, p. 185.
- ⁴⁴ Francesco Balilla Pratella, 'Futurist Music: Technical Manifesto', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 80–84 (p. 81).
- ⁴⁵ Pratella, *Futurism*, p. 82.
- ⁴⁶ Pratella, *Futurism*, p. 84, emphasis in original.
- ⁴⁷ Fillipo Becarria, liner notes, *Giorgio Federico Ghedini, Concerto dell' abbatro, Francesco Balilla Pratella, Trio op. 28*, Bongiovanni GB 5501-2, 1987. CD.
- ⁴⁸ *Musica Futurista*. James Hayward, liner notes. 2004. Salon 2401. CD. This CD has five recordings of intonarumori, one of which attempts to re-create the seven extant bars of *Risveglio di una Città*. It also gives examples of the gurgler, the buzzer, the hooter, and the crackler. The instruments were reconstructed and the examples performed by Danielle Lombardi for the 1977 Venice Biennale. The recorded performance is from 1978. There is a very brief fragment from Pratella's *L'Aviatore Dro* (1914) on Youtube. There is absolutely no information on when this film was recorded or by whom. The recording seems very good. Search 'Balilla Pratella – AVIATORE DRO – Fragment with Intonarumori.' I have been unable to find any complete recordings of this piece, perhaps because it is only in the last few years that people have been able to figure out how to make intonarumori.
- ⁴⁹ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 68.
- ⁵⁰ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, pp. 72–73.
- ⁵¹ The Lombardi reproductions are on *Musica Futurista*. Salon, LTMCD 2401, 2004. CD. More recently, though, on Youtube one can find many recent, and different, demonstrations of these machines. One of the best is 'Music For 16 Futurist Noise Intoners.'
- ⁵² See notes 36 and 38.
- ⁵³ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 72. With thanks to Pendragon Press for permission to reproduce this image.
- ⁵⁴ Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult*, p. 192.
- ⁵⁵ Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult*, p. 192.

- ⁵⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), p. 13.
- ⁵⁷ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 14.
- ⁵⁸ Tessel M. Bauduin, 'Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5.1 (2012), 23–55 (p. 47).
- ⁵⁹ Bauduin, 'Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century', pp. 47–8.
- ⁶⁰ Bauduin, 'Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century', p. 48.
- ⁶¹ Barclay Brown, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Noises*, by Luigi Russolo (1916), trans. by Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), p. 18.
- ⁶² In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 86, p. 87.
- ⁶³ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 87.
- ⁶⁴ In Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, p. 87, emphasis in original.
- ⁶⁵ Brown, 'Introduction', pp. 7, 8.
- ⁶⁶ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'The Unspeakable and the Law', in *Music and Esotericism*, ed. by Laurence Wuidar, *Aries Book Series, Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism*, vol. 9, Editor-in-Chief, Marco Pasi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 328–53 (p. 346). Arnold Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones', *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. by Leonard Stein, trans. by Leo Black (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 214–245 (p. 223), emphasis in original.
- ⁶⁷ Hanegraaff, 'The Unspeakable and the Law', p. 347.
- ⁶⁸ Hanegraaff, 'The Unspeakable and the Law', p. 346. Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones', pp. 214–45 (p. 223), emphasis in original.

PART II

Development

CHAPTER 6

Literary Soundscapes

Helen Groth

Writers conjure and orchestrate patterns of words on the page to generate sound effects, but not always in the interests of sense, as Joyce's magisterial acoustic experiment, *Finnegans Wake*, exemplifies, or his onomatopoeic transcriptions of everyday sounds in *Ulysses*, which give literal form to the inchoate stream of acoustic phenomena that strike Bloom's ears as he wanders the streets of Dublin. Like so many of his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century precursors, sound is integral to the form of Joyce's narratives. The difference lies in the techniques Joyce, or alternatively, Sterne, Dickens or Woolf, for example, enlist to construct and make sense of their respective sound worlds, techniques which overlap with and reconfigure an equally diverse array of contemporary sonic forms and media.

This chapter approaches the literary soundscape as a construct that is most usefully explored and understood through a close analysis of forms of writing for which sound is both formally and thematically integral. Using Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', as a theoretical spine, this chapter examines the implications of Woolf's contention that certain forms of writing are no longer possible in a modern sound world.¹ While the future and past of literary form may be Woolf's primary preoccupation, her essay continuously circles around the extent to which literary form is not only altered or re-ordered by its immediate sonic environment, but is continuous with it. In other words, the literary soundscape, to extend the implications of Woolf's essay for the argumentative purposes of this chapter, is not divorced from the social or natural sound world in which it is created and consumed, it is of it, in it, and contributes to its construction. Sound does not intrude on literary form, nor does it need to be filtered or silenced so the real work of literary writing and reading can be done.² As Rita Felski so lucidly reminds us, works of art 'by default, are linked to other texts, objects, people, and institutions in relations of dependency, involvement, and interaction. They are entangled,

engaged, embattled, embroiled, and embedded.³ Woolf, of course, put it slightly differently, but the implications of her contention, that it is impossible, to use one of her many examples, for modern writers to produce dramatic verse like Shakespeare in the absence of the noise of Elizabethan street life, aligns with Felski's contention that 'works of art cannot help being social, sociable, connected, worldly, immanent.'⁴ Accordingly, the letters, words, lines take shape on the page in radically different ways depending on the sound world in which they are embedded.

'Soundscape' is a term that is often used loosely in the context of discussions about whether literature represents, mediates, or registers sound. R. Murray Schafer's seminal definitional elucidation of the soundscape shares Woolf's interest in both the changes and ecological ravages wrought by modernity, and, like her essay, is interwoven with literary exempla that embed poetry and fiction – past, present, and future – in the process of conceiving of, and defining what, a soundscape is, beginning with the following lines from Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*:

Now I will do nothing but listen ...
I hear all sounds running together, combined,
Fused or following,
Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds
of the day and night.⁵

Whitman's lines energetically materialise the process of listening. Invoked in this way, Schafer accords Whitman the status of what he variously characterises as an ear-witness or soundscape analyst. Soundscape analysts, using the techniques or tools afforded them by the system or form in which they work, are tasked with discovering and categorising the 'significant features of the soundscape', its keynote sounds, signals, and sound-marks, as well as the occasional archetypal sound (mysterious ancient sounds inherited from antiquity).⁶ Both keynote and archetypal sounds can be voluntarily or involuntarily registered, in contrast to signals and sound marks, which are consciously listened to and formally distinguish one soundscape from another.

Extrapolating from Schafer, the soundscape is a network of related sounds and sound patterns, the latter of which might take literary form, but could just as easily take musical or architectural form, or that of a natural landscape. Schafer conceived of literature in particular as a sonic archive. He characterised the acoustic precision of writers such as Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Mann, and William Faulkner, as a form

of 'ear-witnessing', singling out their exemplary ability to render the soundscapes of their respective cultures and times, a mimetic emphasis augured by his opening invocation of Whitman as an exemplary response to a rapidly changing modern sonic environment. Woolf, unsurprisingly, takes a more nuanced approach to how literary form shapes and is shaped by its immediate soundscape. Poetry and 'the book', as she calls it, are constantly reconfigured and redefined by the sounds of the world around them, rather than functioning as a descriptive mimetic repertoire for literary soundscape analysts to mobilise to accurately capture their respective sonic environments. This is why the literary realism of her immediate precursors, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens had limited appeal for Woolf, and why, as this chapter will discuss, she also responded so unevenly to the realist inclinations of more immediate contemporaries, such as Elizabeth Bowen. Instead, Woolf finds the ideal template for the future of 'the book' in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, a seemingly unlikely choice, but one that provided the space to theorise how a literary soundscape might afford a different, more attentive kind of listening to the sounds of the everyday than either Dickens or Brontë offered for her generation of modern writers.

Defining the Modern Soundscape

If it was no longer possible in 1927 to channel the expressive energy of Shakespeare's plays, which formed the 'perfectly elastic envelope of his thought,' into the confined channels of modern poetry and fiction, Woolf wanted to know why:

What has changed, what has happened, what has put the writer now at such an angle that he cannot pour his mind straight into the old channels of English poetry? Some sort of answer may be suggested by a walk through the streets of any large town. The long avenue of brick cut up into boxes, each of which is inhabited by a different human being who has put locks on his doors and bolts on his windows to ensure some privacy, yet is linked to his fellows by wires which pass overhead, by waves of sound which pour through the roof and speak aloud to him of battles and murders and strikes and revolutions all over the world.⁷

Modern writers, Woolf suggests, listened differently and to a radically altered sonic environment. In place of the unmediated collective chaos of Woolf's version of Shakespeare's sound-world, new forms of connectivity rewired minds to register and communicate in forms that reflected

the atomisation of lives now lived in 'long avenues of brick cut up into boxes' and deafened to the point of desensitisation by the news of a world consumed by violence that they are powerless to change. What Woolf captures so vividly in this characteristically literary rendering of the soundscape of modern life, is as much a changed perception of the environment as an alteration of the material environment itself. Listening to the radio assumes a beleaguered solipsistic form in Woolf's essay. The radio's promise of 'connective sociability', to borrow David Trotter's term, constitutes a threat to privacy in this essay.⁸ Although, as Randi Koppen argues, Woolf's increasing ambivalence towards the radio's intrusions into the modern literary soundscape oscillated between happily participating in broadcasts, and remarking on the distractions of the increased acoustic stimulus of a range of new media. The latter concern is most notably expressed in her address to the WEA in Brighton in 1940:

Scott never saw the sailors drowning at Trafalgar; Jane Austen never heard the cannon roar at Waterloo. Neither of them heard Napoleon's voice as we hear Hitler's voice as we sit at home of an evening.⁹

Woolf assumes here that to hear the harsh staccato rhythms of Hitler's voice broadcast nightly, for example, necessarily altered what it was possible to write in the face of such horror and uncertainty. The noise and grotesquery of war is a constant presence for modern writers, setting them apart from the more uncomplicated embrace of new media, of Woolf's nineteenth-century precursors, such as Scott, Austen or Dickens.¹⁰ These various perceptions of interconnected media and soundscapes also confirm Emily Thompson's definition of a soundscape as both a physical environment and a cultural construction of that world that incorporates technological and aesthetic ways of listening, as well as 'a listener's relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what.'¹¹ As Thompson argues, following the influential work of Alain Corbin, the 'physical aspects of a soundscape' include not only sounds, 'the waves of acoustical energy permeating the atmosphere in which people live, but also the material objects that create, and sometimes destroy, those sounds.'¹² These material forms might include new electro-acoustic devices, as well as musical concerts, radio broadcasts, and motion picture sound tracks, according to Thompson, but they could equally include dissonant or harmonising literary forms.

Woolf's interest lies in the challenge the 'soundscape of modernity', to poach Thompson's term, poses to the writer and critic, the duty of the latter being 'to tell us, or to guess at least, where we are going.'¹³ The challenge,

in other words, of belatedly fashioning new literary forms in the absence of the simpler times that nurtured the expressive freedom of the Elizabethan dramatists or, more recently still, for Woolf at least, Keats's romantic rendering of the ecstatic aesthetic unity unleashed by the unequivocal beauty of a nightingale's song. In 1927, Woolf argues, modern poets might hear a nightingale singing on a spring night, but they also register the sounds and sights of 'a diseased old woman [...] picking over her greasy rags on a hideous iron bench.'¹⁴ In Eliot's urban wasteland, Keats's nightingale now sings 'jug jug to dirty ears.'¹⁵ Limited to the expression of discordant 'quick, queer emotions which are bred in small separate rooms' poetry's accents are too marked and emphatic to channel the emotions of 'the modern mind.'¹⁶ Woolf speculates that this task will fall to a new kind of book, written in a different kind of prose which will eschew the 'marvellous fact-recording power' of the 'sociological novel or the novel of environment.'¹⁷ This new prose will 'listen silently at doors behind which only a murmur, only a whisper, is to be heard. With all the suppleness of a tool which is in constant use it can follow the windings and record the changes which are typical of the modern mind.'¹⁸ These sentences summon strange images of books as listening bodies, secreted behind doors with ears peaked to capture the most elusive vocal trace, a whisper or murmur, or, alternatively, of books as investigative tools or instruments with the supple technical capacity to record the otherwise inaudible sounds of the modern mind as it struggles to process the emotional noise of the 'queer conglomeration of incongruous things' of everyday life in 1927.¹⁹

Woolf cannot quite summon the kind of prose that can 'chant the elegy, or hymn the love, or shriek the terror' as a poet does.²⁰ Having dispensed with incantation and mystery, rhyme and meter, Woolf also dispenses with novelists who 'force their instrument', like George Meredith's 'Diversion on a Penny Whistle' in *Richard Feverel*, or Charlotte Brontë in the final storm scene in *Villette*, defying their readers' expectations that they will stand 'close up to life' and capture every detail in the rhythms of prose, not poetry.²¹ Woolf turns instead to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* as an historical precedent for a future book that adopts a different rhythm: that stands back from life and eschews the descriptive labour of realist prose. Where his Victorian successors strain against prosaic limits, Woolf argues, Sterne 'laughs, sneers, cuts some indecent ribaldry and passes on', his fluid movements between modes unremarked by his entranced readers. To demonstrate her point, she cites Sterne's reflection on the transience of writing from the end of the eighth chapter of *Tristram Shandy*:

Time wastes too fast: every letter I trace tells me with what rapidity life follows my pen; the days and hours of it more precious – my dear Jenny – than the rubies about thy neck, are flying over our heads like light clouds of a windy day, never to return more; everything presses on – whilst thou are twisting that lock – see!²²

Freed from the burden of detailed observation, Woolf's new literary form will, like Sterne's prose, sweep and circle, removed and yet attuned to the idiosyncratic pleasures of 'human character in daily life.'²³ The choice of these lines to exemplify the ideal form of a future fiction, however, taken from a moment in the book when Tristram concedes his failure to out-write his own mortality, unsettles the muted optimism of Woolf's search for literary precursors. Following immediately on from Tristram's assertion that his book deserves to 'swim down the gutter of Time along with' William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1765) and Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1702), these lines read like a last gasp of poetic clarity penned despite the afflictions and distractions of everyday life. Harkening back to the opening volume of the book, this concession to the exigencies of time also contrasts with 'the tracing' of 'everything' that Tristram promises his 'history of myself' will achieve.²⁴ At this juncture in the narrative Tristram begins by advising readers uninterested in the details of his life history to leave, and literally draws a line across the page with the instruction 'Shut the door', a residually theatrical spatial demarcation that gestures towards a virtual soundscape behind closed doors for 'the curious and inquisitive' reader.²⁵

Shut the door

It is unclear whether Woolf was specifically referencing this shut door when she envisaged books listening silently at doors to catch every whisper, but there is, nevertheless, an unexpected rhetorical alignment between close listening and literary futurity in both Woolf and Sterne. The future of literary form in both texts depends on readers listening to literary voices that break through the noise and distraction of everyday communication, that speak otherwise and create alternative pathways through the soundscape that they inhabit.

Coleridge might have been another touchstone for Woolf's aerial version of future fictions. He likens reading to listening and writing to a form of sounding in [chapter 14](#) of *Biographia Literaria*: 'The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but [...] like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes,

and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which carries him onward.²⁶ To trace a path of sound through air, like Sterne's poetic fractured sentences, or the sweeps and circling movements of Woolf's future prose, is to suggest a literary approximation of music, a form that refuses the constraints of mimesis, and the burden of recording every sound, yet still organises noise into encoded forms of 'perceiving the world', to adapt Jacques Attali.²⁷ This might be described as the internal soundscape created by certain kinds of writing, experimental prose, or lyric poetry, for example, as opposed to the seemingly indiscriminate soundscape evoked by Dickens, Meredith or Charlotte Brontë, to return to Woolf's examples.

Coleridge's reflections serve as a fitting epigraph to Garrett Stewart's *Reading Voices*, which theorises reading as a form of embodied sounding, an 'acoustics of textuality' or mode of listening that speaks 'silently the turmoil of wording itself before and athwart the regime of words' (see [Chapter 11](#)).²⁸ Stewart's conception of a literary soundscape, although he never uses this terminology, is predicated on a close attention to what he terms the 'differential fundament of textuality', which he argues is overlooked in historicising interpretations of reading as voicing and listening as speaking.²⁹ Stewart's method requires the reader be on 'hypersensitive alert' to the subvocalic phonemic patterning of literary language, and, consequently, to what a 'text itself reads, and is silently overheard to do', a method that, in turn, resists the conservative hierarchy and aesthetic biases of traditional stylistics.³⁰

In light of Stewart's method, it is worth pressing further on one of Woolf's examples of when nineteenth-century novelists 'force their instrument' and defy their readers' expectations that their prose will stand close up to life. This is typified, in Woolf's view, by the final storm scene in Brontë's *Villette*, which is insistently disruptive and disrupted by hyphens, semi-colons, repetition and exclamations that force the prose towards something approximating free verse form:

The sun passes the equinox; the days shorten, the leaves grow sere; but – he is coming.

Frosts appear at night; November has sent his fogs in advance; the wind takes its autumn moan; but – he is coming.

...

The wind shifts to the west. Peace, peace, Banshee – 'keening' at every window! It will rise – it will swell – it shrieks out long: wander as I may through the house this night, I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong; by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm.³¹

The rhythm and shape of these lines is not prosaic enough for Woolf, in a novel that, unlike *Tristram Shandy*, has made a stylistic promise to stand close up to life. These final lines of the novel also echo another earlier acoustically charged reverie triggered by a storm, when Lucy sits beside the dying Miss Marchmont's bed:

Three times in the course of my life, events had taught me that these strange accents in the storm – this restless, hopeless cry – denote a coming state of the atmosphere unpropitious to life. Epidemic diseases, I believed, were often heralded by a gasping, sobbing, tormented, long-lamenting east wind. Hence, I inferred, arose the legend of the Banshee.³²

Extracted in this way, the registers of these passages jar. The heightened, onomatopoeic prose Brontë enlists to animate the final storm scene, materialises how Lucy listened differently to the previous storm. The Banshee, once easily rationalised away, keens at every window. Disinhibited by fear Lucy can no longer muffle and distance the immediacy of the storm's violence and noise with the matter of fact tone of the retrospective first person. It 'will rise – it will swell' and consume the present and future. Lucy 'cannot lull the blast.'³³

Whether these jarring registers constitute a stylistic failing, however, as Woolf would have it, hinges on a form of aesthetic snobbery that in 1927 was fortified by relegating the work of Brontë, Dickens, Meredith, and other novelists, whose style equated to 'standing up close' to life, to a Victorian soundscape that no longer resonated with lives lived in modernist interiors filled with the disembodied voices of the radio or gramophone. A less rigidly periodised reading method could argue otherwise: that despite the stylistic variations between Brontë's *Villette* and Woolf, in essayistic and fictional modes, both experimented syllable by syllable with literary sounding, pre-emptively orchestrating the reader's affective response at the most fundamental level of the word. Setting aside Woolf's arbitrary distinction between Modernist and Victorian style, what makes Brontë a failure in Woolf's eyes is precisely the same characteristic that she praises in Shakespeare, the creation of a literary form that is not only responsive to the acoustics of its immediate social environment, but makes those sounds intrinsic to its rhythms, metaphors, syntactic patterning. This distinction intentionally echoes Caroline Levine's recent definition of a new kind of formalism that challenges long held assumptions about the specificity of literary form.³⁴ Drawing on Rancière, Levine argues that given 'the work of form' is 'to make order', to pattern and to shape, forms and forming are as intrinsic to political and social life as they are

to literature.³⁵ This idea translates into how the sounds of everyday life are intrinsic rather than extrinsic to literary form – for Shakespeare this means the dynamism, chaos and energy of Elizabethan street life is not simply represented by, but integral to, the form his dramatic verse takes, or, in the case of Brontë or Dickens, their novels not only represent but are integrally shaped by the sounds of Victorian life, from the slam of a door, the rattling window frame on a winter's night, to the noisy bustle of crowded London streets and markets. In Levine's schema, the important difference between forms lies in both the specificity of historical situations in which they circulate or overlap, and the 'limited potentialities' afforded to a particular shape, form or pattern.³⁶ Affordance, a term Levine derives from design theory, offers a more capacious method for identifying continuities between the acoustic richness of Elizabethan dramatic verse, the reflexively comic materialism of Sterne, the expansive polyphony of the Victorian novel and the experimental rigour of modernist prose, than Woolf's chronological, genre-based narration of the past and future of fiction and poetry.

Levine's rethinking of social and literary form also helps to reframe how sound works in the apparent silence of the reading process. 'Literary forms and social formations are equally real in their capacity to organise materials, and equally *unreal* in being artificial, contingent constraints,' as Levine puts it.³⁷ The question then becomes not – how close do they bring the reader to 'real life' or, how to hear or unlock the suppressed sounds of the real world from inside the constraints of their prose, but rather – how do the sounds and voices their novels capture, import, or converge with extra-textual forms or structures for hearing, voicing, sounding? To return, for example, to the first storm in *Villette*, in which Lucy narrates how she overcame her superstitious fear of the Banshee – 'Epidemic diseases, I believed, were often heralded by a gasping, sobbing, tormented, long lamenting east wind. Hence, I inferred, arose the legend of the Banshee.'³⁸ Retrospectively inserted by an older, more circumspect narrative I, the authoritative, rational tone of these sentences strikes an inauthentic note. Lucy's attempt to channel the vocal patterns of a more authoritative voice to silence the associative noise in her mind, as she sits alone listening to the violent chaos of the storm outside, exposes the psychological strain 'rational' thinking requires from her in moments of emotional distress. Mixing registers by migrating different patterns of words, conversations, and voices, across the boundary between forms is, in this context, less a failure of style and more a symptom of a dynamically plural formalism. This method of reading Lucy's ventriloquising would seem to

approximate Levine's methodological move away from 'reading aesthetic forms as indexes of social life' and towards a method that considers the ways in which 'literary and social forms come in contact and affect one another, without presuming that one is the ground or cause of the other.'³⁹ This method also has much in common with Felski's refusal of the dichotomous treatment of 'the social' and 'the literary' aspects of literary form, with which this essay began.⁴⁰

Defining Victorian Soundscapes

John Picker's influential reading of Dickens's fictional and journalistic writing on the sounds of modern life as quintessentially Victorian soundscapes shares some of the characteristics of Levine's methodological stress on networked and overlapping forms.⁴¹ Ultimately, however, Picker tends to read Dickens's writing, as well as George Eliot's novels and Tennyson's verse, for indices of a Victorian soundscape reverberating with the noise of the railway and the rapid urbanisation it catalysed.⁴² Picker anchors his reading of *Dombey and Son*, for example, in the following description of train travel from an essay published in *Household Words* in 1851:

Bang! We have let another Station off, and fly away regardless. Everything is flying. The hop-gardens turn gracefully towards me, presenting regular avenues of hops in rapid flight, then whirl away. So do the pools and rushes, haystacks, sheep, clover in full bloom delicious to sight and smell, corn-sheaves, cherry-orchards, apple-orchards, reapers, gleaners, hedges, gates, fields that taper off into little angular corners, cottages, gardens, now and then a church. Bang, bang! A double-barrelled Station! Now a wood, now a bridge, now a landscape, now a cutting, now a – Bang! A single-barrelled Station – there was a cricket match somewhere with two white tents, and then four flying cows, then turnips – now, the wires of the electric telegraph are all alive, and spin, and blur their edges, and go up and down, and make their intervals between each other most irregular: contracting and expanding in the strangest manner. Now we slacken. With a screwing, and a grinding, and a smell of water thrown on ashes, now we stop!⁴³

After noting that Dickens's style comes 'close to representing a pure rush of speed' in this passage, with its 'outward projection of subjective responses,' Picker moves quickly to elaborate the causal connections between the social changes associated with railway travel and Dickens's dynamic prose more generally.⁴⁴ Citing the railway boom and the shift in reading practices prompted by the rapid expansion of the railway book-stall business as catalysts, Picker makes his diagnosis – the soundscapes

Dickens constructs both in the above essay, and in similar passages in *Dombey and Son*, are orchestrated responses to the 'uneasy sensation that the roar of authorial expression might not be heard above the shriek of the express train.'⁴⁵ While this may be true, Picker fails to attend to what Garrett Stewart calls 'the differential fundament of textuality' in his rush to read this passage as a symptom of broader changes to the sound world in which Dickens's fiction is immersed.⁴⁶ Every syllable matters in this passage, so too the syntactic patterning that transcribes the rhythms of the train at the micro level – of a hyphen, an exclamation mark or full stop. The reiterative 'Bang!' truncates the dynamic, visual sequence of scenes moving before the traveller's eyes, triggering a sudden shift from eye to ear. So too, Dickens's familiar reliance on anaphora, that moves the reader through the passage, simulating urgency through repetition.

More generally, Dickens's formal experimentation in overtly virtuosic passages like these in both his journalism and novels, assumes a fundamental continuity with, rather than a reactive separation from, the soundscape that the railway or the telegraph generated (see also [Chapter 14](#)). Rather than an anxiety about his work going unheard amidst the hubbub, as Picker suggests, there is a formal ambition here that asserts Dickens's style of prose as the future of literary form. To elaborate further, the future of fiction lies, for Dickens at least, in his ambitious capacity to absorb and reconfigure 'the hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream' that now constitute its environment, to invoke his rhythmic evocation of the desiccated London suburb of Staggs's Gardens from *Dombey and Son*.⁴⁷

When the narrator returns to Staggs's Gardens at a later point in the novel to find 'the hundred thousand shapes and substances' he had listed off have vanished, the allegorical omniscient narration orchestrates a particularly literary mode of listening to the rumbling sounds of industrial production that manages its affects without being subsumed by them:

Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours, produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. Wonderful Members of Parliament, who, little more than twenty years before, had made themselves merry with the wild railroad theories of engineers, and given them the liveliest rubs in cross-examination, went down into the north with their watches in their hands, and sent messages before by the electric telegraph to say that they

were coming. Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge.⁴⁸

Expanding from a single encounter with a streetscape, Dickens's prose draws the entire industrial revolution into a few resonant, capacious sentences. This stylistic condensation reinforces the narrator as the still point amidst the flux of change and ensures that the reader registers the amplification of sound and interconnectedness that modern life entails. As in the passage quoted above from 'A Flight', the telegraph is internal to the dense associative network Dickens mobilises here to construct the sound world of the new Staggs's Gardens. No longer a single street in an isolated part of London, Staggs's Gardens is subsumed into a nationalised network by the condensing accelerations of Dickens's syntax, in which fantastic similes allow trains to assume the form of 'tame dragons' in the wake of what then become equally surreal images of modern efficiency, modern politicians imagining that the chaos of the world around them can be orchestrated by the regular rhythms of clock time and telegraphic communication.

In 'A Flight' the omniscient narrator likewise positions the reader inside the train carriage looking out, a silent still point, in effect, around which everything moves and sounds. In the above passage from 'A Flight' even the telegraph, typically a signifier of modern interconnectedness for Dickens, akin to Woolf's description of the radio-networked minds of modern readers, is listed off, along with sheep, cows, tents and turnips, as just one more material object fleetingly registered. The form of Dickens's prose reroutes the telegraph in this way, not as an alternative or analogous medium of information, but as a sound effect that spins, blurs and whirrs in the background. The literal word 'telegraph' signals its own incidental presence, part of a listing of random objects and acoustic effects that is continuous with, rather than antithetical to, the formal ambitions of Dickens's late style.

This reading of Dickens slightly recalibrates Richard Menke's argument for the electric telegraph as a salient analogue for the complex interconnected networks of characters that populate a novel such as *Dombey and Son*. Menke argues that: 'the telegraphic message confirms that a coherent structure of unseen connections is already in place. Running overhead and underwater, the telegraph wire actualises the imaginary links that Dickens highlights in his novels.'⁴⁹ In fact, in both 'A Flight' and *Dombey*

and Son Dickens reverses the process of representation Menke describes. It is the sheer force of Dickens's prose, not the telegraph, that materialises the 'unseen connection' between people and places that both telegraphic and railway systems enabled. Dickens's literary soundscapes are thus anything but a simple process of 'listening at the door' of real life, as Woolf would have it.

The modernist cliché that realist style naively aspired to its own invisibility and inaudibility – its 'sheer fact recording power' to quote Woolf – assumes causal links between literary and extra-literary phenomena, including a radical discontinuity between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century sound worlds and literary forms, rather than observing the way literary soundscapes have long imagined different forms of connection and ways of listening to and out for previously unregistered links between forms, spaces and environments. This shift away from causality (historical or otherwise) is indebted to Bruno Latour's argument for networks and observing points or patterns of contact, and Levine's reworking of Latour's method in her reconsideration of literary form as both a network and networked, but with one minor variation that speaks to those working at the intersection of literary and sound studies.⁵⁰ To adapt Latour's method to fit Woolf's conceit of a future fiction that will 'listen at the door', whilst resisting recording every fact, listening in this sense is about contact, receptivity, and assemblage, not resistance, suppression, or alienation.⁵¹ A literary soundscape can and should be understood as a distinct form of connecting with other sound worlds and media, but not in the sense of struggling to be heard above the noise of contemporary media, whether that be the telegraph, the radio or gramophone, but as a distinctive resonant patterning of words that recalibrates and interconnects with these media, as well as other forms and modes of hearing and sounding.

Future Soundscapes

Elizabeth Bowen shared Dickens's predilection for omniscient narration, acoustic metaphor, and rhythmic syntactic patterns that typically configured into conflict and tension. She once described her writing process to an interviewer thus: 'The idea for a book usually comes to me in the shape of an abstract pattern. Then the job is to construct characters to fit the situation.'⁵² Woolf, who typically admired Bowen, characterised reading her prose in a slightly less positive way: 'I feel you're like somebody trying to throw a lasso with a knotted rope.'⁵³ Too much space covered by an uneven

form, is one way of decoding the implications of this casual witty aside, in which Woolf's characteristic acuity exposes the competing impulses that shape Bowen's fiction. Bowen, in turn, read Woolf avidly. She admired Woolf's talent for summoning the voices of the past. 'Neither the coldness of print nor the stretch of time separated her from anyone who had lived,' Bowen observed in a review of Woolf's essay collection *The Death of the Moth* in 1942.⁵⁴ She also seized on Woolf's negative characterisation of realism in a later review of *A Writer's Diary* in 1954, which echoed Woolf's earlier dismissal of realism as the past rather than the future of fiction in 1927: 'the narrative business of the realist: getting from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional. Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry – by which I mean saturated?'⁵⁵ Yet for Bowen, whose writing life spanned most of the twentieth century, the future of fiction was continuous with the things of modern life that got her characters from lunch to dinner. To quote Maud Ellmann, Bowen was compelled by 'the narrative business of the realist' that released her from the 'archaic phantoms of the mind' into the world 'of cars and cocktails, typewriters and telephones.'⁵⁶

Ellmann's retrieval of Bowen's prose from the critical margins is a fitting conclusion to a chapter on various methods of thinking about and theorising literary soundscapes. Ellmann describes her own critical method as an attempt 'to listen' to the ways in which Bowen 'knocks' and 'batters' at the edifice of social realism.⁵⁷ For Ellmann to listen is intimately tied to psychoanalysis and close reading. But with a writer such as Bowen, for whom character is usurped by 'cars and cocktails, typewriters and telephones', the task of getting the text to spill its secrets requires returning the reader to the senses, to the sound world through which her characters move, a world in which inner and outer, literary and non-literary forms reverberate and echo. When Bowen describes how she writes, she speaks of the simple pleasure she gleans from the noise of the typewriter, or, sometimes how certain sounds blur the line between fictional and 'real' worlds, as she does in the 1949 Preface to a re-edition of *Encounters*: 'the convulsive gratings of my chair on the board floor were hyper-significant to me: here were sensuous witnesses to my crossing the margin of a hallucinatory world.'⁵⁸ The grating chair, to return to Schafer's schema, with which this chapter began, becomes a keynote, involuntarily registered, ambient sound that crosses the margin into the hallucinatory world of the short fictions that follow.

The future of fiction is intimately tied to sound and, more particularly, radio, for Bowen. In a 1969 review of Angus Calder's *The People's War* Bowen argued that the Blitz triggered a need for the kind of collective acoustic

experience only the radio could provide: 'Sound made for community of sensation, was emotive (which was required) ... The desideratum was not to *address* the masses but to speak as one of them.'⁵⁹ She attempted to realise her own literary version of this 'community of sensation' in her work for the BBC's 'The Third Programme' which was designed to bring 'highbrow' culture to a general global audience through adaptations of novels, documentaries, learned conversations, and classical music. Reflecting on the programme in 1947 Bowen observed:

Language can put out a majesty in its sheer sound, even apart from sense: in poetry and, at its greatest, prose, this becomes apparent. My own feeling is that in listening to spoken (or broadcast) speech, we have listened for sense too much and for sound too little.⁶⁰

The mediated voice as soundscape compelled Bowen, drawing her to continuously experiment with the radio as a literary network, or networked form. To be immersed in sound, to surrender to the sensory rather than the sensible, was continuous with Bowen's enduring fascination with voice and dialogue in her own fiction. As Allan Hepburn observes:

For Bowen, sound is a form of drama. In her novels and short stories, she attends to dialogue and sudden intrusion of sound as events heightened in magnitude, often devastating in their consequences. The noise of a lorry changing gears on a distant hill or the blare of a gramophone in a seaside house causes fear or dazedness in those who listen.⁶¹

Hepburn shares Ellmann's critical stress on listening to and in Bowen. Sound 'imputed only to unliving things,' as Ellmann puts it, continuously unsettles and 'mocks the notion that human beings can command their destiny.'⁶²

The sheer excitement of Bowen's account of the first broadcast of 'The Third Programme' on 29 September 1946, puts a very different inflection on networked minds and domestic interiors to Woolf's gloomy, solipsistic, pre-war vision of the future of fiction and poetry:

September 29, 1946, was the day; that day, I cannot imagine that any listener tuning in at 6 P.M. to the wave-length was without some tremor of the dramatic sense. Clocks were set; a queer critical silence pervaded rooms. New aesthetic history was going into the making.⁶³

Bowen's 'high-brow' vision for the programme jars with the reality that over a third of the audience for 'The Third Programme' were working class, according to the social historian Asa Briggs.⁶⁴ This suggests a diversity that is absent from Bowen's homogenous vision of hushed bourgeois interiors filled with like-minded souls awaiting the turning of the hour.

Yet Bowen's vision of interconnected minds and spaces is also more expansive, optimistic, and global in its impulse than Woolf's vision of the inherent fragility of homes connected to world events beyond their ken or control. While she may be guilty at times of the same snobbish unease about popular media and middle-brow style that inflects Woolf's fears for the future of fiction and poetry, Bowen is a creature of the future literary soundscape Woolf struggles to imagine in 1927. Unlike Woolf, Bowen's radio work only served to intensify her awareness of the intrinsic limitations of elitism: 'Stress on style, manner, execution, if necessary virtuosity – can we now, have too much of that?'⁶⁵

Despite its limitations, Woolf's essay, as this chapter demonstrates, offers a typically nuanced and formally attuned theorisation of the relationship between literature and sound. Networked, overlapping, and interconnected, Woolf's polemical open-ended prose enacts the theoretical complexity of its argument at a formal level, ranging across time and space, reminding contemporary readers of her continuing relevance as a theorist of literary form, its echoes, patterns and resonances. Woolf's reflections on the future of fiction and poetry are surprisingly under-utilised. Inherently resistant to any one critical system or method, her essay nevertheless presses at a question that continues to haunt contemporary literary criticism – what does the future of fiction sound like? And who is listening? The closest Woolf comes to an answer to this question is to press on the point that the novel and poetry are relational, networked forms. The key to the novel's survival, Woolf ultimately contends, lies in its flexibility and responsiveness, its capacity to 'take the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things – the modern mind.'⁶⁶ But what will constitute both the underlying keynotes and soundscape of this future fiction remains as elusive now, as it was for Woolf in 1927.

Notes

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction, and the Future', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, vol. 4 (London: Harcourt, 1994), pp. 428–41. All future references are to this edition of Woolf's 1927 essay.

² It is, however, important to note the considerable historical work on noise, and street noise, in particular, literally disrupting the work of writing, see, for example, John Picker's influential account of writers in nineteenth-century London protesting against the incursion of street music into their work spaces in *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 11.

- ⁴ Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p. 11.
- ⁵ Cited in R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1977), p. 3.
- ⁶ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 9.
- ⁷ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', pp. 428–41. Original publication of the essay was 1927, pp. 432–3.
- ⁸ David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 43.
- ⁹ Cited in Randi Koppen, 'Rambling Round Words: Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Broadcasting', in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, ed. by Matthew Feldman, Erik Tonning and Henry Mead (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 147.
- ¹⁰ Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age*, p. 43.
- ¹¹ Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 1.
- ¹² Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, p. 1.
- ¹³ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 429.
- ¹⁴ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 433.
- ¹⁵ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 433.
- ¹⁶ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 434.
- ¹⁷ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 435.
- ¹⁸ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 436.
- ¹⁹ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 436.
- ²⁰ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 437.
- ²¹ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 437.
- ²² Cited by Woolf (p. 137). The edition referenced in the subsequent discussion of Sterne is Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 582.
- ²³ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 438.
- ²⁴ Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p. 38.
- ²⁵ Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p. 38.
- ²⁶ Cited in Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 1.
- ²⁷ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 4.
- ²⁸ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 11.
- ²⁹ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 12.
- ³⁰ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 18.
- ³¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 495.
- ³² Brontë, *Villette*, p. 38.
- ³³ Brontë, *Villette*, p. 495.
- ³⁴ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 3.
- ³⁵ Levine, *Forms*, p. 3.

- ³⁶ Levine, *Forms*, p. 3.
- ³⁷ Levine, *Forms*, p. 14.
- ³⁸ Levine, *Forms*, p. 38.
- ³⁹ Levine, *Forms*, p. 22.
- ⁴⁰ Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p. 11.
- ⁴¹ Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* has had a generative role on the field of nineteenth-century sound studies, both within and beyond the field of Victorian literary studies. His work has been taken up by literary, music, media and cultural historians. The cross-disciplinary impact of Picker's work is considered in *Victorian Soundscapes revisited*, ed. by Martin Hewitt and Rachel Cowgill (Leeds: Trinity and All Saints/Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies, 2007).
- ⁴² Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 28.
- ⁴³ Charles Dickens, 'A Flight', in *'Gone Astray' and Other Papers from Household Words 1851–1859*, ed. by Michael Slater (London: Dent, 1998), p. 29.
- ⁴⁴ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 28.
- ⁴⁵ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 29.
- ⁴⁶ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 12.
- ⁴⁷ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 121.
- ⁴⁸ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 290.
- ⁴⁹ Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 92.
- ⁵⁰ Levine, *Forms*, p. 113.
- ⁵¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 8.
- ⁵² 'Meet Elizabeth Bowen', Interview with *The Bell* 4 (September 1942), pp. 423–4.
- ⁵³ Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* (London: Orion, 1993), p. 127.
- ⁵⁴ Elizabeth Bowen, 'Rev., of Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth*', 24 June 1942, reprinted in *The Weight of a World of Feeling: Reviews and Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1917), p. 147.
- ⁵⁵ Cited in Elizabeth Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1986), p. 179.
- ⁵⁶ Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 5.
- ⁵⁷ Ellmann, *Bowen*, p. 4.
- ⁵⁸ Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, p. 6.
- ⁵⁹ Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 184.
- ⁶⁰ Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Third Programme', reprinted in *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 207.
- ⁶¹ Hepburn, *Listening In*, p. 3.
- ⁶² Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 67.

- ⁶³ This extract is from the version of the essay published in American *Vogue* (15 July 1947) and reprinted in Allan Hepburn's collection *Listening In*, p. 366. Bowen felt the American audience required more clarification of the cultural significance of the broadcast.
- ⁶⁴ Cited in Hepburn, *Listening In*, p. 366.
- ⁶⁵ Cited in Hepburn, *Listening In*, p. 13.
- ⁶⁶ Woolf, 'Poetry, Fiction and the Future', p. 436.

CHAPTER 7

Noise

James G. Mansell

We know it when we hear it. Noise is the ‘splinter in your ear,’ a sound that doesn’t belong.¹ Despite the extensive attention that it has received following the turn to sound in the humanities, noise has nevertheless remained the slipperiest of critical terms. It is the limit and political economy of music as well as a component of everyday soundscapes.² It is linguistic and philosophical meaningless and what the ‘signal’ isn’t.³ As Marie Thompson puts it, ‘noise is a “noisy” concept: it is messy, complex, fleeting, fuzzy-edged and, at times, infuriating.’ Noise is said to be ‘stubbornly resistant to theorization’ because definitions of what it is vary so widely, even, and perhaps especially, in colloquial use.⁴

This chapter argues that the question of what noise is should interest us more than it frustrates us. Its slipperiness, while frustrating to theorists, can provide the starting point for a revealing, sonically attuned cultural history. It is precisely the openness of the category of noise to interpretation and change that makes it so revealing. Understanding what noise is, and how this comes to be so, helps us to understand sound’s presence and activeness in social relations. Rather than ask what noise is, as a universal category, we might instead begin by asking: how do we come to know what noise sounds like? In turn, we might then ask, what role does that coming to know play in producing the cultures that hold us in place as subjects? This chapter takes up these questions in relation to moments in cultural history from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, a period associated with a rising tide of everyday noise brought about by continuing industrialisation, urbanisation and technological revolution.⁵ It considers, in particular, the role that writers and writing play in the shifting meanings and ideological power of noise. The chapter is intended as a contribution to ongoing discussions about what Philipp Schweighauser has called ‘literary acoustics’ and argues in favour of a historical-contextual approach to analysing literature’s place in auditory culture.⁶

Literature allows us to hear through the ears of the writer. It can give us unique insight into what a given time and place sounded like. Historian Mark M. Smith argues that written evidence, such as literature, is better even than a sound recording, since 'printed evidence offers a far more robust way to access the ways sounds and silences were understood in the past.' Smith explains that writers use the printed word to 'convey and even reproduce' sounds in a way that captures both the acoustic properties of sound as well as its meaning to those who heard it.⁷ This has been an important insight for the practice of historical sound studies, but my interest here is in the opposite direction of travel. My contention is that writers and writing play a role not only in capturing and commenting upon our cultures of hearing, but also in shaping them.

Interesting work has been done to account for the presence of everyday noise in literature. Josh Epstein's work on music, noise and modernism, for example, shows how modernist writers engaged with the problematic boundary between music and noise in the age of Stravinsky and Antheil, and in turn how they thought about the border between art and everyday life in modernity. Ultimately, the focus in Epstein's study, and in other similar scholarly works, is on what noise does within the textual forms of modernist writing. Epstein takes the acoustics of noise beyond the text to be self-evidently 'the affective shocks of industrialization, urbanization, warfare, publicity, and mechanical reproducibility.'⁸ However, the noisy sounds which Epstein takes as a given were shaped in definitional terms in no small degree by the writer's 'listening ear,' to borrow Jennifer Lynn Stoever's useful concept.⁹ Writers have a role to play in naming and shaping noise as a recognisable category of sound.

Schweighauser's approach comes somewhat closer to what I have in mind. He argues that literature is 'not solely a privileged site for the representation of the noises of our acoustic world but is itself a discourse that generates noise within the channels of cultural communication.'¹⁰ For Schweighauser, modernist writing, in particular, listens to, amplifies and refuses to discipline the noises of the modern world, and in doing so itself becomes noise to the signal of capitalist communication (Schweighauser draws here on Claude Shannon's communications theory of noise and signal and on William Paulson's notion of literature as the 'noise of culture').¹¹ Schweighauser argues that noisy modernist literature, such as the work of Dos Passos, stands in contrast to the capitalist, rational-scientific quest to control unwanted sound. 'In accepting noise as one of the constitutive factors of their literary practice,' modernist writers, according to Schweighauser, 'seek to retain something of the alterity and ineffability of the noises they represent.' They in turn 'align

themselves with an aesthetics of negativity which ultimately eludes our cognitive and representational grasp.' Schweighauser views this Adornian aesthetics of literary refusal, what he describes as writing's 'refusal to offer up its objects of representation to the reader's ready consumption,' as being at 'the heart of all literary experience.'¹² I do not wish to deny the critical potential of noise in the sense that Schweighauser advances it. A range of noise theorists persuasively argue for the politically resistive potential of noisy art, music, and literature.¹³ However, I am not convinced that we should view the literary experience as *essentially* resistive where noise, and acoustics in general, are concerned. This chapter looks, and listens, beyond the modernist text for insight into how writing and writers have involved themselves in the social shaping of noise. It does so with particular reference to writers' involvement in anti-noise discourses and campaigning for the purpose of demonstrating literature's involvement in the shaping of hegemonic power. This necessarily involves emphasising the work of anti-noise writers at the expense of those, such as Virginia Woolf, who challenged the negative categorisation of noise.¹⁴

Although we might know it when we hear it, the category of noise is not intrinsically connected to particular kinds of sound. Turning a sound into a noise is the product of a good deal of cultural work. This work is most evident in the efforts of noise abatement campaign groups who spearhead the call for legal definition and control of noise, but these groups typically represent wider auditory-social forces at play around them. This campaigning includes the active participation of writers. Key moments in the control of noise in Britain – the 1864 Street Music Act, the 1939 model bylaw on noise, and the 1960 Noise Abatement Act – were each accompanied by organised campaigns against specific kinds of everyday sound. In each case, writers and their writing were closely associated with the shaping of these campaigns and the attempt to define certain kinds of sound as noise. Charles Dickens was a prominent leader of the anti-street music movement in the 1850s and 1860s. Dystopian writers H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley supported the Anti-Noise League's crusade against new technological sounds in the 1930s. The poet Sir John Betjeman was associated with the Noise Abatement Society's defence of rural peace and quiet in the 1950s and 1960s. As noise abatement increasingly became a matter of public health in the early twentieth century, doctors quoted from fictional descriptions of noise to help them explain the threat that it posed to the human body. This medical-literary nexus was particularly prominent in early twentieth-century France, where literary and medical texts on noise were strongly inter-textual.¹⁵

John M. Picker identifies the power of writers and writing to shape noise in his influential book on Victorian literary acoustics, *Victorian Soundscapes* (2003).¹⁶ He shows that in Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, street music, particularly that produced by German and Italian itinerant barrel organists, became a topic of strident complaint among London's professional middle-class 'brain-workers', especially those who conducted their work at home, such as writers. In their quest to protect the quiet conditions necessary for their work, they 'waged a battle to impose the quiet tenor of interior middle-class domesticity upon the rowdy terrain outside.'¹⁷ Picker argues that anti-noise advocacy directed specifically at foreign street musicians allowed writers, including Dickens and Thomas Carlyle, to make sense of their class identity within the nation. Picker notes that a new 'loose federation' of professionals, including writers, but also mathematicians and scientists, was 'just coming into its own' and though 'increasing in numbers,' it was still 'struggling for respect and recognition' as an equal to the established professions of law and medicine.¹⁸ The campaign to silence street musicians allowed these new urban, middle-class professionals to stake their auditory territory in the city and the nation. They asserted their right to quiet over the nuisance of the street musicians whose sound was described, via letter writing, cartoons and, in the end, an Act of Parliament, as an intrusion on the auditory space of the civilised hearer and of the acoustic nation as a whole. Picker uses the anti-noise campaigning of writers like Dickens to reinterpret Victorian literature and concludes, importantly, that 'what can loosely be considered the anti-street music movement represents a critical aspect of the context in which much if not most of the major artwork and literature of the period developed.'¹⁹ Picker's work shows that writers not only reflect the acoustic worlds they represent, but actively involve themselves in shaping them.

Dickens and Carlyle's campaign to rid the streets of barrel organs represents a clear example of the kind of cultural work that goes into turning a sound into a noise and of how writers become involved in this process. Not everyone disliked the sound of the barrel organs, and indeed many wrote fondly of them, sometimes as a direct reaction to the scorn poured on them by Dickens and others. Picker cites several writers who came to the barrel organists' defence. Such writers, including the clergyman and essayist, H. R. Haweis, countered the categorisation of barrel organs as noise, and noted that they provided welcome musical accompaniment to working-class street life.²⁰ Aimée Boutin identifies a similar process at work on the streets of nineteenth-century Paris, where the street cries of peddlers became the target of middle-class anti-noise campaigning.

While the '*cris de Paris*' were to some writers a scourge on the sonic life of the city, they were to others a romantic reminder of the old Paris.²¹ Boutin points to this dynamic as a fundamental source of inspiration for Baudelaire and other modernist poets' engagement with the acoustics and politics of urban space.

Why have writers been such prominent members of noise abatement campaigns or otherwise involved themselves in the cultural work of shaping noise? Part of the explanation lies in Picker's insight that since the middle of the nineteenth century writers have staked their claim to social space, and social recognition, by defending the quiet auditory terrain they hear as necessary for reading and writing, as in the well-documented cases of Marcel Proust and Thomas Carlyle who created soundproofed work spaces for themselves. In the nineteenth century, the auditory priorities of writers aligned with a wider growing middle-class demand for quiet and thus took on the shape of a normative auditory culture. Writers, though, are also involved in the social dynamics of noise precisely because noise must be created and 'dramatised' as such, to use Karin Bijsterveld's terminology.²² Leaders of noise abatement movements have sought out the collaboration of writers because they know that writers have the power to shape our perception of the world. The doctor, Thomas Horder, who led the Anti-Noise League in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s, made H. G. Wells the star of the organisation's high-profile conference at London's Science Museum in 1935, noting that writers are part of the 'intelligent section' of society who know what acoustic civilization means and how to protect it.²³ He might just as easily have said that writers know a noise when they hear one, and can help the rest of us catch up.

In situating writers as important mediators of the category of noise, my intention here is to add weight to Brian Kane's defence of the auditory culture approach to sound studies. Kane notes the rise of an ontological and affective paradigm in the study of sound which, in some of its variants, claims that sound is involved in human affairs not primarily via its connection to systems of meaning and culture, but thanks to its power to impact directly upon our bodily and pre-cognitive states, what Steve Goodman calls the 'politics of frequency'.²⁴ Kane argues that Goodman's approach 'directly challenges the relevance of research into auditory culture, audile techniques, and the technological mediation of sound in favour of universals concerning the nature of sound, the body, and media'.²⁵ The ontological approach would also suggest a limited role for literary description of noise in the politics of hearing and listening. Kane, though, criticises Goodman's ontological approach to sound and

claims that auditory culture methods have always sought to balance the affective and discursive presence of sound in society: 'Studies in auditory culture are not simply studies in "representation" or "signification" without consideration of the body,' he argues. 'Rather, scholars in auditory culture seek to demonstrate the successions and relays between cognition and affect, or, speaking broadly, between the mind and the body.' He goes on to describe the social shaping of sound as a process in which hearers are trained to encounter sounds in certain ways. He describes hearing as a cultural skill which, once learned, is 'offloaded onto the body.'²⁶ Kane's theory of sonic training is a useful one, offering a framework for understanding how the cultural choice to label a sound as noise becomes an acoustic truth, experienced as such, once established, as affective bodily response.

Sound is, of course, affective. It is used in notable instances, such as the high frequency 'mosquito' deterrent device used to disperse groups of young people, for its material power to impact bodies. However, the affective power of sound also makes it an attractive target for ideological investment. When we hear a noise we are affected, but that affect is mixed with social meaning produced by the cultural work that goes on around and through sound, including the categorisation of sound as noise. The noisiness of noise resides neither entirely in the sonic object, nor entirely in cultural meaning, but rather in what might be called the sonic encounter between hearer and heard. If we know a noise when we hear one, then that is because we have become attuned to a way of hearing some sounds as noise. The sonic encounter, which is both a bodily and a cultural experience, is where sound becomes socially active. It draws us in to hearing communities of those who hear like us, making those communities all the more real because they *feel* true. Goodman notes that sound can be weaponised in warfare, but, recognising this, as I show elsewhere, British authorities during the Second World War made it a priority of home front propaganda to manage the encounter between civilians and bombing noise, entraining a stoical, critical and managed listening encounter with blitz sounds to counter the auditory-affective power of aerial bombardment and to produce a wartime community of listeners.²⁷ Here, bomb noise was situated as a source of, rather than a drain on, civilian morale. Noise was useful, in this context, as a source of national community building.

We are trained, in Kane's sense, to hear noise as noise, for good or for ill, and when we do, that encounter comes bundled with social effects as well as affects. The noise of the factory, to add a further example, has been

situated as a mark of civilizational decline, as in the work of the British Anti-Noise League, and as the soundtrack of proletarian heroism, as in the USSR in the 1920s and early 1930s. There are all kinds of sources of this noise training. In the 1930s, the Anti-Noise League sought to spread the values of 'acoustic civilization' by producing posters, staging exhibitions and making radio broadcasts. Psychological self-help writers were close allies, giving advice to the 'nervous' about how to manage their hearing of unhealthy noise.²⁸ In the case of the USSR, films, such as Dziga Vertov's *Enthusiasm* (1931) were used to present industrial noise as a healthy, productive, source of class unity. Yet writers of fiction stand out as leaders of the noise-shaping agenda, aware of the role that they might play in producing the encounter between hearers and sounds. Their literary works 'train' hearers in Kane's sense.

The French novelist Georges Duhamel is a good case in point. He was a leading supporter of the French anti-noise movement spearheaded in the 1930s by the Touring-Club de France.²⁹ He not only worked in support of the noise abatement agenda, suggesting, for example, the creation of national quiet parks where mechanical sounds would be prohibited, but also attempted to produce sound as noise through his written works. In order for noise to be successfully abated, writers like Duhamel knew that it needed to be actively produced as a stable and immediately understandable sonic category. A text such as his *Scènes de la vie future*, first published in 1931 and translated into English as *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future*, offers an insight into the role that writers play in situating sound as noise.³⁰ It also serves as a case study in how we might come to think about writing's role in producing the sonic encounter, as I have outlined it above. *America the Menace* is an exercise in travel writing in which the narrator gives his first-hand impressions of life in the United States. American culture is situated as a threat to European civilization in the book, as it is in a number of Duhamel's other works. Sound plays a central role in the book's description of American life. This is established in the opening pages, which describe the journey by ship from France across the Atlantic Ocean. The passage from European to American civilization is marked by sound. As the ship leaves European waters, 'scraps of "Carmen" and the eructations of a gentleman who was reading a lecture' were still audible on the radio. In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, only 'the crackling conversation of the ships' could be heard. As the ship approached American shores, however, 'plaintive, almost funereal melodies' could finally be heard on the ship's radio. 'They are hymns,' said the officer, 'sung by Negro choruses. There's never anything else but them

or jazz. Every hour now you will be more and more aware of America.³¹ America's difference is established first through sound and the contrast with European civilization is underscored via identification of racial as well as sonic difference.

It is, though, technology, rather than race, that forms the primary focus of Duhamel's distaste for American culture in *America the Menace*. In the preface to the book he draws a sharp distinction between moral and technological civilization: 'I persist in regarding as a phenomenon of capital importance what may be called a divorce that in many minds has taken place between the concept of an essentially moral civilization, fit, according to Humboldt, to "make people more human" and the concept of another civilization that is predominantly mechanical.'³² As such, Duhamel's writing fits within a prominent strand of technophobia at work within the intellectual history of the twentieth century. This technophobia took multiple forms, but in Duhamel's case it is evident that he saw, and heard, new technology as a threat to the place of writing and the writer in 'moral civilization.' The quiet spaces of contemplation needed for reading and writing were threatened by the new noisy world of motor traffic, radio, gramophone and the talkies. Christopher Todd confirms that Duhamel worried that radio and cinema generated unthinking crowd behaviour rather than properly individual, thinking, subjects: 'He saw machine-generated culture as appealing essentially to the gregarious spirit, whereas the book was the friend of solitude and allowed the reader to reflect and even reappraise.'³³ Todd suggests that Duhamel's critique of new media technologies was at least in part a defence of writing and the writer, and, as in the case of Dickens, it becomes clear that anti-noise advocacy was part of this defence of literature and its creators for Duhamel.

In *America the Menace*, noise covers some considerable auditory terrain. It is associated with technology, such as motor traffic, but also with the 'easy' culture which Duhamel associates with technological mediation, and which he presents as consumed without thought, and produced without consideration. Describing Chicago, the book's narrator draws a sharp distinction between the silence of Lake Michigan and the noise of the city beside it. 'You are astonished to find so much noise and activity on the edge of nothing,' the narrator observes.³⁴ It is the sound of motor traffic that draws his attention – the 'roar of the streets' – which is dominated only by a steamboat, 'a clattering storm of sound.'³⁵ Elsewhere, he describes 'the raucous outcry of wrathful expostulations of ten thousand automobiles quarrelling for precedence.'³⁶ In contrast, the lake is described as 'an abyss of silence, an infinity of cotton-wool in which the noise of

the demoniac city was lost.³⁷ At a brief moment of respite from the traffic noise, the narrator notices that 'little waves were slapping' on the lake. 'The water was dirty,' writes Duhamel, 'but still it was water; that is, something simple and natural. The murmur of it was closer to my soul that night than all the clamour of the life of man.'³⁸ Here, as elsewhere in the book, noise is situated as bad because it is unnatural, standing in contrast to a good, natural acoustic world.

The presentation of the unnatural sounds of motor traffic helps to frame other kinds of noisy sounds as equally unnatural. Popular and mediated music, as well as mediated sound in general, are included within the same category of noise as motor traffic. Upon arrival in the United States, an early scene-setting experience for Duhamel's narrator is attending a movie theatre to see a film, with sound. It is indeed the film's soundtrack which horrifies the narrator the most, more so even than the 'famous, and hideous, pictures on the walls,' which give the building 'the luxury of some big, bourgeois brothel.'³⁹ Duhamel describes the music on the soundtrack as 'canned ... from the slaughter-house of music, as the breakfast sausage comes from the slaughter-house of swine.' He describes this recorded music as producing in the narrator an uncritical and passive 'hearing' rather an engaged and critical 'listening.' 'Listen, listen!' the narrator insists to himself as he closes his eyes to block out the screen. He heard, 'a sort of soft dough of music, nameless and tasteless.' But, still, the theatre refuses to allow him to think: 'there was too much noise, too much movement.' Contrasting it with true art, including live symphonic music, which requires intellectual reflection and produces self-improvement, Duhamel describes sound cinema as 'this terrible machine, so elaborately dazzling, with its luxury, its music, its human voice, this machine for stupefying and destroying the mind.' Duhamel situated sound cinema both as noisy, and as a poor relation to literature, claiming that it is 'a pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety.'⁴⁰

Duhamel was not alone in attempting to situate sound cinema as noise in the 1930s. Aldous Huxley was another writer who viewed noisy mass entertainment as a threat to the quietude of reading and writing. He described an early experience of sound cinema as appalling noise: 'The flesh crept as the loud speaker poured out the sodden words, the greasy sagging melody. I felt ashamed of myself for listening to such things, for even being a member of the species to which such things are addressed. I comforted myself a little with the reflection that a species which has allowed all its instincts and emotions to degenerate and putrefy in such a

way must be near either its violent conclusion or its no less violent transformation.⁴¹ Huxley wrote elsewhere that 'the aim and end of all amusement is to kill thought; therefore, noise is an essential part of amusement.'⁴² Duhamel and Huxley's attempts to cast sound cinema as noise are especially interesting precisely because they failed in wider cultural terms. Unlike the sound of motor traffic, which was successfully transformed into noise in the inter-war period, sound cinema, as well as radio, were in the end heard as sound rather than noise, despite some writers' attempts to include them in the latter category (such as Huxley, who called radio 'nothing but a conduit through which pre-fabricated din can flow into our homes').⁴³

Duhamel thought of noise in the same way as Huxley: it was auditory stimulation which, in one way or another, produced collective, uncritical, selfhood rather than detached, rational individuality. His writing situated mechanical sounds, such as the motor car and the cinema loudspeaker, as sources of noise, but noise as a category in his writing also takes on social significance. Frequently throughout *America the Menace*, noisiness is connected to the unfamiliar music of African Americans, especially jazz, but more noticeable still is the way in which women's voices are included in the roster of sounds which stifle thought and rational selfhood. When the narrator of *America the Menace* attends a sports stadium to watch a game of American football, he is appalled at the sound of the crowd: he asks whether they had really come to watch the game, before suggesting instead, 'Did you not come, O Crowd, rather to get drunk on yourselves, on your own voice, on your own noise; to feel yourselves numerous and full of strength, to be charged with one another's emanations, and to taste the mysterious pleasure of the herd, the hive, and the ant-hill?' In the voices of the crowd, however, some stand out as particularly noisy. He describes 'powdered and rouged girl students' with 'bosoms, still as immature as apples in July' who 'sent forth shrill penetrating cries that seemed to have a tonic influence on the nerves of the competitors.' The worst of these young women was the one '[w]ith a megaphone in her hand, and with her skirts flying in the wind.' She 'screamed, flounced about, gave play to leg and haunch, and provided a suggestive and furious *dance du ventre*, like the dances of the prostitutes in the Mediterranean parts.' With her megaphone, she would encourage her 'aviary' to 'a fresh burst of shrill screaming.'⁴⁴ Here, and elsewhere, Duhamel connects noise with feminine and feminising sound. The dangerous, corrupting sexuality of the women Duhamel describes is connected to the easy, intoxicating effects of their noise. At the end of his description of sound cinema earlier in the

book, he gendered the movie theatre loudspeaker female, calling it 'a harlot' which 'strives to gratify us to the limit.'⁴⁵

In contrast, quietness and silence are gendered male in *America the Menace*. The value of quiet natural sound, such as the water sounds in Chicago, are closely connected with the natural state of quiet, thoughtful, (male) contemplation. In one chapter of the book, the narrator returns to his hotel late one night and begins to reflect on his experience of being in the American city. 'Was I exhausted?', he asks. 'Certainly! I was drunk with noise, with delirious lights, with brazen odors, and with humanity gone crazy.'⁴⁶ Having resolved to prove 'at least to myself, that I had not been absorbed,' the narrator 'sought the innermost sanctuary of my soul, and questioned the shades of my ancestors.' Then, at night, he dreamt of 'an oasis' where he visited a college in which 'A young man' was 'among his books,' an ethnographic museum, a 'haven of peace,' where among the exhibits, 'Superb and silent warriors were smoking pipes,' and, finally, a library, where a male guide 'spoke in a hushed voice like a priest at an altar.'⁴⁷ Duhamel's narrator concludes that in contrast to the noise and intoxication of American life, 'the supreme luxury is silence, fresh air, real music, intellectual liberty, and the habit of joyous living,' all of which were still to be found in France, but which would only persist there if the dangerous, noisy, example of America was actively avoided.⁴⁸ Duhamel gendered civilization, and silence, as male, and aligned noise with women and femininity.⁴⁹ His production of noise thus contributed to social as well as sonic formation.

The gendering of noise in literature had effects beyond the text in the 1930s. As consensus was built within the kinds of noise abatement movements supported by Duhamel about what counted as noise, literary organisation of noise became social organisation of sound. The sounds cast as noise by 1930s noise abatement groups were frequently those associated with female labour, both in the office, such as typewriting, and in the home, such as vacuum cleaning. This is evident in adverts for 'silenced' typewriters and vacuum cleaners, included for example at the 1935 Science Museum noise abatement exhibition, which presented the female users of such objects as noisy alongside the technologies they operated.⁵⁰ Literature, in other words, had a role to play in generating noise outside of itself. The sonic encounter which doctors and writers attempted to produce through their noise abatement campaigns in the 1930s was bound up with a social ordering of class and gender relations in which quiet, male, European, intellectual culture was situated as a norm against which other sounds were judged.

Literary involvement in the social activity of noise is not limited to the immediate circulation context of any given text, either. Literature's role in the

ideological work of making noise is to be found further afield, too. R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977) has been the most influential exposition on noise and why we should control it.⁵¹ The book has shaped social movements in sonic ecology, soundscape design, and has, in no small measure, driven the agenda of academic studies in the culture of sound. Schafer argued that modern society was in the grip of a lo-fi noise crisis. He argued that in pre-industrial societies, communities knew what to listen to in their hi-fi sound environments, where acoustic signals were clear and background noise was minimal. In modern societies, however, we can no longer distinguish between signal and noise. Important, health-giving sounds, especially natural sounds, which are crucial for our mental and physical wellbeing, as well as those sounds needed for community cohesion, are drowned out and distorted by the constant hum, crackle and crash of industrial and electronic noise. 'Schizophonia,' or mental disturbance brought about by hearing sounds separated from their sources, is but one consequence of this noise crisis.

The crucial evidence offered by Schafer for this historical transformation from hi-fi to lo-fi soundscapes is the 'earwitness' testimony to be found in literature. Schafer writes that 'it is a special talent of novelists like Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy and Thomas Mann to have captured the soundscapes of their own places and times, and such descriptions constitute the best guide available in the reconstruction of soundscapes past.'⁵² Schafer turns to Dickens for evidence that it took until the later period of the industrial revolution for people to eventually understand the negative effects of noise in everyday life. Writers like Dickens, with their unique perceptive skills, were the among the first to note these negative effects, according to Schafer: 'The only people to criticise the "prodigious noise" of machinery were the writers, figures like Dickens and Zola.' Schafer goes on to cite a passage from Dickens's *Hard Times*, contrasting human and machine sounds: 'Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he worked.'⁵³

In Schafer's account of noise, literature becomes an objective source of knowledge about changing soundscapes and growing dissatisfaction with noise in the age of industrial and electronic revolutions. Citations are not made in passing, either. Schafer's team at the World Soundscape Project built a huge repository of literary 'earwitness' evidence. Statistical conclusions are drawn from a 1000-strong card index, such as that there was a marked 'decline in the number of times quiet and silence are evoked in literary descriptions' over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. 'Of

all descriptions in our file for the decades 1810–30, 19% mention quiet or silence, by 1870–90 mentions had dropped to 14%, and by 1940–60 to 9%.³⁴ Ultimately, what this literary evidence points to, for Schafer, is the truth of modern noise, that it kills thought: ‘the noise of the machine became “a narcotic to the brain,” and listlessness increased in modern life.’ Bemoaning his own office, Schafer writes of the telephone’s power to ‘interrupt thought’ and of radio as a medium that ‘does not rest. It does not breathe. It has become a sound wall’ producing ‘audioanalgesia’ or sound as ‘painkiller,’ a ‘distraction to dispel distractions.’ ‘Moozak,’ another sound wall to be found in shopping centres and factories, reduces ‘a sacred art’ (music) to ‘a slobber’: ‘Moozak is music that is not to be listened to.’³⁵

Schafer takes noise in literature, produced as we have seen for particular social and ideological purposes, and reproduces it as the universal truth of acoustics. In Schafer’s writing we find an extension of the technophobia of early twentieth-century thought refracted through the prism of acoustic ecology and repackaged as advice for soundscape designers. Marie Thompson describes Schafer’s definition of noise as belonging within a ‘conservative politics of silence’ in which natural sounds are valued above all, and in which the preferences and prejudices of a socially specific listening ear are reproduced.³⁶ The evidence which Schafer finds in literature forms the basis for the following question which he poses to soundscape planners: ‘Which sounds do we want to preserve, encourage, multiply?’ Once decided, he says, ‘the boring or destructive sounds will become conspicuous enough and we will know why we must eliminate them.’³⁷ But, as I hope I have shown here, when the sonic is planned, so too is the social. Asking which sounds we want to hear is also to ask what kinds of people we do and don’t wish to encounter, who has full and who has partial or no access at all to the public realm of audibility.

Notes

¹ Nick Smith, ‘The Splinter in Your Ear: Noise as the Semblance of Critique’, *Culture, Theory and Critique* 46 (2005), 43–59.

² Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Paul Hegarty, *Noise Music: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007); David Hendy, *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile Books, 2014); Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

- ³ Greg Hainge, *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
- ⁴ Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound*, p. 2.
- ⁵ Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Peter Payer, 'The Age of Noise: Early Reactions in Vienna, 1870–1914', *Journal of Urban History* 33 (2007), 773–93; Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- ⁶ Philipp Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006).
- ⁷ Mark M. Smith, 'Echo', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 59–62.
- ⁸ Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. xv.
- ⁹ The 'listening ear' is a term used by Jennifer Lynn Stoeber to describe 'normative listening practices.' See Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature*, p. 3.
- ¹¹ Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963); William Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- ¹² Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature*, p. 197.
- ¹³ For an interesting discussion of these issues, see Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound*.
- ¹⁴ See Kate Flint, 'Sounds of the City: Virginia Woolf and Modern Noise', in *Literature, Science, Psychoanalysis, 1830–1980: Essays on Honour of Gillian Beer*, ed. by Helen Small and Trudi Tate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 181–94.
- ¹⁵ For a fuller overview of the connection between fiction and medicine in 1930s anti-noise campaigns, see James G. Mansell, 'Neurasthenia, Civilization, and the Sounds of Modern Life: Narratives of Nervous Illness in the Interwar Campaign Against Noise', in *Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-century Europe*, ed. by Daniel Morat (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), pp. 278–304.
- ¹⁶ John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁷ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 43.
- ¹⁸ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 53.
- ¹⁹ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 42.
- ²⁰ H. R. Haweis quoted in Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 77.

- ²¹ Aimée Boutin, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).
- ²² Karin Bijsterveld emphasises the need to dramatise noise as a social problem in *Mechanical Sound* and in Karin Bijsterveld, ed., *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013).
- ²³ Anti-Noise League, *Silencing a Noisy World: Being a Brief Report of the Conference on the Abatement of Noise* (London: Anti-Noise League, 1935), p. 43. For discussion of the wider context of the Anti-Noise League's conference at the Science Museum in 1935, see James G. Mansell, 'A Chamber of Noise Horrors': Sound, Technology and the Museum', *Science Museum Group Journal* 7 (2017) <http://journal.sciencemuseum.ac.uk/browse/issue-07/chamber-of-noise-horrors/> [accessed 29 June 2018].
- ²⁴ Brian Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn', *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1 (2015), 2–21; Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).
- ²⁵ Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture', p. 3.
- ²⁶ Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture', p. 8.
- ²⁷ Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*. For further explanation of the management of noise in Britain during the Second World War, see Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain*, pp. 145–81.
- ²⁸ Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain*, pp. 86–97.
- ²⁹ Jean-Pierre Gutton, *Bruits et sons dans notre histoire: Essai sur la reconstitution du paysage sonore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), p. 146.
- ³⁰ Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future*, trans. by Charles Miner Thompson (New York: Arno Press, 1974).
- ³¹ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, pp. 1–2.
- ³² Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. viii.
- ³³ Christopher Todd, 'Georges Duhamel: Enemy-cum-Friend of the Radio', *The Modern Language Review* 92 (1997), 48–59 (p. 49).
- ³⁴ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 79.
- ³⁵ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 82.
- ³⁶ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 152.
- ³⁷ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 80.
- ³⁸ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 84.
- ³⁹ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, pp. 24–5.
- ⁴⁰ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, pp. 28–35.
- ⁴¹ Aldous Huxley, 'Silence is Golden' in *Aldous Huxley: Complete Essays*, Volume II, ed. by Robert S. Baker and James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), p. 23.
- ⁴² Aldous Huxley 'Preface', in *A Realist Looks at Democracy*, ed. by M. Alderton Pink (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), p. viii.

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- ⁴⁴ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 155.
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- ⁴⁶ Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p. 186.
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- ⁴⁹ For further discussion about the gendering of noise see Marie Thompson, 'Gossips, sirens, hi-fi wives: Feminizing the Threat of Noise', in *Resonances: Noise and Contemporary Music*, ed. by Michael Goddard, Benjamin Halligan and Nicola Spelman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 297–311.
- ⁵⁰ For examples of such advertisements, see Mansell, 'A Chamber of Noise Horrors.'
- ⁵¹ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994).
- ⁵² Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 9.
- ⁵³ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 75.
- ⁵⁴ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 145.
- ⁵⁵ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, pp. 89–98.
- ⁵⁶ Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound*, p. 4.
- ⁵⁷ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 205.

CHAPTER 8

'Lost in Music' *Wild Notes and Organised Sound*

Paul Gilroy

A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers. 'Make a noise' 'make a noise' and 'bear a hand' are the words most frequently addressed to the slaves when there is silence amongst them. This may account for the almost constant singing heard in the southern states... they (the slaves) would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild notes.

Frederick Douglass

I

In recent years, scholastic treatments of the cultural history and grounded aesthetics of black music have changed significantly. Among other factors, the grudging acceptance of popular culture as an object of serious, academic study, the global reach acquired by hip-hop during more than three decades, and the abrupt economic contraction of the music business have all expanded the field. At the same time, the music of slave-descended populations has acquired new meanings and audiences, often in locations distant from its places of emergence. Instrumental electronica derived from black Atlantic forms has swept the world. Officially certified jazz, played live in real time, has become an expensive, esoteric entertainment administered from deep within the sparkling citadel of cultural capital, often with enthusiastic support from high-end advertisers.¹ Blues is basic, blue-collar recreation while rap and dancehall styles are routine components of an expanded pop-rock lexicon. Even Grime, no longer the hermetic pride of East London's Africa-descended youth, has been smartened up, projected outernationally and brought in from the commercial cold. These changes are associated with an unprecedented techno-cultural ecology that encompasses computer-mediated commerce in novel kinds of commodified culture.

Much of the economic value discovered in what came to be known as black music has been haemorrhaging away. In response to its loss, the music's cultural brokers and guardians sought ways to channel and conserve any remaining commercial potential. Having discovered that hard-won, twentieth-century approaches to music criticism and musical education now appear redundant and understood that accepted ideas of cultural copyright expired along with their outworn economic and juridical counterparts, they have devised alternative axiologies, often by assembling revisionist accounts of music in black social life. Many commentators have tried to explore the historical relationships established between music, song and sound on the one hand and the sequence of political movements aimed at freedom, decolonization, human and civil rights, and black liberation on the other.² There is renewed interest in the phenomenologies of musical performance and reception.³ Attention has been turned toward consideration of how music, dance and song might be appreciated in counterpoint with specifically literary movements as well as broadly defined 'critical race theory.'

Inside the United States, those discussions have revolved around the proposition that African American musical expressions created in response to slavery and its after-lives are much more important than literary or poetic work, both for the establishment of political and moral community and in the evolving organization of collective cultural habits. Predictably, those conversations have lately ascended to a high theoretical altitude where their complicated relationship to the black radical tradition's critiques of Marxism and political economy can be safely explored.⁴ The limits of text-centred approaches and the philosophical depth of black vernacular cultures are at stake in those exchanges, yet the history they yield is often a thin one. It must be reinforced by better accounts of musical and political entanglement.

Black Atlantic self-making and sociality can be explored through organised sound: music and song. However, rather than caricaturing their confluence as a smooth, even flow of predictable interactions, accounts of its evolution should be able to accommodate fluctuations, detours, feedback loops and distortions. Diasporic accounts of the music's nonlinear, planetary course have not displaced stubborn, ethnonational conceptualisations which analyse culture as something sedentary. That narrower focus is fundamental to the provincial narratives that can, for example, foster Jamaican Reggae tourism or burnish justifiable African American pride in their unique, stylistic contributions to globalised popular music.

The deep ambiguities first identified in the 1930s by Alain Locke's writing on the Negro and music, have led to jazz acquiring greater respectability and new status as a fully American art now much more than merely 'tinctured with modernism.'⁵ Nudged in the direction mapped out by Ralph Ellison and elaborated under the stern tutelage of Albert Murray and their disciples, it has won institutional support of the type formerly associated only with European concert music. Those changes are reflected in the funding of performance spaces and the emergence of specialised academic research programmes as well as in how formal 'jazz training' enhances the varieties of musical education that are currently available at advanced levels.

Even when the long and internally differentiated history of black musical creativity is explored most vividly stylistic differences and regional factors mean that it is still often defined as a local or provincial event rather than a travelling or transcultural phenomenon. This was also something Alain Locke had warned against.⁶ Methodological and cultural nationalisms remain dominant in critical commentary. The unbreakable hold of critical assumptions focused on identity means that this music has only rarely been allowed to play a role in defining historical periods or characterising aesthetic and political movements. Larger-scale, cultural histories to which music and its lore are central, remain relatively few and far between.

Simpler, stern approaches defined by the anxieties of cultural nationalism converge around conceptions of culture as an object that is amenable to being held and owned like any other property. With regard to music, the legitimacy of (mis)appropriation dominates every other consideration. This perspective is mostly content to recycle outdated scripts about artistic responsibility, representation and an *effortless* variety solidarity resulting from strong ethnicity: as absolute as it is incorrigible.

That style of thought has been divided by the issue of whether popular music and the vulgar social relations it supports and solicits should be taken seriously. There is reluctance to concede the specific, political importance of musical culture in the pursuit of emancipation and rights, both civil and human. There has also been resistance to the idea that unruly, sly and forbidding musical forms, and the half-hidden performances they involved, might demand deeper, more detailed and sustained critical scrutiny alert to their political effects. The interpretative patterns that result underscore the conflicts that arise from the publication of critical and expository material intended primarily to vindicate the cultural worth of racialised groups or convey their underground achievements into an ambivalent mainstream still shaped by institutionally racist contouring

of the markets in entertainment and attention. Locke's insightful proposition that black music might serve as an 'anti-toxin' for a listless, bored and neurotic civilization has been stress-tested to the point of destruction.

Most contemporary commentary is imprinted with the stamp of black music's epoch-making retreat from the embattled front lines of political culture and its gradual replacement by multimedia spectacle. Those problems are compounded when digital media awards priority to visual stimulation over hearing. Auditory experience of music regresses into the sound stages of headphones and automobiles, the major settings for today's radically privatised cultures of listening. In those sterile conditions, residual concern with the ethical significance of communal cultural habits based on sound is obscured or mystified. The music's sacred associations are complacently profaned, reducing it to the bland, mood-making role of soundtrack to diverse life-styles. This altered cultural and commercial environment suggests that the history of black music might benefit from a more open and contingent orientation than is now usual. This is especially true where music and musicking have been slotted into parochial or nationalist analysis as sonic touchstones of dwindling ethnic authenticity.

2

The historical periodization of black Atlantic sound is forbiddingly complex but its beginnings appear simple. They reside in the long, peculiar institution of slavery and its violent sculpting of the lives of Africans: bloodily rendered as inhuman 'negro' slaves. However anodyne this orientation might sound today, it necessitated a break with older, anthropological perspectives in which the forced relocation of African cultural practices to the Americas was understood as a linear, anthropological transfer. That simplistic view offered a combative response to historians who saw slaves as acculturated. Today, we can say that African habits were not erased but neither were they suspended in the barracoons and slave-ships only to be resumed and revived when their shocked practitioners reached new territories. Those vital assemblages could not be arrested or placed on hold. Already prone to spontaneous mutation, they were adapted and augmented during brutal transits between zones of cultural contact. Those traumatic journeys and the heterological history they initiated were also substantively matters of culture. Their effects are evident in the dense, creolised patterns and plural capabilities that resulted.

Europe's new world plantations established enduring epidermal and corporeal schemata. Those involutory systems viewed incoming Africans as naturally either childlike, loyal and gay or menacing, cunning and resentful. A racist mesh holds those complementary stereotypes in eloquent and damaging relation. It demands extensive historical and ontological unravelling that cannot be provided here. Whichever masks were displayed in those bloody theatres of subordination and exploitation, the 'Negroes' who wore them were always musical, always noisy.

Black Atlantic music is now at large on earth. Its feral spirits can be detected in the way that the backbeat and the second line signature of Congo Square became fundamental points of reference. Reggae and Salsa, Samba and Blues are now components of the cosmopolitan musical training routinely provided to the generations of musicians who have followed in the footsteps of predecessors who had taught themselves, against the odds, how to play. More recently, YouTube has provided an additional storehouse for budding instrumentalists. The same apparently weightless and placeless technologies export African American history, music and style to legions of remote users who receive them eagerly as the precious substance of generic black culture and identity.

These irreversible developments have helped to make it fashionable to approach slavery primarily in ontological and interpersonal terms. From that angle, enslavement's primary purpose can appear spontaneously to be located in the debasement and defiling of black life rather than the systematic pursuit of profit or the ruthless accumulation of capital. The history of our planet's violent racial orders yields many examples in which the profit motive and the outrage motive have coexisted in genocidal processes of conquest and exploitation. It is therefore a mistake to say that their mutual entanglement can always be tidily resolved into structures that make cruelty and deliberate outrage consistently decisive and determining.⁷ The Tarantino-ification of slavery has been immensely corrosive of historical knowledge, moral sensibilities and the political imagination alike.

The enslavement of Africans did not constitute an abyssal zone of non-being. Instead, an extraordinary cultural productivity was born from their cruel bondage. Of course, its transcendent epiphanies offered no redemption for the suffering in which they were embedded. The unexpected flourishing of musical creativity under slavery's racial *nomos* has become doubly important today because its complexity and syncretic character obviously repudiate the facile consignment of black life to an unremitting 'social death.' However, the idea of slavery as an absolute negation of

human being has oddly proved appealing to the disoriented and demoralised legions of 'afropessimist' keyboard warriors operating on the infinite battlegrounds of twitter and Instagram.

Slavery's earliest musical fruits were disturbing and demanding to the ears and the eyes of all those who encountered them. The slave community had been present at its own birth and, as it made and reproduced itself, its signature mysteries, rituals and objects created a host of additional interpretative challenges for European observers of slave culture. Among the most acute of those trials was the pressure to assess the meaning and character of musical performances – by no means always integrated with the sadistic intensities of unfree labour. This assumed greater significance once the effects of the slaves' enforced exile from literacy began to be appreciated by abolitionists.

The apparently unique qualities of slave music and song had been noted by numerous eighteenth and nineteenth-century functionaries, administrators and visitors to the slave plantations. Those cultural and spiritual practices constituted a subaltern yet 'public' space and reproduced a dissenting consciousness that presented chronic, practical problems in the institutional governance of plantation slavery and the day to day management of slaves.⁸

The canonical starting point for commentary on the vexed history of that artful opposition is located in Frederick Douglass' autobiographical remarks on the spontaneous composition, challenging sound and sublime dynamics of slave song. He addressed the way ritualised performances counterposed the levels of meaning found in words, against the altogether different semantic, communicative and somatic effects deriving from eloquent, disjunctive sound. No priority was accorded to the linguistic elements. 'The thought that came up, came out – if not in the word in the sound; – and as frequently in the one as in the other.'⁹ Thought could, unexpectedly, reside in sound, so Douglass advised his readers to disregard the 'unmeaning jargon' of the lyrics and assured them that every tone was 'testimony against slavery.'¹⁰ He included a further comparison. This music had substantive educational, political and moral effects. They were at variance with what might alternatively be learned about the problems and injustices of slavery by reading about them in the pages of *philosophical* tomes. That contrast was associated with an implicit award of privilege to corporeal rather than cognitive responses to the horrors of slave suffering. The resulting expansion of what constitutes a philosophical event need not detain us, but this argument still attracts critical interest. Douglass credited the transformation in his own consciousness

of the 'dehumanizing character of slavery' to an initially uncomprehending exposure to this musical experience.¹¹ Here the significance of musical creativity in the establishment of slave culture is again impossible to overlook. Douglass wrote of the 'soul-killing' effects of slavery against which music offered a measure of relief.¹² This music could, apparently repair and sustain the imperilled souls of its makers. It became their soul music. These pointed comparisons are followed by a discussion of the music's enigmatic demand for new kinds of interpretation. Its staging of the fundamental tension between sounds, feelings and words and its origins in the absolute misery of its creators could, as result of the performances' complex characteristics, be misheard obscenely as sonic confirmation of slave contentment.

Before it could be set to work in the service of freedom and liberation, slave music and song had to be interpreted correctly. The necessary labour involved in that cultural endeavour had powerful effects on those who undertook it. All of this is well known, and was fully appreciated by Douglass who used his autobiographies to reflect on these issues as well as to highlight the foundational, interpretative conundrum they posed for white audiences rallying to the just and urgent cause of abolition.¹³ One listener who responded to this aural cue with sympathy and vigorous political action was the feminist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon who recounted her responses to the slave singing in *English Woman's Journal*.¹⁴ During a seven month visit to the US that she made in 1857, Bodichon heard slave song and understood its demands for recognition and emancipation. We may query her judgement that nothing immediate could be done to end slavery while appreciating that her empathetic grasp of the music's deep meanings was accurate: 'The voices of the negroes are beautiful; some day great singers will come out of that people... Sometimes when I hear them sing, the thought of slavery, and what it really is, makes me utterly miserable: one can do nothing, and I see little hope; it makes me wring my hands with anguish, sometimes, being so helpless to help.'¹⁵

William Wells Brown, the fugitive slave *flâneur*, employed his characteristic business acumen to publish and distribute 'The Antislavery Harp' in June of 1848.¹⁶ He described it as 'a cheap Anti-Slavery Song-Book' which was presumably designed to bring the practice of sonic solidarity, empathy and affinity into the gendered, interior space of the abolitionist home. These small acts were not trivial gestures but important components in the steady growth of the antislavery, freedom and suffrage movements.

As enlightenment anthropologies assumed coherent epistemic shape, the example of black music was carried into Europe's loftier philosophical and aesthetic debates about the comparative value of different cultures. That term was being pluralised in tune with the emergence of scientific commitments to racial typology and hierarchy: properly reasoned responses to the declaration of universal human equality. Struggling to articulate elements of a relativist understanding of the resulting aesthetic system, Hegel famously declared:

... the Chinaman has quite a different conception of beauty from the Negro, and the Negro in turn from the European and so forth. Indeed if we look at the works of art of those extra-European peoples... their music may sound to our ears as the most horrible noise; while they on their side, will regard our sculptures, paintings, and musical productions as trivial or ugly.¹⁷

The supposedly innate musical ability of the Negro had made this kind of comparison pertinent even before the consolidation of scientific racism. In the context of his influential arguments against the unitary origin of all human beings, Gobineau described Africa's 'sable tribes' recreating themselves through their music and song. His view can be taken as an important example of the reach of this viewpoint which would not be lost upon romantic, slave-descended proponents of African particularity in later years.¹⁸

The knotty issues identified by Douglass were not resolved in his presentations of his political development. They recurred during the nineteenth century and, as I have suggested elsewhere, would come to be dominated by discussion of the example provided by the pioneering performances of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The choir's unprecedented popularity and itinerant, international career transposed the problems of interpretation onto a world scale and resituated them in a new cultural economy that had begun to appreciate African American music and song outside of the codes and rules associated with rising minstrelsy.¹⁹

Today, even the most cursory treatment of these matters must take account of the commentaries made successively by a range of important critical voices each of which demands extensive discussion. That archive cannot be reconstructed here in its entirety. For brevity's sake, we can say that W. E. B. Du Bois initially transformed Douglass' 1845 stance into a subtle juxtaposition of the relative potencies of text and music. In the process, he created the foundations for a wholly new black modernism elaborated in the complex shapes of his own semi-autobiographical 1903 volume *The Souls of Black Folk*.²⁰

Controversially, Du Bois defined these musical traditions as 'sorrow songs' and incorporated fragments of their musical form, without acknowledgement, into the 'Wagnerian' scheme of his own multi-vocal text.²¹ The format of that book was influenced by the recipe devised in J. B. T. Marsh's edited 1875 volume of song, biography and history which abridged earlier accounts of the Singers' quest and was sold to raise money for Fisk University where Du Bois began his higher education. His sense of the commercial potential of the music and its place in the social changes then underway, was conveyed in an editorial entitled 'Phonograph Records' that he produced for *The Crisis* two decades later.²² He was involved in the innovative operations of the Black Swan phonograph record label which was seen as a new, decidedly modern vehicle for the transmission of racial propaganda, education and uplift. Du Bois was a friend and mentor to Black Swan's owner and manager, Harry Pace.²³

Du Bois' personal connections to Fisk were also significant because they help to explain how the mythologised figure of the female Jubilee Singer, as an aesthetic and racial embodiment of the catastrophe of slavery and the transformative possibilities of reconstruction, became prominent during the early years of the twentieth century. That incarnation was, for example, charged with occult significance in Pauline Hopkins' magazine novel *Of One Blood* where an undead Jubilee performer, Dianthe Lusk, links the slave past to the promise of a reparative African future where she reappears as Queen Candace of Telassar.²⁴ Anna Julia Cooper's 1902 discussion of the 'Ethics of The Negro Question' includes a treatment of African American patriotism and citizenship in which their political and moral choices are framed powerfully in the difference between lustily 'singing America' and remaining stoically silent in the face of suffering brutality and humiliation.²⁵

A more extensive relationship between music and letters that extended Du Bois' influential perspective emerged from the pen of James Weldon Johnson who, among his many accomplishments, had enjoyed a brief career in musical comedy. The nameless protagonist of *Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man* passes a rewarding day at Fisk and acknowledges the wider importance and cultural achievements of the university's Singers. The preface to Johnson's 1925 anthology of American Negro spirituals provided extended testimony to this miraculous musical creativity.²⁶ Johnson situated his historical survey of the music, as a Du Boisian gift both to America and to the world, in relation to two other arguments. He drew attention to the cultural genius of Africa and prophesied an impending transformation in America's view of Negroes and their abilities to which music would be key.²⁷

Alain Locke published his enduringly valuable survey of black Americans and their music a decade later. It was a volume designed for use in teaching and included bibliographies as well as lists of questions designed for seminars. Though a committed member of the Baha'i faith, Locke was no less Germanic in his view of the political anthropology of culture than Du Bois had been. He triangulated the development of African American music through a progressive sequence leading from folk expression, through popular material and thence to fully classical forms. Locke was an early and influential commentator on the aesthetics of what he called 'the African musical gulf-stream.'²⁸ Zora Neale Hurston, academically trained in Boasian anthropology, applied those professional tools to dispute Du Bois' essentially gloomy view of the music and its primarily sorrowful meaning. She used the platform provided by Nancy Cunard to take Du Bois to task for his emphasis on sorrow, and reconfigure the critical approach to musical traditions which were not to be considered fixed or final but seen instead as processes that, like folk tales, were 'made and forgotten every day.' For her, Du Bois' treatment of the music had narrowed critical understanding too much. More rewarding perspectives would recognise the wealth of emotions and feelings that spirituals could convey alongside sorrow.²⁹ Hurston attacked the desire to confine, codify and formalise the music as a body of teachable, reproducible 'Negro Spirituals.' Her argument was linked to a discussion of 'performed sermons' as a related vernacular art as well as to a longer and more provocative discussion about the aesthetic characteristics of all 'Negro' expression. Her distaste for the Fisk Singers was readily apparent. Their trademarked formality came off badly when compared to the choir and congregation that she remembered from the interactive proceedings in her father's Baptist Church.³⁰

Hurston's younger, communist nemesis, Richard Wright, was one of the first writers to employ an approach to the formation of racial subjects derived from psychoanalysis and apply it to the interpretation of African American vernacular culture.³¹ Wright was not deeply drawn towards the analysis of music, but his distinctive approach yielded insights with regard to the poetics of the Dirty Dozens which would eventually be mainstreamed in the triumph of hip-hop. His lengthy reckoning with these questions can be found in a lecture, 'The literature of the negro in the United States', first published in the 1957 volume *White Man Listen!*. Wright anticipated some of the concerns of the Black Aesthetic movement by accentuating the dependency of literary and poetic creations on the musical vernacular of the poorest, lowliest folk.

Ralph Ellison shared Wright's interest in matters of psychology and psychoanalysis and collaborated with him. But music was absolutely at the centre of his world and his creative life. This comes across in his determination to incorporate increasing sonic fidelity into his creative methods as a writer: 'I was obsessed with the idea of reproducing sound with such fidelity that even when using music as a defense behind which I could write, it would reach the unconscious levels of the mind with the least distortion.'³² To that ennobling end, Ellison began to construct his own electronic amplifiers in 1949. His writing about HiFi, the introduction of long-playing records and his peerless studies of musicians all confirm his complex relationship with recorded sound. Ellison's nameless invisible man illuminates his underground refuge with expensive electric bulbs, but the source of his music is described as a 'radio phonograph.' That wording suggests that his sound emanated from a wind-up, 78 rpm. gramophone that had to be duplicated several times so that it could point adequately towards the obscure sonic future in which it has become possible to hear music with more than just ears, through the whole body.

3

Curtis Mayfield, Aretha Franklin, Jimi Hendrix and Huey Newton were all born in 1942. According to an essay that he published in the *Chicago Defender*, Langston Hughes – then forty – celebrated its passing in the 230 Club – a blues dive on the South Side. The principal performer that memorable night was Memphis Minnie, who, with only minimal back-up from a 'dung-colored' drummer, rocked her way through a set that unsettled Hughes' desire to affirm and celebrate vernacular musical art.

As he recoiled from the sheer volume of what Hendrix, a few years later would dub a congregation of 'The Electric Church', Hughes was being made to look in two different directions simultaneously. He heard and felt the scientific deployment of electricity in the playful service of communal repair and collective recreation, but he was also moved to acknowledge what he felt was an ancient quality in the pulse that underpinned Minnie's extravagant set.

The electric guitar is very loud, science having magnified all its softness away. Memphis Minnie sings through a microphone and her voice – hard and strong anyhow for a little woman's – is made harder and stronger by scientific sound. The singing, the electric guitar, and the drums are so hard

and so loud, amplified as they are by General Electric on top of the icebox, that sometimes the voice, the words, and melody get lost under sheer noise, leaving only the rhythm to come through clear. The rhythm fills the 230 Club with a deep and dusky heartbeat that overrides all modern amplification. The rhythm is as old as Minnie's most remote ancestor.³³

Memphis Minnie's amplified act seems to have asked Hughes new questions about how electricity transformed music into noise. He put his hands over his ears but placed his finger on the novelty of a pivotal moment. In response to her performance, he could do little more than assert the continuity of black creativity across the threshold between scientific and electronic technologies. However, this encounter with science seems to have taken its toll. He repeats that the music became loud, hard and strong. Minnie's voice, her words and even the melody get lost in the disorienting effects of volume. Only the rhythm came across – through – clearly. Hughes describes how two different unintelligible rhythms became connected. First, Minnie's voice and words disappeared beneath the sheet of almost industrial noise that operated both as a sounding board and a filter, allowing only the rhythm to pass through. In turn, a throb fills the building with an organic, syncopated heartbeat. Somehow it overrides the modernizing effects of electronic amplification with ancient, primal power. It summons the histories of migration and suffering which are folded into the conspicuous effects of the second world war on the economic life chances of African Americans.

Her right hand with the dice ring on it picks out the tune, throbs out the rhythm, beats out the blues.

Then, through the smoke and racket of the noisy Chicago bar float Louisiana bayous, muddy old swamps, Mississippi dust and sun, cotton fields, lonesome roads, train whistles in the night, mosquitoes at dawn, and the Rural Free Delivery, that never brings the right letter. All these things cry through the strings on Memphis Minnie's electric guitar, amplified to machine proportions—a musical version of electric welders plus a rolling mill... The hand with the dice-ring picks out music like this. Music with so much in it folks remember that sometimes it makes them holler out loud.³⁴

Hughes recognised the losses as well as the gains in this shocking experience. He bears ambivalent witness to the birth of something like the bass culture that flourished during the remainder of the twentieth century. His words extend and amend the interpretative agenda devised by Douglass, systematised by Du Bois and then revised by Hurston and the others.

4

This roughly sketched sequence of just a few of the most important positions and comments is no more than a preliminary directional pointer. Even so, fitting the work of Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka into it is not straightforward. It is probably more productive to locate his work close to the terminal point of a longer critical conversation about music, politics, ethics and letters.

Baraka's accomplishments merit the deepest varieties of exploration and discussion. His wide-ranging work should not be cherry picked for its most angry, outrageous or supposedly authentic aspects. He is more than a key figure. No discussion of African American culture and letters in the twentieth century can proceed without acknowledging his contributions and his example. His work is one of the rare instruments necessary in order to gauge the history and specify the temporality of African American cultural and social life as well as to situate the worldwide forces with which it was in dialogue. His influence made things happen and is still doing so. His capacity for restless, energetic reinvention, like his commitment to making nouns into verbs and refusing the ossification of processes, challenges the absolutism that still seeks to capture him and can see no virtue in the unrelenting obligation to grow, change and develop. His enthusiasm for and appreciation of music is the only constant feature. We must therefore ask how that love for music might be connected to his political and ethical restlessness.

The path Baraka made into the cultural field was bounded initially by the pleasures of aesthetic modernism and authoritarian nationalism. It moved through various forms of Marxism and out of them into something more complex, worldly and perhaps more responsible. It was a journey that has been made by many other African Americans as well as by affiliates of Cedric Robinson's 'black radical tradition' who discovered that those conceptual systems had to be stretched in order to become adequate to the task of analysing colonial situations and capable of including the agency of slaves and their descendants in a militant self-emancipation that would determine the quality of US democracy.³⁵

Apparently, Baraka's black nationalism was not compromised by its importation of the hierarchies and vanguards replicated from other authoritarian traditions otherwise regarded as alien; by its primary concern with interpersonal dynamics, its focus on the proper configuration of gender and generational relations; or its attachment to the idea that history could start over and shape a new world within the old spaces of

endocolonial decay. Few of his supporters have followed his example in dismissing that phase of his life and work as 'petit-bourgeois fantasies' and 'naïve cultural nationalist delusion.' Their continuing apologies for his ancient excesses remain a clue to the unresolved issues pending in nationalist attempts to apprehend and monopolise the politics of black suffering.

That phase was succeeded by a version of a class politics that offered, along with the hope that stemmed from 'revolutionary optimism' something more than nationalism's inversion or its negative impression. It is therefore imperative that we do not elide these serial attachments into a history-less continuum. The appeal of Maoism³⁶ to Baraka seems to have resided in an exaggerated class politics which was nominally global 'in tune with the majority of all nationalities and languages'³⁷ but always at its most ferocious through its immersion in *local* matters. It was not tied to the USSR and the CPUSA, but to the Third World, offering immediate solidarity to the Vietnamese people as well as those of Cuba, Algeria, Palestine, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa. Of course, these unfashionable attachments were immediately reflected in fluctuating enthusiasm for Baraka's work found among black critics and commentators inside the USA. Few of them were inclined either towards 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tse-Tung thought' or to the varieties of socialism that followed it. During the significant period in which his nationalism gave way to communism, serious critical commentary on Baraka's writing was led by European critics like Werner Sollors, white American literary scholars like Kimberly Benston and leftist voices in music criticism such as Frank Kofsky.³⁸ Recognising that irony, we should also note that one of the most sensitive and insightful studies of Baraka's work is by Adrienne Rich whose thoughtful, detailed and sympathetic critical exposition of his literary development is a model of radical and humane intelligence.³⁹

Imaginative proximity to the idea of revolution provides an interpretative key to Baraka's work even in a time when that prospect has evaporated and the idea that the liberation movement could be adequately oriented by linked battles against exploitation and alienation has itself come under attack from liberal, postracial complacency on one side and the woeful exceptionalism of metaphysical, 'afropessimism' on the other. Baraka became concerned with the issue of where, and on what terms, African American struggles might intersect with those of other peoples in the process of emancipatory decolonisation. However, that assessment did not – with the partial exception of Apartheid South Africa – involve a strong identification with remote conflicts. Any tricontinentalist flavour

was repeatedly overwhelmed by what earlier militants in the cause of liberation (Alain Locke is again an obvious example) would have dismissed as a *provincial* desire for belonging – articulating the revolutionary restitution of African American suffering as a US matter, and sometimes, as a US family romance.⁴⁰

Baraka's influential mapping of 'the birth of music out of the spirit of tragedy' as Kimberly Benston deftly put it in 1976, created several generations of poetic critics of music. The publication of *Black Music* and *Blues People* initiated the welcome process whereby African American writers could depart from the Germanic interpretative scripts that had been put in place earlier by the approaches provided by Du Bois and Locke. The disciples of Leroi Jones started to evaluate black music not as an index of progress on the upward trajectory of a culture that was becoming a civilization, but as the catalyst for a distinctive aesthetic and the hidden public sphere it both affirmed and held together. There are precedents for this to be found in Hurston's riposte to Du Bois, and elsewhere, but the novelty and force of Baraka's interventions cannot be overstated because his love of the music in all its forms was so deep and his insight into its history so acute.

Blues People was the first book by an African American about the blues. It preceded Ralph Ellison's *Shadow and Act* into print by a year. In it, and to a lesser extent in *Black Music*, readers of my generation discovered something like a whole black paradigm for cultural criticism: a mode of speculative, multidisciplinary, conjunctural analysis focused by the interplay of text, performance and context, culture and sociality, but deeply rooted in the emergencies and imperatives of ordinary life. The inclination to undertake the work that Ellison dismissed as 'delicate brain surgery with a switchblade'⁴¹ was not for everybody, but it appealed to many who had been drawn towards aspects of Black Power and thrilled by the dynamism and creativity in that uniquely rich phase of African American and Caribbean musical life.

Baraka responded with a seemingly simple stance that uninhibitedly specified culture as 'simply how one lives and is connected to history by habit.' His project was oriented politically by the pursuit of 'Unity without uniformity.' It could be readily traced back into the convivial, everyday interactions characteristic of good sense: mother wit, and signifyin'. He insisted that music was not just central to this new configuration of culture in motion but was the decisive factor that enabled critics to perceive its true complexity. This was not the Ellisonian practice of descending into its depths to discover there [with the help of intoxication] a submerged

world, but of seeing, or rather hearing, the world that had already been summoned and required to submit to the sensuous intuition of its artistic architects who asserted their thwarted humanity by daring first to possess and then to transform it.

Baraka's example is also important because it raises the supremely difficult problem of how a subject, an agent, movement or culture can and indeed must, as his trope of the 'changing same' insists, differ from itself. That point bears repetition. He articulated not the logic of identity specified mathematically or serially, but of cultural mutability and plasticity conceived within historically specified conditions and tied on the one hand to improvisation, and on the other, to a view of the committed intellectual in the roles of interpreter and translator. Baraka's narration presented these options as the vernacular, philosophical fruits of the baracoons, the plantation and the Jim Crow nomos, of the noisy, annular, public spaces of the slaves' secret night-time assembly – the original source of Douglass' 'wild music.'

Perhaps the idea of tradition, so central to Baraka's early work is insufficient to bear all the weight that is being placed upon it here. Perhaps it resolved the daring and promise of his insights too quickly into self-consciousness and self-possession, but those exhilarating possibilities acquired new flesh in that trope of 'the changing same.' They were fully animated in the incredible and much anthologised 1966 essay where the soul and RnB of James Brown and Sam & Dave were, against all existing critical conventions, and the very structure of the market in these novel racial commodities, revealed to bear a profound kinship with older vocal and instrumental traditions as well as the newer experimental adventures being conducted under the atelic banners of the New Jazz.

More than forty years ago, the idea that the music of James Brown could be the worthy object of such detailed, loving, critical scrutiny was an extraordinary possibility. That seriousness and respect for disreputable, funky cultural forms that were still largely represented as devoid of any and all value, was a liberation *in itself*. Baraka's view of Brown as 'Our number one black poet' seems to have typified the feelings of the movement's poets – people like David Henderson who is particularly important because of his association with the magazine *Umbra* and for his meta-cultural reflections on the artistic life of Jimi Hendrix in a luminous biographical study: '*Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky*.'

Baraka's untimely judgment on James Brown's art was confirmed and reflexively historicised by his collaborator Larry Neal, who offered a

Fanon-centred account of how their thinking developed during the period that incubated the Black Arts Movement:

We began to listen to the music of the Rhythm and Blues people, soul music. That was the other musical tendency that influenced the language. The big hero for the poets was James Brown. We all thought that James Brown was a magnificent poet, and we all envied him and wished we could do what he did. If the poets could do that we would just take over America. Suppose James Brown had consciousness? We used to have big arguments like that. It was like saying, 'Suppose James Brown read Fanon.'⁴²

The dazzling polemic of the changing same essay opened a portal through which next generation of critics could begin to imagine their own contributions even if they could not then appreciate either the richness of Baraka's willful speculations or the simplifying gesture that aligned the new music with the blues continuum on one side, and on the other, diverted it away from the class-accented output of upwardly mobile 'penthouse' jazz on track towards respectability under the direction of producers like Creed Taylor.

One might object to the axiology implicit in James Blood Ulmer's suggestion that 'jazz was the teacher and funk was the preacher', but it is hard to miss the fundamental point being made. Later in the same wonderful interview with Kalamu Ya Salaam, Baraka describes what grasping this impossible relationship meant to him in 1972:

We were obviously digging Martha and the Vandellas and digging Smokey, just like we were digging Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, and Trane. To us it was just different voices in the same family, different voices in the same community. The screaming and hollering in James Brown and the screaming and hollering in Albert Ayler was the same scream and hollering, you understand?

If it took the world a little time to catch up with the music that Baraka and Ayler had heard approaching around the corner, it took the former a few years more to catch up with himself and fully to possess the epoch-making implications of the prophetic argument he'd divined through the honourable method of being supremely attentive.

Baraka, the stone genius of the Black Liberation Movement, didn't just write about music in an illuminating and provocative manner that transformed the poetics of criticism. His keen rhetorical sensibilities made critical words musical and brought that evasive black aesthetic to life right in the teeth of a blues aesthetic that had lost its way and needed the gutbucket transfusions that he and Jimi Hendrix would provide. Baraka's writing provoked a welcome chance to reopen concern with the

relationship between music and freedom and to use that engagement to specify a sophisticated, honest and dissident politics of culture in terms derived from the history of organised musical sound.

Notes

- ¹ See Anthony Jackson, 'The New Dark Age', *Bass Player* March–April (1991), 78; and Farrah Jasmine Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday: If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001). These texts convey the range of responses to this difficult moment.
- ² Noelle Morrisette, *James Weldon Johnson's Modern Soundscapes* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2013); Ed Pavlic, *Who Can Afford To Improvise? James Baldwin and Black Music, The Lyric and the Listeners* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).
- ³ Emily J. Lordi, *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Jennifer L. Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).
- ⁴ Ronald Radano, 'Black Music Labor and the Animated Properties of Slave Sound', *Boundary 2* 43.1 (2016), 173–208.
- ⁵ Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, DC: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), p. 90.
- ⁶ Alain Locke, 'Self-Criticism: The Third Dimension in Culture', *Phylon* 11.4 (1950).
- ⁷ Sidney Mintz, 'Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?', *Review* 2.1 (1978).
- ⁸ David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World but in Particular, and very Expressly to Those of the United States of America* 1830 (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1993), p. 57.
- ⁹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover, 1995), p. 8.
- ¹⁰ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, p. 8.
- ¹¹ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, p. 9.
- ¹² Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, p. 9.
- ¹³ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of an American Slave Written by Himself* (New York: Dover, 1995) see [chapter 2](#). I have used these pages since 1987 to introduce analysis of the more general attributes and strategies of black expressive culture. See also Frederick Douglass, 'Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders', *North Star* 29 June (1849), 2. And 'The Hutchinson Family—Hunkerism', *North Star* 27 October (1848), 2.
- ¹⁴ Barbara and Eugene Bodichon, 'Slavery in America', *English Woman's Journal* 2 October (1858) & *English Woman's Journal* 8 November (1861).
- ¹⁵ *English Woman's Journal* 8 November (1861), 186. Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 98–126; Bodichon's *An American Diary* & Sheila Herstein, *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

- ¹⁶ William Edward Farrison, *William Wells Brown: Author & Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Aaron D. McClendon, 'Sounds of Sympathy: William Wells Brown's Anti-Slavery Harp, Abolition, and the Culture of Early and Antebellum American Song', *African American Review* 47.1 (2014), 83–100.
- ¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. by Bernard Bosanquet (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 50.
- ¹⁸ Arthur de Gobineau, *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races* (New York: Lippincott & Co., 1856), p. 14. Edward W. Blyden (1888), *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), p. 276.
- ¹⁹ This was my argument in *The Black Atlantic*. See also W. T. Jnr. Lhamon, *Raisin' Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998). Langston Hughes' essay on the Fisk Singers begins his book *Famous Negro Music Makers* (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1955).
- ²⁰ Ronald Radano, 'Soul Texts and the Blackness of Folk', *Modernism/modernity* 2.1 (1995), 85–7; and Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 490–525.
- ²¹ Anne E. Carroll, 'Du Bois and Art Theory: *The Souls of Black Folk* as a "Total Work of Art"', *Public Culture* 17.2 (2005). Russell Berman, 'Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between Germany and the United States', *New German Quarterly* 70.2 (1997), 123–35.
- ²² W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Phonograph Records', *The Crisis* 21.4 (1921), 152.
- ²³ David Susman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- ²⁴ Pauline E. Hopkins, *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self*. 1902–3, in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline E. Hopkins*. ed. by Hazel V. Carby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 439–621.
- ²⁵ Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).
- ²⁶ James W. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, New York), 1925.
- ²⁷ Johnson, *Spirituals*, p. 50.
- ²⁸ Locke, *The Negro and His Music*, p. 138.
- ²⁹ Zora Neale Hurston, 'Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals' in *Negro: An Anthology* (1933), ed. by Nancy Cunard (New York: Ungar & Co., 1970), pp. 223–5; see also Hurston's 'Characteristics of Negro Expression', pp. 24–31, in the same volume.
- ³⁰ Robert Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston A Literary Biography* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1977).
- ³¹ Richard Wright, 'Between Laughter and Tears', *New Masses* 5 October (1937).
- ³² Ralph Ellison, 'Living with Music', *High Fidelity* December (1955).
- ³³ Langston Hughes, 'Music at Year's End', *The Chicago Defender* 9 January (1943).
- ³⁴ Hughes, 'Music.'
- ³⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938).

- ³⁶ Amiri Baraka, *Autobiography* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), this is from a footnote on pp. 310–12.
- ³⁷ Baraka, *Autobiography*, p. 329.
- ³⁸ Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (London: Pathfinder Press, 1974); Kimberly Benston published his study of Baraka in 1976 while still an undergraduate. Werner Sollors' study of Baraka's 'populist modernism' appeared in 1978. See also Nate Mackey, 'The Changing Same: Black Music in the Poetry of Amiri Baraka', *Boundary 2* 5 (1978), 355–86.
- ³⁹ Adrienne Rich, "'What Country Is This?'" re-reading Leroi Jones Dead Lecturer', *Boston Review* March (2009), *A Human Eye: Essays on Art and Society* 1997–2008.
- ⁴⁰ Baraka, *Autobiography*, p. 311.
- ⁴¹ Ralph Ellison, 'Blues People', *The New York Review of Books*, 6 February 1964. www.nybooks.com/articles/1964/02/06/the-blues/
- ⁴² Larry Neal, 'The Social Background of the Black Arts Movement', *The Black Scholar* 18.1 (1987), 19.

Unrecordable Sound
*Media History, Technology and the Racial Unconscious**
Julie Beth Napolin

The Sound of History

Long before the invention of the phonograph, the twin themes of storage and communication oriented Western literary production and its modes of presentation. From Homer's evocation of the Sirens in alliterating sibilance to the heteroglossia that Mikhail Bakhtin took to be the defining gesture of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's and Charles Dickens's social style, literature is a sound recording technology, documenting vocal rhythms, tones, and idiolects.¹ Though he did not remark upon the technological reality of his 1930s context, Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, or the multiplicity of speech types that populate fiction's social space, strikes one today as related to the rise of the phonograph, 'an extreme case of the voice's detachability from speaker, body, and presence', so much so that Paul de Man readily embraced Bakhtin's dialogism, not as 'voices of authorial identity and identification [...] but voices of radical alterity, [...] their otherness their reality.'²

In thinking of that alterity, one can insist not only upon heteroglossia, but also *heterophony*, a diversity of sounds, listening positions, and acoustical spaces documented and incited by literature.³ From Alain Corbin to Ana María Gautier Ochoa, contemporary critics turn to written narratives to find a broader acoustical sensorium, a monument not only to speech, but to the sounds of voices and the extra-linguistic, audible world.⁴ Lyric and the novel were no doubt altered in the modernist imaginary by sound technology, but they retain their pre-phonographic power, being a bifurcated space, both of and heterogeneously other from sound technology, proleptically predicting and exceeding it.

The relationship between the history of literature and other forms of media is uneven and anachronic. After the invention of the phonograph, it becomes possible to hypothesize in literature what we might call

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heteraudiophony, it being undecidable whether some diegetic sounds are naturally vibrating or technologically reproduced. Even when mechanical devices nowhere appear within a text, critics have observed how sounds take on a stored, transmitted, or replayed quality, reminiscent of the pianola, phonograph, radio, and telephone.⁵ We have understood less well how these sounds also register, in uncanny ways, technologies not yet invented and immanent ways of hearing not yet established.

Consider, for example, the harmonic fragments of slave song that begin each chapter of W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a meditation on African American life and consciousness after Reconstruction that spans sociology, autobiography, fiction, and musicology. Du Bois compiled the chapters in a moment not long after the phonograph's invention in 1877, but well before the machine had made recorded music widely available in homes in the teens and 1920s. The Fisk Jubilee Singers who orient Du Bois's remarks were engaged in their world tour, spreading the sound of African American spirituals in ways that recordings would later compound. Yet, Alexander Weheliye argues persuasively that Du Bois's literary aesthetic anachronistically calls upon a nascent technological sensibility.⁶ It is as if Du Bois samples the fragments of song that, Du Bois writes, 'welled up from the black souls in the dark past.'⁷ Weheliye relays these musical fragments through applications of technology that postdate Du Bois's text. The turntablist, particularly in the encounter between black studies and sound studies (ranging from the work of Tricia Rose to Kodwo Eshun and to Louis Chude-Sokei), is a technologized figure who usurps Bakhtin's notion of the author as an 'orchestrator' of the many heterogeneous voices of the social.⁸ Du Bois cuts and mixes voices of the past, many of them anonymously or collectively authored and passing through his text as a sound and memory system. This absent-presence of media in *The Souls of Black Folk* underscores a logic both commemorative and disjunctively technological, committed to what in the old slave songs demands to be heard, played, and reproduced anew in the contemporary. For Du Bois, something of Euro-American hearing itself was not yet adequate to the songs' message.

In relation to Afro-Futurism and sound in the black diaspora, Chude-Sokei writes of a 'creative tension [...] between that which foretells and that which has been told.'⁹ In this 'technopoetics', the harmonic fragments are immanently for the future, beginning with their optical effect on the page that registers a potential for sounding (through playing, imaginary listening, and future performance). Situated within this tension, a literary sound recording is not simply a copy of a preexisting, remembered, or

conjectured event that has not yet taken place. In Du Bois's moment, the full promise of Emancipation and Reconstruction had yet to be realized; it is as-yet unrealized.

Joining such scholars as Chude-Sokei and Stephen M. Best, I argue for the absent-presence of media history in fictional narrative as it is twinned by the absent-presence of slavery's legacy in media history and historiography. Asking how theorists have variously approached or elided early encounters between racialization and sound recording, I show how media history and historiography participate in a *technological racial unconscious*. Turning to the work of Southern writer, William Faulkner, and Harlem Renaissance writer, Angelina Weld Grimké, I follow this unconscious in the anachronic temporality of literary soundings. Paul Gilroy influentially defines the chronotope of the 'Black Atlantic' as a transcultural and international nexus of sound, listening, and migration making black culture a 'counterculture of modernity.'¹⁰ Where Faulkner was seeking in prose a technology that might capture the contradictions of an unreconstructed South in the present, Grimké took up sound technology to insert an excluded subjectivity into modernity, posing a *counter-recording*.

In thinking of literature as a 'recording' of voices, but also an ambient world of sound, the word 'record' maintains its double valence, as the surface onto which marks are inscribed and the document that evidences. But fiction, not being bound by physical laws, can pose a subversive heteraudiophony and with it, a counter-recording of the latencies of the present. Far from being a purely present-tense event that disappears or is positively recorded to be stored and replayed, what is not known or grasped by the writer's own moment is evocative of a sensorial future tense. In heteraudiophony, it is impossible to decide whether sounds are of a particular moment or that moment's own immanence. Something of the event it indexes is lost to its contemporary perceivers and demands future perception.

Literature is the media that records something of the history and ongoing struggle of Reconstruction that other media cannot. By 'history', I indicate not the objective past, but what Saidiya Hartman calls, in relation to slavery and Reconstruction in the United States, 'afterlives.' In afterlives, there is no clear epistemic or affective distinction between past and present. Rather, the present is experienced as the 'debris' of what had once been a hope for the future.¹¹ Reconstruction is officially dated between 1863 and 1877, the year of the phonograph's invention, but it remains incomplete, having ushered in Jim Crow segregation and its continued legacy. The hopes for Emancipation and Reconstruction cannot be separated from their afterlives, famously articulated for Du Bois in feelings of emptiness,

disenfranchisement, and disenchantment. The negativity of such historical debris makes it difficult to say positively and in the simple grammatical past, 'X happened', in the manner favoured by the historical record.

The humanities and social sciences today are increasingly characterized by a renewed faith in the archive, such that every history, including histories of sound, must be substantiated and hyperlinked. Yet, as Hartman's work repeatedly demonstrates, some experiences are not in the archive except as a 'scrap' because their subject is nameless or a multitude. These experiences live on not in record, but in haunting. Media history itself, an increasingly archaeological field of study, cannot be indifferent to the politics that attend any struggle to arrange time into periods, ages, and eras, which necessarily declare history's losers and victors. 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism', Walter Benjamin writes. 'A historical materialist therefore [. . .] regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.'¹² We can find in the literary history of sound technology a 'partial history' of Reconstruction, and in Reconstruction, a partial history of literature and media.¹³ In the United States, the racial afterlives of Reconstruction are the warp and woof of media history and sound technology. At the same time, black listening subjects have imagined and archived other possible worlds in the production and reproduction of sound.¹⁴

While some sounds and voices are unavailable because the formats that captured them are easily degraded or, like early radio, easily discarded or unarchived, there are sounds that have gone unrecorded except in literature, despite being of the 'machine age.' Some sounds and voices were unrecordable, or impossible to capture with any fidelity given the limitations of a particular recording technology. In a third possibility, perhaps no one thought certain sounds and voices significant enough to capture in an audio recording or the technological means of recording were inaccessible. These latter sounds' existence, not only in written records, but also in performance (as an archive of sound), becomes a counter-memory, a counter-recording. Such sounds may be without the normative cultural elevation that attends historical 'artefacts.' They are no less an index of a time and place, marking a struggle over the meaning and existence of collective history.

Historiography and the Technological Racial Unconscious

Heteraudiophonic sound straddles what media theorist Friedrich Kittler calls the 'discourse networks' of 1800 and 1900, the first defined by orality

and the alphabet, the second by mechanical inscription.¹⁵ Kittler is famous for establishing a commonplace in media studies: 'The phonograph does not hear as do ears that have been trained immediately to filter voices, words, and sounds out of noise. It registers acoustic events as such.' The phonograph, in Kittler's view, inscribes indiscriminately every sonic contingency – or the 'Real' – without filter or regard for meaning.¹⁶ But what is an 'acoustic event as such' when it concerns listening and with it, what Du Bois calls 'double consciousness', a subject who has been split by the traumatizing experience of racialization and the hope for Reconstruction? Such an experience is, in Du Bois's phrase, 'the gift of a second-sight', which is also a second-listening turned toward the past while sensing the future.¹⁷

For Faulkner, born one year after *Plessy vs. Ferguson* upheld the doctrine of *de jure* racial segregation, white consciousness was no less split. In his opus of the American South, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Faulkner turns to voices that, repetitively talking to one another a generation ago in 1909, are consumed by a series of events and disembodied voices that still speak in memory from the Civil War past. An anonymous narrator reports sounds that resound continuously between the novel's diegetic time, 1833 and 1909: 'It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells rung on that Sunday morning in 1833 [...]—a Sunday morning in June with the bells ringing peaceful and peremptory and a little cacophonous—the denominations in concord though not in tune.'¹⁸ Faulkner documents what it is to hear the pastoral community intoned by bells for a subject who, like Faulkner's protagonist, both loves and repudiates his home in the Jim Crow South. The sound of bells is split between the cyclical temporality of worship and the interruptive temporality of the political. Faulkner's listeners do not experience themselves as listening to a sound for the first time but on the receiving end of an echo that began long before their individual lives, implicating the present in a past that official records deem concluded or complete.

I've described elsewhere how Faulkner was representing these sounds anachronistically through his technological moment of the 1930s.¹⁹ It was the same era that novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston documented Floridian sounds and folklorist John Lomax took his equipment to the Delta to record the blues for the Library of Congress. Faulkner's narrator listens in 1909, a moment before the invention of broadcast radio

and before the electric microphone would have made it possible to capture sounds that were not sounding directly into the phonograph's horned mouth, which doubled as microphone and speaker.²⁰ The resonance of town bells mingles in the novel's airspace with an errant sound: a gunshot that echoes long after a murder in the 1850s. It resounds for an impossible, phonographic duration of forty years, from the beginning of the Civil War to the novel's present in 1909. Quentin Compson, the novel's young protagonist and principal listener, only later comes to understand the vexed, largely unconscious motives of the murder not fully grasped by the actors themselves. The sound and the experience of listening draw their potency from the novel's own delayed epistemic distribution and divided consciousness. The sound is not simply preserved, but held over and suspended: it is an experience of listening shot through with epochal change and dislocation.

In 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Benjamin argues that no fact begins as historical simply because it is causal. It only becomes so 'post-humously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years.'²¹ Benjamin outlines an anti-historicist approach: 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was."²² A historian who understands this fact, he continues, 'stops telling the sequence of events [. . .]. Instead, he grasps [*erfasst*] the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.'²³ In a sonic analogue to the constellation, Faulkner demonstrates that narrative is the technology that might capture, store, and transmit the sound of history. He was recording something difficult to capture by traditional methods, finding no clear analogue in orality and ethnography. In a kind of field recording, Faulkner's text absorbs his lived experience of the sound of bells in his native Mississippi, but what it captures is a posthumous sound twinned by a divided listening consciousness. These could not just as easily have been captured by a recording device. In its inclusion of a listening subject, literature is a particular kind of historical record: the linguistic presentation of sound – its tense and mood – does not record a positive event, but rather a site of contact, the resonance across millennia.²⁴

It becomes difficult to maintain that the phonograph operates in a purely indexical relationship to its object, purified of subjective modes of listening and unshaped by race, gender, and politics. Sounds, writes Jennifer Lynn Stoeber 'come to us "already listened to."²⁵ Kittler often has implicit racialized categories in mind when he writes of phonographic sound as capturing the 'Real' of the symbolic.²⁶ Though he offers among the most extensive accounts of the psychodynamics of the history of

media, black and non-Western sound recordings occupy the place of the Real in relation to the (white, European) symbolic, a racialization that continues to frame many discussions of sound and in unspoken ways, from Michel Chion to Slavoj Žižek.²⁷ As Roshanak Kheshti has argued of ethnographic practices that later codified the notion of 'world music', such categories and, above all, the desires for the 'aural other' that drive them, are just as available to historicizing.²⁸ As I will return to, these categories are tied up with at times violently racist fantasies in the early technological imaginary. There are also speculative counter-projections of technological possibility imagined by 'aural others' who are not simply objects to record, as Daphne Brooks might suggest, but listening and recording subjects.

Media history is an absent-presence within literature, textual production registering sound technology without being fully contained by it. The two forms of media coexist in productive tension. While media historiography often fantasizes technology to be neutral or indifferent to questions of racism and sexism, fiction amplifies an axiom that historiography often mutes: every history is both story and plot, *histoire* and *récit*, and mandates a listening and narrating subject.²⁹ When, in *The Audible Past* (2003), Jonathan Sterne proposed the possibility of a 'history of sound', he sought to pursue 'sound culture as such' rather than 'within other disciplinary or interdisciplinary intellectual domains.'³⁰ But who is the subject of that history? What, strictly speaking, separates the history of sound from the history of literature? Roland Barthes once declared that the grammatical question, 'who is speaking?', defines the novel's semiotic production.³¹ In ways that have not been adequately understood in the case of sound, both real and imagined, physical and fictional, this question is twinned by another, 'who is hearing?'³² When a sound is presented in literary space, it is not an 'acoustic event as such', but as heard, ignored, or muted, a twinning of sound and listening in fictional presentation.

Sterne provocatively describes how, across media historiography, critics often fetishize the first message as recorded or transmitted by a newly invented machine. The first telephone call: 'Mr. Watson—Come here—I want to see you!'³³ The poetics of genesis is nowhere more clearly inscribed than in the first telegraph message, transmitted in 1844 from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore: 'What hath God wrought?'³⁴ 'These are powerful stories because they tell us that something happened to the nature, meaning, and practices of sound in the late nineteenth century', Sterne writes.³⁵ Calling upon the literary, Stoevers extends Sterne's critique when she writes of 'self-evidently triumphant narratives of sound reproduction's role in American history.'³⁶ The rhetoric of first messages involves a divine

speaker and addressee. They appear unmarked and implicitly universal, though they are freighted with what the speaking and listening subject takes to be the 'I' and 'you' of his messages.

What if we were to include in the genealogy of first messages a different scene, the installation of the nation's first emergency call or '911' system? In 1968, at the peak of Civil Rights unrest, the mayor of Haleyville, Alabama placed a test call on a red phone to a U.S. Representative who answered 'Hello.' The first emergency call was later placed to Bull Connor, Birmingham, Alabama's Commissioner of Public Safety made famous by authorizing the use of fire hoses and attack dogs on African American protestors. The 911 call technologizes what had already been the right of any white American during slavery to deputize himself and demand any black person to show his or her freedom papers. The popularization of the telephone propounded intimacy and what David Trotter calls, in the British context, 'connective sociability' oriented around the metaphor of being 'in touch.'³⁷ Nonetheless, Jim Crow laws in the United States asserted physical and social distance, materializing a heightened anxiety over what one early advertisement for the telephone invoked as 'time and dist. overcome.'³⁸ The telephone pole, Eula Biss describes, was adapted to and caught up in a terrorizing imaginary, becoming a technology of lynching, the pole repurposed as gallows.³⁹

Sound technologies literalize, facilitate, and extend forms of racialization. Racist terror in the U.S. rose with communications, newspapers, and telegraphs, which publicized these events to draw spectators from surrounding towns, photographers then capturing and re-disseminating the event (commonly as postcards, violent images only being made illegal in 1908 by the United States Postal Service).⁴⁰ In 'Never Heard Such a Thing', historian Gustavus Stadler includes within this violent technosphere a staged recording of the lynching of Henry Smith in 1893 in Paris, Texas.⁴¹ Where the announcement of Smith's lynching in the newspapers and via telegram drew spectators from nearby states, the feigned restaging of the event is its twisted memento. This commemoration points to an opposing death drive within what Sterne describes as the broader ethos of preservation in the nineteenth century, from the invention of canned goods to embalming. Permanence was not a given, but rather 'became a wish and a program for sound recording.'⁴² Where there is 'wish,' there is the unconscious. We can turn to Stadler who writes, 'these recordings do not preserve life; rather they document a cultural practice whose ritualized performance is centered around the destruction of a life, and they hence point to the indelible whiteness of not only phonographic listening in the

1890s, but also a great deal of recent work on phonography.⁴³ Inhospitable to permanence, the fragile wax cylinder recording of the staged lynching has since vanished and underscores its fleeting entertainment value.

In these instances, media history doubles itself, a preservative machine tied to destruction, a connective machine to segregation. But the doubling is still more profound. Stadler was puzzled to find so many recent references to the Smith recording that took for granted it was real. The electric microphone had not yet been invented, making it impossible to capture such an event with any fidelity. Contemporary listeners knew the recording had been staged, but nonetheless reacted with horror.⁴⁴ The fact of this record's existence, later miscast by white historiographers as 'real', turns upon an aural fantasy that is a close companion to the scopic drive: the fantasy of being close enough to a lynching to have captured it with the horn of the phonograph. Such fantasies of proximity are grounded, Stadler writes, in a 'fascination among whites with black voices, as well as fantasies about the relationship of black voices to black bodies.'⁴⁵

The historian can reproduce the unconscious desires of the past or brush them against the grain. In *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (2000), Lisa Gitelman set out to describe the shift in writing culture with the rise of sound recording, but the archive led her to the often-elided bond between the early phonographic imaginary, violence, and racism.⁴⁶ Gitelman discusses a c. 1904 Edison Company recording, in which a white actor performed, against a background of melodramatic music, 'The Flogging' scene of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.⁴⁷ Several 'literary' questions unfold from the psychic economy of the flogging scene, which lends itself not only to dramatization by an actor but to sound recording, the actor's voice playing back in the privacy of the home in ways that were later standardized by the rise of the audio book.⁴⁸ In the scene in question, Tom's sadistic master demands that Tom beat another slave; Tom refuses, and the flogging does not occur. Gitelman notes how, in one early account of listening to Edison's recording of 'The Flogging', a white male listener describes having leapt out of his chair, so real was his wish to flog the invisible and fictional master on behalf of Tom.⁴⁹ This listener identifies with Tom and participates affectively in the event. For that identification to 'work', however, the listener had to imagine himself to be Tom, a slave. This listener, animated by a machine, now animates the otherwise subdued Tom with his own fury. In the staging (by a white actor playing both voices) before a phonograph, the sound recording literalizes what in the act of reading is already productive of imaginary sounds and images.

Such a recording is without the cultural elevation that attends the genesis narratives of Edison's first recordings, but it underscores the dimension of media history they often disavow. As Sterne notes, these narratives continually emphasize 'disembodiment', claiming that the phonograph separated sounds and voices. In the early moments of recording history that I've identified, white listeners are entangled with a black body he or she imagines to be 'fungible', moveable, and flexible like a commodity.⁵⁰ The phonograph did not 'disembody' the voice. Rather, it posed new forms of (racialized and gendered) embodiment. Writing in the context of blackface minstrelsy, Eric Lott thus describes in a psychoanalytic vein 'the imagined introjection of objectified black people.'⁵¹ The phonograph expanded upon that introjection. But the act of reading also produces phantasmatic bodies to consume and attach to its imaginary voices whose sources we cannot physically see. Reading is imbued with the desire to 'hear' and to 'see' up close and at a distance. It is here that heteraudiophony can become actualized towards another potential, circumventing and redirecting that desire.

Sound and Becoming-Objects

In c. 1918 Angelina Weld Grimké composed a Gothic tale, titled in its first and unpublished instance 'Blackness.' An unnamed man sits in the 'chilling blackness' of a cellar, somewhere in the American North, to tell his friend, Reed, that he is going to skip town.⁵² He has just returned from his family home in American South, where he was raised; he had found his family house to be nearly destroyed.⁵³ No one was in the house, he recounts, yet he heard a series of uncanny sounds coming from the outdoors, what he calls 'the two voices and the duet.' 'Somewhere—from over there it came—where the blackness was—of the trees.' The narrator continues:

"Creak! Creak! Creak!" That was the voice that was a little higher.

"Creak! Creak! Creak!" And that was the voice that was a little lower.

"Creak! Creak! Creak!" And that was the two together. Stillness would follow and then it would begin all over again – and end. And I noted the stillness always came when the breeze was still and the voices – it blew. What was it? Where was it?

"Creak! Creak! Creak!", First voice.

"Creak! Creak! Creak!", Second voice.

"Creak! Creak! Creak!", the duet.

"Silence!"⁵⁴

Recalling Tennyson's pre-phonographic 'Break, Break, Break,' there are eight repetitions of the triplicate sound.⁵⁵ Each is recounted (replayed?) while Grimké's unnamed narrator describes leaving the house to walk slowly in 'the direction of the sounds.' Grimké's strategy predates sound cinema by nearly a decade: she desynchronizes sound and image, presenting the sound before the visual source. In ways that recall my comments about delayed epistemic and sensory distribution in Faulkner, the narrator finally 'sees' the source of the sound: the creak is the aftersound of a lynching, the corpses of his family hanging in the grove.

Grimké eroticizes an event that is supposed to be uniformly abhorrent, extending a pleasure in telling, writing, and reading while also imagining a character who not only survives the image of his family's murder but – in ways that are unprecedented for the period – imagines him avenging them and escaping the law. In reality, those who sought adjudication often paid with their lives.⁵⁶ Though the sounds, like the technology of lynching itself, are repetitive, Grimké's presentation is speculative, also playing upon the reader's perception and courting an ambiguous sensory reality. 'Silence!' itself is quoted in text, as if subversively seized.

The 'Creak!' is a sound that no one is supposed to record or preserve. Heteraudiophonic, it is the kind of sound that could not have been captured by recording technology as it was in that moment (several years before the electric microphone). Above all, it is an aftersound, an afterlife. But it is also futuristic, a collision of creation and destruction in what Carter Mathes might call an 'apocalyptic soundscape.'⁵⁷ Grimké's story does not present the mob's loud cacophony of which a lynching photograph is the image, a viewer imagining the murmur and shouting. Instead, the creaking in the wind is the sound after a mob has left. It is the sound of what is left behind after a spectacular event, with no formalized memory system that might receive and preserve it. Who hears? The 'creak' is a sound of survival, heard by the one who is left with the memory of an event whose documentation official culture suppresses.⁵⁸ But at the same time, the sounds and their auditory sensibility are irreducible to history's violent reiteration. It is as if Grimké's insurgent listening subject takes a microphone, not yet invented, to this scene and its stillness.

On August 1930, perhaps the most well-known photograph of lynching in America was taken by Lawrence Beitler after Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith had been taken from their cells in Indiana and extrajudiciously executed for the accusation of robbery and rape of a white woman.⁵⁹ Five months later, Faulkner completed revisions on 'Dry September', a story that culminates with a white mob. Across Faulkner's corpus, the

memory of lynching is a displaced memory.⁶⁰ Where it is not displaced, the spectacular moment is quickly ushered away in favour of an event that is overheard and visually obscured. Faulkner drew from the cinematic language of editing and the cut. In 'Dry September', a group of white men brutalize a black man, Will, for the likely false accusation of raping a white woman, but the anonymous narrator flees the scene, leaving behind a series of scuffling sounds that do not answer whether Will survives or dies. Like 'Creak!', these sounds do not strike one as for the historical record. In such instances, Faulkner's technique creates a disjunctive relationship between sound and image reminiscent of filmic montage.⁶¹

There is much to say about Faulkner's privileging of the auditory over the visual in those moments that undermine the spectacular and reiterative technology of lynching.⁶² But its absent-presence allows us to ask after the historical negativity recorded by literary sound space. Consider Faulkner's 'Mistral', which Faulkner began in 1926, but only completed and published in 1931, in close proximity to 'Dry September.' 'Mistral' takes place in Italy, far from the Jim Crow South whose ways of hearing and structure of feeling nonetheless leave a trace in the story's space, which is beset by the sound of relentless wind. The story is one manifestation of the listening subject that would later define *Absalom, Absalom!*:

The whisper in our ears seemed to fill the room with wind. Then we realized that it was the wind that we heard, the wind itself we heard, even though the single window was shuttered tight. It was as though the quiet room were isolated on the ultimate peak of space, hollowed murmurous out of chaos and the long dark fury of time. It seemed strange that the candle flame should stand so steady above the wick.⁶³

The sound of wind is among the most difficult to record, blasting the microphone. Yet, one can recognize in the story's acoustical space something technified, if only at the level of an anachronism: this is a headphone space where 'the sound of music in my ear', as Kittler was among the first to observe, 'can exist only once mouthpieces and microphones are capable of recording any whisper.'⁶⁴ The headphones used by telephone operators were invented in 1910, but it was not until 1958 that stereo headphones, the kind we associate with listening to music, were invented. This sense of the sound of wind being 'in' the ear also echoes the contemporary and uncanny technology of the telephone receiver.⁶⁵ As if there were no distance between the recorded voice and listening ears, as if voices travelled along the transmitting bones of acoustic self-perception directly from the mouth into the ear's labyrinth, hallucinations become real.⁶⁶

In the late 1940s, composer Pierre Schaeffer isolated the sounds of individual objects, tapes that were cut up and looped to diminish the listener's sense of a preconceived context, what he called 'reduced listening' after phenomenological reduction. Chion turned to the work of Schaeffer in order to account for cinematic sounds whose sources are not seen, or what Schaeffer called, after Pythagoras, the 'acousmatic.'⁶⁷ What Chion calls the 'not-yet-seen' sound, upon which the aesthetic of horror turns, has erotic and racial connotations that Chion himself never explored.⁶⁸ Being in the darkness, in the 'chilling blackness': these carry association with the racialized other, a horror of darkness that Grimké tropes and inverts. 'Mistral' ushers us far away from the racist divisions of Mississippi, displacing them onto the wind's 'dark fury.'⁶⁹ Here, 'Mistral' connotes a racialized spectre fantasized by Faulkner's white characters. Yet, Faulkner also casts a listening subject who senses in the wind something he cannot grasp, not only history, but a portent of things to come. The belatedness between sound and source lends to Faulkner's story, as it does to Grimké's, the political valence of a counter-recording.

Since Schaeffer and Chion, discourses of sound have continually seized upon the acousmatic as a promise of a sound unpolluted by the visual, political, historical, or sociological, in Schaeffer's lexicon a 'sonorous object.'⁷⁰ In Schaeffer, the subject is purified of the object, and in Kittler, the object is purified of the subject. But Faulkner's sense of 'the wind [...], the wind itself' is a sound object that, though it appears to be mechanically reproduced and to circulate independently of a listener, yields no idealized or neutral subject of listening. 'Then the wind began: a steady moving wall of air full of invisible particles of something. Before it the branches leaned without a quiver, as before the pressure of an invisible hand, and in it our blood began to cool at once.'⁷¹ We are confronted in Faulknerian space not with sound objects traditionally conceived or 'acoustic events as such', but rather with what Lauren Berlant might call 'becoming-objects.'⁷² These are objects that 'conceal their immanence' in the present. The sound of wind manifests from an anonymous place and time, in a space that might otherwise appear to be silent were it not for narrative as a sensitive receiving instrument. Such moments make media history itself the unrecorded or absent-presence. The wind is discerned by a mode of attention that records what is not-yet phenomenally present.

Such sounds belong to what Fred Moten might call 'a degraded present.'⁷³ In a degraded present, narratives of the past have been partially

suppressed by an understanding that flees from or repels them. Faulkner's listening subject senses without yet knowing that he is bound to a past that would seem to be outside him and to an ongoing event of reconciliation. The heteraudiophonic sounds of 'Mistral' and 'Blackness', taken together and in themselves, capture sonorous negativities, a duet of futurity and afterlife. These sounds, particularly where action cedes, register an epistemic rift, an alternative space that cannot be framed by what can be seen, known, and understood through a diegesis that has been mandated by the degraded present. Such moments refuse to allow the violence of the present to contain the hopes for other desires, fulfilments, and ways of life.

Notes

- ¹ For a discussion of the ways that ancient writers self-consciously reflected on writing as a sonic medium, see Shane Butler, *The Ancient Phonograph* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).
- ² I draw the first quotation from Saint-Amour's summary of Derridean studies of the phonograph and literature. See Paul K. Saint-Amour, 'Ulysses Pianola', *PMLA* 130 (2015), 15–36 (p. 16). Paul de Man, 'Dialogue and Dialogism', *Poetics Today* 4 (1983), 99–107 (p. 103).
- ³ I am adapting the technical meaning of heterophony in music, the 'texture resulting from simultaneous performances of melodic variants of the same tune', found in Middle Eastern musical practices, medieval European monophonic song, and jazz. See 'Heterophony', in *The Encyclopaedia of Britannica* [online], updated 28 April 2017 [cited 3 December 2018]. Available from <https://web.archive.org/web/20181229164333/https://www.britannica.com/art/heterophony>.
- ⁴ For an important historical methodology of recovering sound before the invention of recording, see Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For a foundational theory of the 'ear witness', see R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994). For a discussion of lyric poetry as it attempted to capture the sound of a singer's voice, see Judith Pascoe, *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011). For a related study of Shakespeare, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For a theoretical study of colonial travel narratives describing unrecorded sounds in nineteenth-century Colombia, see Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

- ⁵ See Ivan Kreilkamp, 'A Voice without a Body: The Phonographic Logic of *Heart of Darkness*', in *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 179–205. Also see Mark Goble, 'Soundtracks: Modernism, Fidelity, Race', in *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 151–224. Also see John A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Touching on these studies, Saint-Amour argues against their 'gramophonocentric' tendencies, which read literature of the past in terms of the 'sonic present' and thus neglect other waylaid machines like the pianola (p. 16). I will argue that anachrony is not to read backward from a stable present, but rather towards a record of the past that, incomplete, demands to be heard anew in the present.
- ⁶ Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Afro-Sonic Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 82, 99. Also see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993). Recorded music figures prominently in Gilroy's theory of the black diaspora.
- ⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 6.
- ⁸ See Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
- ⁹ Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), pp. 73–4.
- ¹⁰ See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 1–40.
- ¹¹ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 39.
- ¹² Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 253–64 (pp. 256–7).
- ¹³ I borrow the phrase from Sara Marcus' study of sound in Du Bois and other texts, *Political Disappointment: A Partial History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). I thank her for ongoing discussions. Formative of my thinking is the work of Michael Rogin who writes, 'Each transformative moment in the history of American film has founded itself on the surplus symbolic value of blacks, the power to make African Americans stand for something besides themselves' ('Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 [1992], 417–53 [p. 417]). Rogin notes four moments, including the blackface adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), the first film to use intertitles, and Al Jolson's blackface vehicle, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first sound film.
- ¹⁴ Daphne Brooks touched on this idea in a lecture on 1 February 2019 at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art. She commented on the so-called 'human phonograph', Blind Tom, a blind composer born into captivity who used the piano to transmit a record of his bondage, creating what Brooks called 'speculative sensorial histories.'

- ¹⁵ See Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. by Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
- ¹⁶ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) p. 23.
- ¹⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 10. The only fictional story in *Souls*, 'The Coming of John', sonically depicts a lynching of a black protagonist by a white mob. We do not 'see' the event; instead, in the story's final moments, the narrator describes how a melody from Wagner recurs to the story's protagonist, but in heterophonic ways, Du Bois altering Wagner's original line to mix it with the liberationist ethos of slave song. See Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 154.
- ¹⁸ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 23.
- ¹⁹ See my 'The Fact of Resonance: The Acoustics of Determination in Faulkner and Benjamin', *Symploke* 24 (2016), 171–86. I argue for the 'archival' and technological dimension of air in *Absalom, Absalom!*.
- ²⁰ Bell Labs developed the Western Electric electrical recording system by 1924, but it did not become universal in record making until after 1930.
- ²¹ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 263.
- ²² Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 255.
- ²³ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 263.
- ²⁴ For a related discussion of 'resonance' in the politics of reading, see Wai Chee Dimock, 'A Theory of Resonance', *PMLA* 112 (1997), 1060–71. Dimock's brilliant essay elaborates 'resonance' as a metaphor for the diachrony of literature.
- ²⁵ Jennifer Lynn Stoecker, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p. 24.
- ²⁶ See, for example, Kittler's discussion of Jimi Hendrix in *Gramophone*, p. 111. In the same chapter, Kittler links the hallucinatory sound of bells in Pink Floyd to an 1898 recording that promised to give listeners the authentic sound of a 'Negro plantation' life. For a brief critique of Kittler, see Benjamin Steege, 'Between Race and Culture: Hearing Japanese Music in Berlin', *History of Humanities* 2 (2017), 361–74. Thank you to Steege for helpful discussions.
- ²⁷ When Ian Penman writes, for example, of Freud's techniques of listening to the unconscious, he juxtaposes Freud with ethnographic field recording, among the earliest uses of the microphone. Penman represents the racial other as pure unconscious vis-à-vis a white, rational subject when he suggests that, where Freud externalized 'our interior world', the field recording captured 'black night songs', 'Itinerant blues shamans', 'Haitian ceremony', and 'Hawaiian unheimlich.' See Ian Penman, 'On the Mic: How Amplification Altered the Voice for Good', in *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music*, ed. by Rob Young (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 26–34 (pp. 26–7). Thank you to Christoph Cox for sharing this essay with me.
- ²⁸ See Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

- ²⁹ Several media historians retrieve in that material the kinds of subject positions marginalized by the white, male, and authoritative subject. See Mara Mills, 'Deafness', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 44–54. Also see Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). Rubery recuperates the blind subject as one beginning of the audio book.
- ³⁰ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 4.
- ³¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Harper Collins, 1977), p. 142.
- ³² I discuss this question in my 'Elliptical Sound: Audibility and the Space of Reading', in *Sounding Modernism*, ed. by Julian Murphet, Penelope Hone and Helen Groth (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2017), pp. 109–29. For a related discussion of the hegemonic 'listening ear', see Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*. For a discussion of physical sound as 'textual', see John Mowitt, *Sounds: The Ambient Humanities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).
- ³³ Qtd. in Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 1. In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Watson had their first telephone conversation.
- ³⁴ Qtd. in D. Graham Burnett, 'The Singing of the Grid', *Cabinet Magazine* 41 (2011) 61–66 (p. 61).
- ³⁵ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, pp. 1–2.
- ³⁶ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, p. 5.
- ³⁷ David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 38.
- ³⁸ Qtd. in Eula Biss, 'Time and Distance Overcome', *The Iowa Review* 38 (2008), 83–9 (p. 85).
- ³⁹ Biss began her research on the telephone by 'searching for every instance of the phrase "telephone pole" in *The New York Times* from 1880 to 1920.' Working forward from the oldest article, she 'was not prepared to discover, in the process, a litany of lynchings' (p. 89).
- ⁴⁰ See Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- ⁴¹ See Gustavus Stadler, 'Never Heard Such a Thing: Lynching and Phonographic Modernity', *Social Text* 28 (2010), 87–105.
- ⁴² Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 301. Sterne's suggestive comment is grounded in his discussion of the primitivizing logic of ethnographic recordings of Native Americans. In this way, the ethnographic desire to capture the vanishing sounds of Native Americans cannot be separated from modernity's destructive impulses, i.e. the programmatic destruction of people.
- ⁴³ Stadler, 'Never Heard Such a Thing', pp. 101–2.
- ⁴⁴ The recording made the rounds in festival circuits. Stadler recuperates several accounts of the experience of listening to the record written by both black and white auditors.

- ⁴⁵ Stadler, 'Never Heard Such a Thing', p. 95. For a related discussion of 'matching' voices to bodies, see Stoevers, *The Sonic Color Line*.
- ⁴⁶ Also see Stephen Michael Best, 'Fugitive Sound: Fungible Personhood, Evanescent Property', in *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 28–88. Best shows how intellectual property law cannot be separated from the 'Fugitive Slave Act' (1850), which served as the legal precedent for and philosophical origin of copyright law and 'The Right to Privacy Act' (1974).
- ⁴⁷ To hear the digitized recording of 'The Flogging', see <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/sound/soundf.html>. Recorded 1904. Accessed 27 December 2018.
- ⁴⁸ For an informative discussion of how the production of audio books reflected mores of domestic listening in the U.S. and U.K., see Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*.
- ⁴⁹ Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 120, 127.
- ⁵⁰ For a foundational theory of the slave's 'fungibility' see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America, Race and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- ⁵¹ Eric Lott, 'Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy', *Representations* 39 (1992), 23–50 (p. 29).
- ⁵² See Angelina Weld Grimké, 'Blackness', in *Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké*, ed. by Carolivia Herron (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 218–51. Thank you to Alex Benson who shared this story with me when I was conducting research for this chapter.
- ⁵³ Though a page of the holograph manuscript is missing, its revised and published version, retitled 'Goldie', indicates that he approaches his childhood home. See Grimké, 'Blackness', pp. 282–306.
- ⁵⁴ Grimké, 'Blackness', p. 241.
- ⁵⁵ Qtd. in Butler, *The Ancient Phonograph*, p. 9. Grimké also predicts the 'Chuck. Chuck. Chuck' of the adze in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, a novel that concludes with the image of a graphophone.
- ⁵⁶ In 1920, Grimké makes extraordinary changes to the plot, most notably that the narrator not only does not get revenge, but is himself murdered. The editors of 'Goldie' would not allow the speculative representation of black revenge.
- ⁵⁷ Carter Mathes, *Imagine the Sound: Experimental African American Literature after Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 61–100.
- ⁵⁸ The majority of lynchings went unreported and without official record.
- ⁵⁹ This photograph inspired Abel Meeropol to compose a poem, 'Bitter Fruit', which later provided the lyrics for Billie Holiday's iconic jazz song, 'Strange Fruit.'
- ⁶⁰ In 1908, when Faulkner was 10 years old, a white mob lynched Lawson Patton in the town square after dragging him out of jail. At his uncle's house only a few blocks away, Faulkner would have heard the mob and participated in the event acoustically. Faulkner later based the lynching scene of his *Sanctuary* on this event. Thank you to Jay Watson for making me aware of this history.

- ⁶¹ For a discussion of the influence of Sergei Eisenstein's montage techniques on Faulkner's use of sound, see Sarah Gleeson-White, 'Auditory Exposures: Faulkner, Eisenstein, and Film Sound', *PMLA* 128 (2013), 87–100. There has been extensive critical work on Faulkner in relation to the visual dimensions of cinema, Gleeson-White marking an important departure. Also see my 'The Fact of Resonance.'
- ⁶² Also see Erich Nunn, 'Music and Racial Violence in William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*', in *Sounding the Color Line: Music and Race in the Southern Imagination* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2015), pp. 154–72.
- ⁶³ William Faulkner, *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 862.
- ⁶⁴ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 37.
- ⁶⁵ For an influential discussion of the uncanny in relation to the telephone, see Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).
- ⁶⁶ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 37. This reading of Faulkner's acoustics chimes with the work of Angela Frattarola who argues that modernists were writing with awareness of headphones and rethinking interior monologue as a consequence. See *Modernist Soundscapes: Auditory Technology and the Novel* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018).
- ⁶⁷ See Pierre Schaeffer, 'Acousmatics', in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 76–81.
- ⁶⁸ Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 23.
- ⁶⁹ In a brilliant study, Peter Mallios examines the absent-present figure of blackness in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, tracing it in part to Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. See Peter Lancelot Mallios, 'Faulkner's Conrad: *Our Conrad: Constituting American Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 335–74. Also see my 'Unorchestrated Voice: Faulkner, Song, and the Politics of Archival Listening', in *The Acoustics of Narrative Involvement: Modernism, Subjectivity, Voice* (Berkeley: University of California, 2010), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1ws2ftr>, pp. 107–80. There I trace the echo of James Wait, Conrad's titular character negated by a racist slur, in the sounds of Faulkner's oeuvre.
- ⁷⁰ The most extensive discussion of Schaeffer's thought and its consequences for sound studies can be found in Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ⁷¹ Faulkner, *Collected Stories*, pp. 852–3.
- ⁷² Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 64.
- ⁷³ 'One of the implications of blackness, if it is set to work in and on such philosophy [of history], is that those manifestations of the future in the degraded present [...] can never be understood simply as illusory.' Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 7–8.

PART III

Applications

*What We Talk about When We Talk about Talking Books**

Edward Allen

It almost goes without saying that reading a book, by and large, still means reading in your head – that fiction gives rise, in other words, to silent reading. We stand to learn surprising things when we flip our formulations, however, and to do so in this case would be to wonder whether in fact silent reading is also the stuff of fiction. Perhaps it always has been. For we know that most people undertake phonological coding when they read, transposing graphic information into a sort of ready-installed sound system; and we also know, thanks to electromyographic recordings, that part of that coding process involves subvocalization, whereby muscles associated with the articulation of speech (in organs like the larynx) kick into gear even as the reading body seems to have switched to silent mode.¹ Those working in the fields of psychology and neuroscience advise us to acknowledge reading for what it really is – a fidgety, covert operation, which is far from soundless; yet still in literary studies we like to imagine that reading in our heads – or ‘sustained silent reading’ (SSR), as it has come to be known among theorists of education – represents some kind of *beau idéal*.² Though its purpose and practical implications in the early stages of child development have been well documented, not enough has been done to apprehend the long-term effects of silent reading, whose very formulation and figurative clout continue – even into adulthood – to command unspoken consensus.³ Alternative names for this absolutist model of reading show little sign of catching on, and this is especially true in and of the places we go as adults to improve our literacy:⁴

Silence shall be maintained as far as possible in the Library. [...] The use of equipment likely to disturb or distract other readers or to damage Library materials (e.g. digital scanners, radios, cameras, personal hi-fi equipment, or computers to perform any of the functions of such machines) is not permitted in the Library.⁵

* My thanks to the staff and Syndics of the University Library in Cambridge, and to Mark Darlow, for a word about a word.

Most bookish institutions cultivate conspiracies of silence, though not many recognize that library etiquette has its limitations as well as its limits. That subtle qualification, ‘as far as possible’, bespeaks a nuanced attitude to the ‘silence’ in which library work is supposed to happen; and once you begin to speculate, as this guideline (perhaps unwittingly) prompts you to, about the relative properties of a library’s soundscape – about what is and is not ‘likely to disturb or distract other readers’ – then you might also begin to wonder whether a reading room’s ‘silence’ is all it’s cracked up to be. The same thought once occurred to Hillel Schwartz upon finding his ear turned by ‘the obtrusiveness of silence’: ‘Where one expects, relishes, and enforces quiet, any sound may be loud and all sound may be noise. The greater the anticipation of silence, the greater the ruckus of sound.’⁶ Could it really be the case that the places we privilege when we think of reading – libraries, classrooms, bedrooms, window seats, sites of worship, the ‘quiet’ carriage, a deserted beach – could it be that these places, and the habits that loosely characterize them, serve in fact to trivialize rather than corroborate the idea of silent reading? And if it’s true that noise-cancellation can have the effect of sensitizing a reader to certain kinds of signal, as well as to the subtle workings of the human body’s inner acoustic, then isn’t it time we began to harness the potential of such ‘noisy’ reading encounters with a view to pointing up the sound events that we find embodied, sketched or scripted in texts themselves?

These questions set the tone for the present chapter, whose subject is the early talking book, and the research for which commenced with a noise in a reading room ostensibly governed by the rules delineated above. For the University Library in Cambridge is not only a collection of books – in this respect it is not unlike other archives – but also a repository for a whole host of knick-knacks, souvenirs and ephemera, whose status in the Library catalogue obscures their shady textual condition. Globes, packaged as jigsaws, which require a student to piece them together; a deck of playing cards – or *ganjifa* – fashioned out of tortoiseshell; a chocolate wrapper, apparently smuggled in from the former Soviet Union, its contents long since devoured.⁷ In tempting us to entertain them, and to be entertained by them, all of these objects appear to emanate an aura of textuality; each one of them warrants a practice of interpretation that is alive to the warp and weft of signification, to the loose ends that keep us guessing. This, of course, renders their place in the Library no less problematic, since theirs is a textuality that requires the kind of behaviour – very often interactive – that is proscribed by the rulebook. Playing cards want to be played with; the packaging of a candy bar begs to be wrinkled and sniffed; a book longs, on occasion, to make a noise (Figures 10.1 and 10.2).

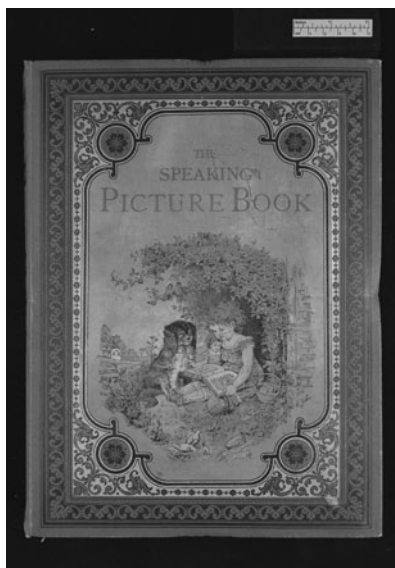


Figure 10.1 [Author unknown], *The Speaking Picture Book* (London: H. Grevel & Co., 1893). Front Cover.⁸



Figure 10.2 *The Speaking Picture Book*, Illustration.

To the unassuming reader – or rather to the *assuming* reader, who may be inclined to judge a book by its cover – *The Speaking Picture Book* (1893) would seem to ape a familiar synaesthetic gesture, whereby looking and storytelling purport to go hand-in-hand. Indeed, as Peter Haining has shown, handling books had become the norm for many pampered children by the 1870s.⁹ Following the early example of Robert Sayer, whose Harlequinades (or ‘turn-up’ books) had turned some heads in the 1760s, illustrators and manufacturers in Britain worked ever more closely in the years of major educational reform to develop and indulge the fine motor skills of young readers, from the slot mechanisms and peep shows to be found in the products of the Temple of Fancy (Rathbone Place, London), to the animation effects that would later give ‘pop-up’ books their name. As well as requiring readers to manipulate them – pulling tabs, flicking flaps, inserting cut-outs – these ‘movable’ books typically encouraged readers to treat them like mini auditoria, and so to coordinate the theatre of moving parts with the drama of vocalization which arises in response to every written text, however saccharine or sentimental.¹⁰

Save for its heft and unwieldy proportions – at 32 cm long and 5.5 cm thick, it’s not what you’d call a portable object – *The Speaking Picture Book* is no different to early-Victorian prototypes inasmuch as it interpolates a basic style of rhyming verse with illustrated material, the staple mode of picture books. But rather than hinging solely on a learned coordination of voice and visual, this example of the genre is doubly dramatic on account of its own palette of sound effects, which can be summoned from the heart of the volume by means of a series of strings, bellows, and dinky whistles (Figure 10.3).

‘In order to produce the sound,’ readers are instructed, ‘gently pull out the cord underneath the arrow on the text accompanying each picture.’¹¹ So, there, in the margin of ‘The Cock’, draw on the tassel and judge for yourself whether the bird’s as good as his word; or skip forward to ‘The Donkey’, pull the string, and notice the teasing discrepancy between sound event and sense (‘Now you hear the donkey’s bray / Such a distance, far away ...’ [Figure 10.4]). It’s easy to detect in this volume the residue of a gentle moral philosophy, much promoted in early-Victorian picture books; hardly a vignette goes by without an appeal to Christian conduct or wholesome family values. Yet the real (and real-time) interest of *The Speaking Picture Book* has to do with its rude textuality – with its resistance to silent reading, yes, but also, more specifically, with its capacity to generate a kind of interpretative

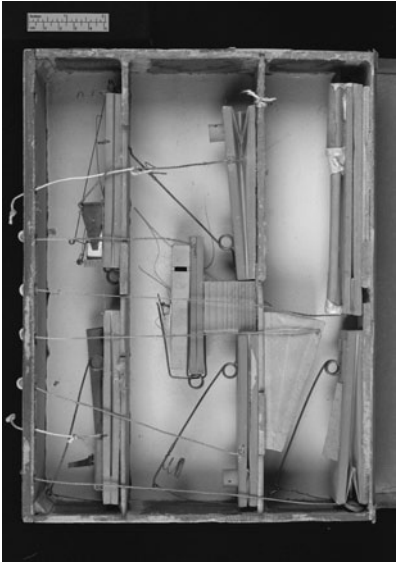


Figure 10.3 *The Speaking Picture Book*, Back cover removed.

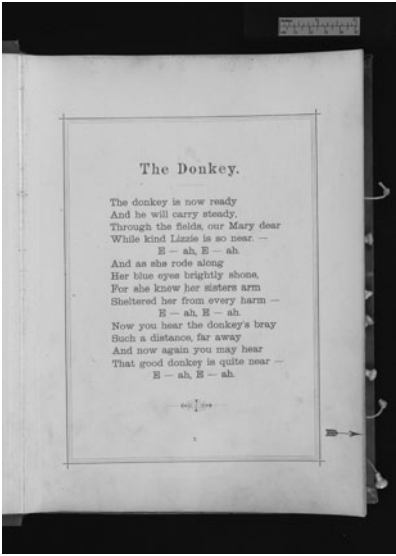


Figure 10.4 *The Speaking Picture Book*, 'The Donkey', p. 2.

free-play, according to which a reader assumes or relaxes control of the volume's rhetorical machinery.

For there is nothing straightforward about the way this series of ekphrastic cameos plays out. It is likely that many a young reader would have encountered them, not alone, but in the company of a parent, nanny, or older sibling; some may have been instructed once and merely left to their own devices. In any case, drawing out the book's voices – coordinating the mechanics of verse and inner-contraption – must be considered a matter of endless negotiation, subject each and every time to the mixture of caprice and learned behaviour that characterizes any such act of recreation.

Are you thirsty, pretty dear?
Come and drink the sweet milk here!
Do not fear the great moo – moo –
Never harm would she do you,
See it is a lovely cow
Standing gently by me now.
Gives us milk, each morning early,
First a glass for our dear Charlie
Then dear Mary drinks it too,
Come along you dear moo – moo.¹²

When would *you* make the cow moo? It would be hard to resist a tug on the string in response to the opening question, though a soundbite to mark the couplet and exclamation at the end of line 2 would make better rhythmical sense. Or perhaps you'd follow the cues in lines 3 and 10, just as you did with the repeated 'E – ah' of 'The Donkey'; in doing so, you might succeed in synchronizing your enunciation of the printed onomatopoeia, 'moo – moo' – which operates here as a vocative as well as a vocal signature – with the lowing effect of the mechanism hidden beneath the page. There are numerous possibilities, all of them connected to exigencies of timing and tonal execution, and all of them determined to some degree by the kind of book this book is trying to be, which is both more and less than a book, and thus a book that speaks volumes of its place in the history of modern sound culture.

Insofar as it toys with one's expectations of what a book can do, *The Speaking Picture Book* could be mistaken for a plaything, or for an object that is crying out at the very least for a reciprocal babel of delight. 'Tous les enfants parlent à leurs joujoux', Charles Baudelaire once declared, ever-rapt by the miniature world of the Parisian toyshop; and indeed this toy would seem to reward that innate wish to strike up conversation in

ways that will leave a child feeling they've got both more than they bargained for and all that they wished.¹³ *Mummy, this toy talks back!* But to make a category error of this sort, book for toy, as many children must have done back in the day, might be to take *The Speaking Picture Book* quite literally at its word, to press it for further signs of life, and so to justify Baudelaire's more sinister adage, that when it comes to a toy '[l]a plupart des marmots veulent surtout voir l'âme.'¹⁴ Baudelaire thence imagines the crazed 'marmot' shaking and breaking the toy open, all in the name of metaphysics, only to discover a busted mechanism and the whisper of adult consciousness ('Mais où est l'âme? C'est ici que commencent l'hébétément et la tristesse').¹⁵ True to that prediction, soul-searching in the case of *The Speaking Picture Book* will reveal nothing more than the book's hidden system of strings and instrumentation, and whether or not you feel the sadness that Baudelaire once attributed to those bent on reducing their toys to bits and pieces, you'd be hard pressed not to wonder why the creator of *The Speaking Picture Book* didn't pay more practical attention to the object's life expectancy. Even the invention's early promoters sought to strike a note of caution: in March 1880, accompanied by reports of a new car door fastener and the latest domestic innovation (an ironing board), a column in *Scientific American* struggled to define *The Speaking Picture Book*, before descending none too persuasively into a description of the invention's 'convenience.'¹⁶ The 'novel toy' did sell, but not enough to establish a lasting market, and not enough to effect any noticeable change in the behaviour of 'the rude and naughty child' for whom this cumbersome object must have seemed the proverbial open book.¹⁷

Still, if media archaeology has taught us anything, it is the value of asking – with Charles R. Acland – how we should interpret 'fond references to things and sentiments that won't stay lost, dead, and buried.'¹⁸ It is not easy to say what sort of a thing *The Speaking Picture Book* is or was – that is part of its interest – but its survival in the archives and the sentiments it conjures up certainly have things to tell us about readers in the late nineteenth century, about their habits, fantasies, and eccentric forms of literacy. It also has something to tell us about the ways people who make books began, amidst a din of patent wars and the hurry-scurry of electricians, to imagine that they too might have a part to play in an emerging media ecology. Most sought to do this by suggesting to readers that they need not fear or capitulate to new modes of communication so long as there are still books to read and treasure; others encouraged readers rather to look on books – even ones designed for children – as a means

of acquiring a vocabulary with which to articulate and even *anticipate* the '[c]haotic and creative experiments' of a changing, electrified marketplace.¹⁹ It is no coincidence, as we'll see, that this was to become the golden age of hard science fiction.

It should be clear that *The Speaking Picture Book* comes down to us from a culture that was by no means opposed to the idea of being plugged into new forms of textual practice. No doubt this book-cum-toy ranks among the more primitive attempts to encourage readers to think about what they're doing when they read, and to notice in doing so the extent to which reading a text might also mean playing a sound object. Even so, *The Speaking Picture Book* is not different in kind but only different in degree to competing forms of new media which did so much to accelerate the book's shelf-life. Imagine, for a moment, that you have a théâtrophone to hand. This telephone-inspired device was first presented to Parisian society in 1881, and it enabled people to tap into live performances of plays and opera, all from the comfort of distant parlours and sequestered public spaces.²⁰ Or cast your mind back, as J. Alfred Prufrock once did, to the magic lantern show, whose increasing sophistication in the 1870s lit the way for cinema proper. This technology had long cheered a variety of audiences – from family gatherings to church congregations – such that Prufrock's later projection of the medium should not only be considered 'slightly archaic', as David Trotter has shown, but also wilfully misleading if it encourages one to look back on the magic-lantern show as a lonesome and purely visual form of entertainment.²¹ Like the théâtrophone, and like *The Speaking Picture Book*, the magic lantern signalled not so much an escape from text as a seduction into its boundary-shifting possibilities.

In fact, Trotter reminds us, most magic-lantern shows were communal in nature and collaborative in scope, layering and interpolating the 'patterns' Prufrock imagines in his monologue with musical accompaniment and some method of voiceover, which was usually scripted and delivered on the spot by a narrator or lecturer.²² It does not suit J. Alfred Prufrock to remember these things any more than it once suited Dorothea Brooke to suppose that her own love song – or honeymoon – would include anything like a soundtrack. 'Our moods are apt to bring with them images which succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze', we're told in *Middlemarch*, chapter 20, before learning that the prayerful Dorothea is to replay her Roman holiday in the manner of a private slide show: even after her husband's death, she will continue to ponder 'the vastness of St Peter's', to glimpse the work of its artists and

architects, and to see, in something like a dissolving view, the basilica's seasonal décor, 'spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina.'²³ When Prufrock later observes the women who 'come and go / Talking of Michelangelo', perhaps he's imagining the company Dorothea may once have kept had she only had the nerve to; perhaps Eliot simply had Eliot on the brain.

In any case, it is not the perfume from a dress that makes me so digress, nor the thought that both of these lonely souls are answered in their moments of need by the vision of a moving picture. I'm preoccupied, rather, by a much bigger question relating to something Jonathan Sterne has called 'the audiovisual litany', whose influence on media historiography needs to be reckoned, and then resisted, if we're to apprehend the kinds of text and textual practice that have stemmed from such technological innovations.²⁴ In order to 'redescribe' sound, Sterne begins his trip back into *The Audible Past* by itemizing a number of 'differences between hearing and seeing' that have frequently been taken as 'a necessary starting point for the cultural analysis of sound.'²⁵ To Sterne's mind, this will to differentiate has its roots in a theological understanding of sound, though this orthodoxy has rarely been articulated as such; for the likes of Walter Ong, he contends, '[t]he sonic dimension of experience is closest to divinity', while '[v]ision suggests distance and disengagement.'²⁶ But this is not all, for the ideological stakes in the debate are so high as to obscure the scientific evidence itself. The result, Sterne laments, is a widely held conviction that the history of the senses must be a 'zero-sum game, where the dominance of one sense by necessity leads to the decline of another sense.'²⁷ In other words, the audiovisual litany requires its disciples to bestow their attention on one sense or the other, even though the reasons for assuming the relative blindness of one age, or the deafness of another, have yet to be properly determined.

For all its gentle, doctrinal promise, then, *The Speaking Picture Book* is not an object one can have any faith in precisely because it confounds the clear-cut distinctions that have come to typify so much of the work being done in literary sound studies. It does not make an appearance in *The Audible Past* – perhaps because the device emits sound effects rather than sound reproductions – but it would not be too much of a stretch to suggest that the *idea* of it haunts the passages of Sterne's book. For what is *The Speaking Picture Book* if not an instance of the thing he calls phonography, a demo in the very art of sound-writing? Sterne is not the first to raise questions about the way we conceptualize sound reproduction, nor is he alone in seeking to refine our sense that the phonograph has at times

spawned its own kind of graven image. Beginning with *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (1999), Lisa Gitelman has done more than most to correct our notion that 'the phonograph' emerged in the 1870s as some sort of protagonist, ready to inscribe a future for itself, and to suggest instead that we recognize such technology 'as plural, decentered, indeterminate, as the reciprocal product of textual practices.'²⁸ There are many differences between this approach and the tack taken by Friedrich Kittler, but one of the things Gitelman and her predecessor can agree on is the fact that the phonograph seemed, from the very start, to be 'one of those rare, Jekyll-and-Hyde devices that was invented for one thing and ended up doing something completely different.'²⁹

Gitelman's nod to Robert Louis Stevenson's infamous double-act is not only accurately timed but telling, because it serves as a reminder that the *meaning* of phonography – whatever the facts may be – is to be found within the pages of literary fiction. This is not to suggest that we haven't learned a good deal from material such as newspapers and manuals about the practical applications of Thomas Edison's first stab at a talking book. He himself, the 'Wizard of Menlo Park', claimed to foresee numerous futures for his invention beyond the basic storage and transmission of 'captive sounds', including clerical work, elocution, death-bed speeches, and a range of automata.³⁰ Music did feature in his list of 'the actual and the probable', but not as prominently as you might think, given the warmth and care with which commentators have lately presented early phonography as a source of immense importance, and not a false start, for the history of twentieth-century music.³¹ Perhaps it's enough to say that the phonograph's purpose was not even clear to its author, still less to reporters who pitched up at exhibitions clamouring to know whether this thing really implied the end of reading. 'Are we to have a new kind of book?', wondered *Scientific American* in November 1877.³² This proved to be exactly the right question, but the answer was to come in a staggered fashion, and not from the mouths of journalists. As critics have shown in increasing levels of detail, the phonograph's life in the public eye has elicited an intensely *literary* kind of attention at every turn. John Picker and Brett Brehm have each found fresh things to say about the medium's appeal to lyric poets in its early days; while others have moved the conversation on, probing at the material benefits that were to come the way of writers once tinfoil and cylinder had been shelved in favour of shellac and disc.³³ Such benefits proliferated in the 1930s, and they continued to do so after the Second World War, as the economy recovered and writers of every style were encouraged to explore the 'third dimension' of the long-playing record.³⁴

So, yes, there *was* to be 'a new kind of book', quite as magical as *The Speaking Picture Book*, but not for some time, owing to the challenge of mass-producing a sound object that could be played again and again. Recent studies of the talking book have consequently converged on the interwar period, and have done a good deal to disclose and complicate the assumptions that have for too long determined the way we theorize reading as an index of 'normal' behaviour.³⁵ In the spirit of enabling new and more nuanced approaches to the matter of disability – properly conceived as a question of difference and potential rather than a clear-cut binary – Mara Mills and Matthew Rubery have both recovered a wealth of material that should prompt us to resist the urge to pathologize experiences such as blindness and limited vision.³⁶ What this material shows, among other things, is that listeners with limited vision in the interwar years were not simply the chance beneficiaries of talking books, but rather the agents responsible for giving the emerging industry a sense of purpose, for helping it to understand its relation to other modes of reading, such as braille and volunteer-led recitation. Helen Keller played a vital and complicated role in this regard, but so did numerous pamphleteers and pressure groups, whose testimonials did much to raise the profile of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), and to keep the idea of talking books alive as engineers continued to perfect a serviceable product.

Many of these testimonials are to be found in the Library of Congress, and they bear witness to a crucial phase in the long and ongoing evolution of readerly practice. To attend to such voices is to assume an ethical stance in a field otherwise driven by questions of economic viability and technological prowess; yet it may also be to overlook the years in which the chief advocates of the talking book are supposed to have lost their way, as though disturbed by the prospect of another century's entropic conclusion. The phonograph, at least, was to experience no such cooling-off period. In the decade or so following Edison's first campaign, it became the preserve of ethnographers such as Jesse Walter Fewkes and Alice Cunningham Fletcher, who undertook fieldwork with a view to building an archive of vernacular languages and dialects right across the North American continent. In doing so, as Brian Hochman has shown, these figures courted the 'parameters of perfect fidelity', though they were wise to see that any such documentary standard had to be 'socially constructed' according – inevitably – to the vicissitudes of 'aesthetic judgment'.³⁷ The categories at issue here have retained a certain piquancy among anthropologists, to be sure, but if Hochman's right to suggest that the likes of Fewkes and Fletcher helped in some measure to nurture the phonograph in the years

of its adolescence – putting it to use, flexing its potential – then it's no less true to say that writers also set to work, probing in their own way at the idea of perfect fidelity. Hochman acknowledges as much by resurrecting *The Grandissimes*, George Washington Cable's first abolitionist novel, which appeared in 1880 to herald a new kind of fiction, one that might rise to the challenge of recording the twists and turns of vernacular speech. Others, meanwhile, have noticed more sustained attempts in the period to do what Cable only does in passing in *The Grandissimes*, which is to spell out the tantalizing interface between 'type' and 'ecstatic tones'.³⁸ Casting ahead to a time when the world runs like clockwork, Edward Bellamy's short story of 1889, 'With the Eyes Shut', puts the technology front and centre, as though to tease the reader who longs for something new with the diegetic spectacle of a reader in the very throes of a 'novel experience': 'I had read enough about the wonders of the phonograph to be prepared in a vague sort of way for almost anything which might be related of it', muses Bellamy's railroad passenger, before sporting a pair of headphones ('in the similitude of a chicken's wishbone') and settling down to enjoy 'the tones of the human voice'.³⁹

Matthew Rubery has understood this encounter, between traveller and technology, as a weird kind of seduction scene. The words involved are not quite sweet nothings, and yet they are 'whispered into the ear' with a force that renders the artist behind the talking book 'either [a] siren or Scheherazade', Rubery suggests, sharply attentive to the dicey outcome implied in that either/or, an exquisite death or an object lesson in enduring rapture. It's easy to see the sense in this reading of Bellamy's story when you consider the ways in which the romance of and with technology was to intensify in the following decade.⁴⁰ By the century's end, as critics have noted time and again – almost, you might say, to a record-scratching extent – Bram Stoker was inviting readers of *Dracula* (1897) to revel in a technology that could make the heart bleed as well as beat.⁴¹ Upon discovering John Seward in cahoots with a phonograph in [chapter 17](#), Mina Harker offers to transcribe his recordings, which amount apparently to an 'awkward' mixture of diary entries and case notes.⁴² She does so not only to gather some more about that 'terrible Being', the vampiric Count, but also to determine the doctor's depth of feeling for her late friend, Lucy Westenra.⁴³ 'He carried the phonograph himself up to my sitting-room and adjusted it for me', Mina confides to her journal, too excited to acknowledge something that must have seemed obvious to Stoker's first readers, which is that Mina now has to manipulate two kinds of

impression, the kind that's wont to hover somewhere between a thought and a sense-perception, and the kind that phonographs produce: a material indentation. 'Now I shall learn something pleasant, I am sure', Mina continues; 'for it will tell me the other side of a true love episode of which I know one side already...' ⁴⁴ And with that, she sinks her teeth into the doctor's waxen cylinders.

There is something criminal about the pleasure with which Mina sets about her secretarial work. There is also a delicious irony about it – a deliberate one, I suspect, on Stoker's part – since in turning her hand to the audio files John Seward has amassed, Mina Harker is doing just the job Thomas Edison had predicted would vanish in the wake of phonography. In 1878, Edison had assured businessmen that they'd soon be able to '*dispense with the clerk*', and that certain assignments could even be taken home, owing to 'the *presence* of a stenographer *not being required*'.⁴⁵ Fast forward to 1897 and Mina's 'presence' could not seem more crucial to the machinations of Stoker's novel, either in her capacity as one of those 'lady journalists' whose skills she'd once written about wanting to emulate, or in view of the fact that she has come to see those skills as a means of circumscribing a media environment that seems as vulnerable to invasion as England itself.⁴⁶ In her first letter to Lucy (chapter 5), Mina articulates her wish to improve her stenographic skills, so as to assist her fiancé, but she also seems to go off script when she imagines that there could be an alternative to Pitman shorthand: 'I am told that, with a little practice, one can remember all that goes on or that one hears said during a day.'⁴⁷ Practice makes perfect, Mina knows, but there's nothing like perfect fidelity, is there? So she thinks, and so she appears here – just for a moment – to forsake the role of stenographer, who deals in phonetics, for the role of a mobile phonograph, which would capture paralinguistic information such as tone and volume, and which could therefore indeed be said to 'remember all that goes on.' The important thing about Mina's subsequent encounter with a *bona fide* machine is that she realizes she still has a part to play in the drama precisely because she is *not* a machine. Unlike a phonograph, she can choose what she communicates; thus she informs John Seward:

'That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to almighty God. No one must hear them spoken ever again! See, I have tried to be useful. I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did.'⁴⁸

In a curious twist of technological determinism, the phonograph has not so much replaced the clerk as given her a new lease of life. For it is within her powers to encrypt the audio files, not by restricting access to them exactly, but by turning sounds into alphabetic code. Mina, you might say, is a good judge of character, and it is thanks to her being a higher being – but less than a phonograph – that she knows what it means to be human, and humane.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* remains one of the more suggestive attempts to mediate the talking book at the *fin de siècle* – to meditate, too, on the uses to which an invention like the phonograph could be put, given a healthy injection of cash (or the threat of a monster). Still, it was not the first novel to do so. I want to conclude this chapter by thinking about one very early text in the history of the talking book, which has just about gone unnoticed. The figure of Albert Robida (1848–1926) has been welcomed into critical conversation in recent years, most notably by Matthew Rubery, who pauses in *The Untold Story* to digest the Frenchman's collaboration with Octave Uzanne (1851–1931), a short story called 'La Fin des livres'.⁴⁹ Anglophone readers were treated in August 1894 to a translation of this story in *Scribner's Magazine*, replete with Robida's illustrations; but while Rubery makes a good case for the ways in which 'The End of Books' must have prompted readers to visualize the sort of product they'd already been asked to entertain in Edward Bellamy's 'With the Eyes Shut', he is not quite right to say that Uzanne and Robida were 'follow[ing] Bellamy's lead in imagining how new media would remake the book'.⁵⁰ Robida, in fact, had long since got to grips with the phonograph, and certainly before Bellamy had seen the light and turned to science fiction. In 1879, in his first crack at the genre, Robida had published *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul dans les 5 ou 6 parties du monde et dans tous les pays connus et même inconnus de M. Jules Verne*. In plot, as in title, Robida goes to great lengths in this neglected novel to pay homage to the fictive exploits of Jules Verne, and to do so in ways that exceed the mode of caricature for which he (Robida) is still best remembered.⁵¹ What this means in practice is that Farandoul rarely finds himself alone once he's embarked on 'la carrière des aventures', since he's troubled every step of the way by a troupe of Verne's domineering pioneers: Captain Nemo, Phileas Fogg, Hector Servadac, Michel Strogoff, and Captain Hatteras.⁵²

Rather than offering just another iteration of the tried-and-tested 'voyage extraordinaire', then, Robida seems to stretch the casting of Farandoul's life-story to the point of overcrowding. This is unlikely to

have taxed Robida's first readers unduly; the novel was presented initially as a *feuilleton* serial, a format perfectly suited to a high turnover of cameos and character sketches, as well as to the periodic return of supporting roles for whom a reader may not have spared a thought for several weeks.⁵³ The matter of pacing is strictly determined when it comes to this mode of publication – like the penny dreadful beloved of Victorian readers, the *feuilleton* is subject to the requirements of a fixed *mise-en-page* – and this appears to have lent Robida in 1879 an astonishing sense of momentum. Quite apart from prompting him to keep an eye on the effects of certain casting decisions – many of them derivative or parodic – the *feuilleton*'s dynamic, its serial rhythm, encouraged the young novelist to invent situations from week to week in which the victims of his casting decisions would look bang up to date. When, for instance, Farandoul is minded on the first leg of his journey to accept 'comme souvenir six superbes scaphandres-Denayrousse' from Captain Nemo, Robida is careful to dramatize the process of gift exchange, not as an instance of inheritance or mere intertextual curiosity, but as an opportunity (in disguise) for Farandoul to distinguish himself.⁵⁴ True, it's not long before we see him canoodling underwater with his sweetheart, Mysora, apparently content to lower the tone and standards set by Nemo. And indeed the scene *would* appear something of a damp squib if it weren't for the fact that Robida's hero has already made the diving suit his own. 'Farandoul', we learn, has taken 'la précaution d'emporter un téléphone de poche pour que leur conversation à sept ou huit mètres de profondeur ne nécessitât point de grands efforts de voix.'⁵⁵ Plenty of adventurers had set their minds before to customizing their outfits, but Farandoul may be the first – in the name of love – to have combined the roles of telephonist and aquanaut. Have you ever known such a smooth operator? (Figure 10.5)

Few writers of the long nineteenth century displayed so firm a commitment as Albert Robida to sexing up the stuff of modern living, and few made it so difficult therefore to say which way round this most modish of formulae should go, the romance of technology, or the technology of romance. Of no episode is this more true than the battle in Part II of *Saturnin Farandoul*, when a new brand of weapon, a hoover-like contraption, sucks up a war correspondent from the *Times*, only to spew him out – after a kind of whirlwind romance – in the arms of a fellow reporter who's been seconded from the *Droit des Femmes*.⁵⁶ Not all of Robida's characters are so lucky. Earlier in the novel, we're introduced to a man called Horatius Bixby, a friend of Farandoul's and a 'constructeur du plus rare

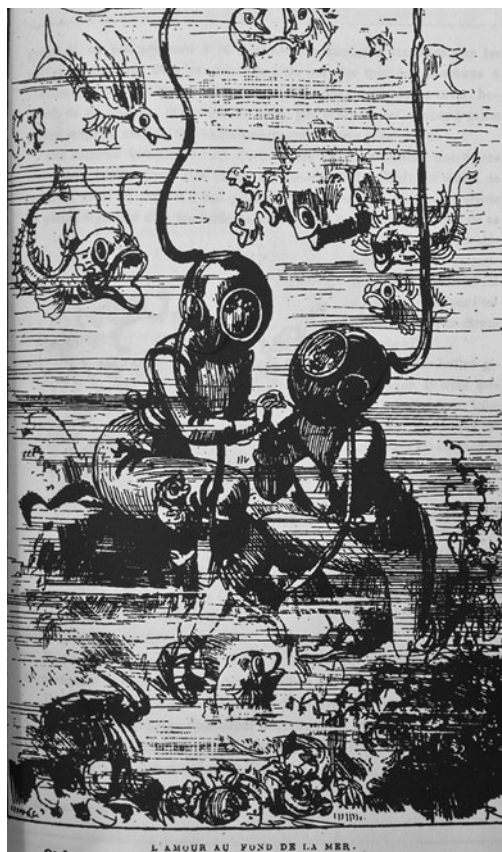


Figure 10.5 'Love on the Bottom of the Sea', Albert Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul* (Paris: Librairie Illustrée; Librairie M. Dreyfous, 1879), p. 57.⁵⁷

mérite.⁵⁸ Notwithstanding his provenance – for Bixby is a 'véritable type du Yankee pur sang', and therefore something of an unknown quantity in the imperialist echelons of French science fiction – it's hard to know why such a resourceful character is still a bachelor. We soon learn that Bixby's is a chequered history, owing to the part he played in the Mexican gold-rush back in the 1850s, which left him all at sea and thence marooned on a desert island. He is, in this sense, a throwback to Daniel Defoe:

Une seule chose le tourmentait, nul confident ne se trouvait à sa portée épancher dans le sein de cet ami la joie de ses triomphes, l'enthousiasme de ses découvertes scientifiques.

Robinson avait eu Vendredi, et Bixby semblait condamné à la solitude. Notre énergique savant résolut de combler cette lacune, il médita deux jours et inventa le phonographe!⁵⁹

Out of meditation comes media, once again, and out of solitude, the soothing strains of phonography. The spirit of Robinson Crusoe is strong in Bixby, yet the machine he manages to fashion is no ordinary machine – ‘n’est pas le simple instrument que nous connaissons’ – and certainly not the ‘phonographe imparfait’ for which (we’re told) Thomas Edison is alleged to have taken credit upon Bixby’s subsequent return to the United States.⁶⁰ Readers in 1879 must have detected a slight bite in Robida’s description of Bixby’s imitator – ‘le savant Edison’ – for it’s clear that the purpose of this set piece is to lampoon the ‘scientist’ at large, and to suggest that he still has things to learn about the phonograph’s real-world application.⁶¹ Unlike Edison’s knock-off model, which ‘répète ce qu’on lui confie et ne répond pas’, Bixby’s has the capacity to generate its own conversation:

Plus d’ennui, plus de solitude, il avait un confident pour son âme exubérante; toutes ses pensées, il pouvait les confier à son phonographe et celui-ci, ce qui, encore une fois, le distingue du phonographe vulgaire, lui répondait.

Quand le savant, fatigué, avait soif d’une longue causerie à son foyer, il commençait, avec son phonographe, un doux entretien qui se prolongeait parfois assez avant dans la soirée.⁶²

Horatius Bixby is not so naïve as to assume that his answer to Crusoe’s Friday has a soul; it is *his* ‘âme exubérante’, after all, that stands to be nourished by the liaison. But still we might suspect that Robida’s castaway has read his Baudelaire, whose claim about chatty children – ‘[t]ous les enfants parlent à leurs joujoux’ – is realised here and rewarded in a flourish of reciprocity that renders Bixby’s deserted nursery a home from home. The substance of the ‘doux entretien’ in which the two indulge sadly goes unspoken; instead, we’re prompted to notice the subtle drift of Robida’s tribute to Defoe. Bixby discovers in the phonograph, not a ‘compagnon’, but a ‘confident’, not an *abat-voix*, but a confessor: ‘toutes ses pensées, il pouvait les confier à son phonographe.’ Blink and you’d miss it; listen, and you’ll catch the connecting thread: it all hinges on that prefix, *con* (Figure 10.6).

Albert Robida is not the only writer of his generation to have recognized that ‘le besoin rend industriel.’⁶³ His work feels at times a necessarily collaborative pursuit, sustained by so many imbricated fictions of technological knowledge and know-how. Verne himself, Robida’s principal source in *Saturnin Farandoul*, was just as quick to put the phonograph through

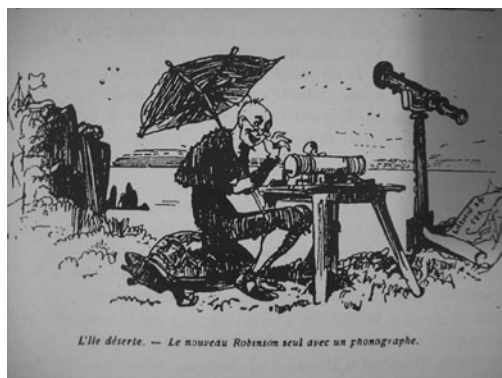


Figure 10.6 'The Desert Island – The new Robinson alone with a phonograph',
Voyages très extraordinaires, p. 223.⁶⁴

its paces for reasons the romantic Robida would instantly have grasped. For Verne, too, that's to say, the phonograph seemed in 1879 to turn with the kind of erotic possibility that would have caused most of his earlier characters to shrug – *bof* – and Edison to return to the drawing board. As it is, the thrill of inscription – of seeing 'toutes les inflexions de la lointaine voix' assume a material form that could be touched, cherished, trashed and stolen – the very thrill of this was enough to instil an interest in the talking book long before any such thing was considered a commercial reality.⁶⁵ The likes of Robida and Stoker, Bellamy and Verne, did not so much spot a gap in the market as create the market from scratch, encouraging readers to imagine a 'new kind of book', and thus a future in which the ontological status of the old kind would have to be reformulated. We have come to know that future, with its Kindles and podcasts, and it's clear that the writers I've touched on here were not wrong to think of themselves as troubleshooters *avant la lettre*. Myself, I like to think of them as trouble-makers too, quietly loosening the orthodoxies of silent reading.

Notes

¹ See Alexander Pollatsek, 'The Role of Sound in Silent Reading', in *The Oxford Handbook of Reading*, ed. by Alexander Pollatsek and Rebecca Treiman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 185–201.

² For more on SSR's recent influence in early-years education, see Janice L. Pilgreen, *The SSR Handbook: How to Organize and Manage a Sustained Silent Reading Program*, with a foreword by Stephen D. Krashen (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2000).

- ³ It has not always been this way; the history of silent reading is a long and complicated one. See, for instance, Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), and Andrew Elfenbein, *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 108–43. Elfenbein has continued his work on the processual aspects of reading and interpretation in *The Gist of Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).
- ⁴ Though sticking firmly to SSR, Pilgreen recognizes that other terms and acronyms have surfaced in the classroom, such as ‘Free Voluntary Reading’ (FVR), ‘Drop Everything and Read’ (DEAR), and ‘High Intensity Practice’ (HIP) (*The SSR Handbook*, p. 1).
- ⁵ ‘Rules’ (revised April 2018), University Library, Cambridge: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/using-library/joining-library/rules [accessed 17 May 2018].
- ⁶ Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang & Beyond* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), p. 40.
- ⁷ These and other pieces from its collections were displayed in the Library’s exhibition, ‘Curious Objects’, 3 November 2016–21 March 2017. The exhibition’s Lead Curator, Jill Whitelock, put together a catalogue of the exhibition with her colleagues: *Curious Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2016).
- ⁸ [Author unknown], *The Speaking Picture Book* (London: H. Grevel & Co., 1893). Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
- ⁹ Peter Haining, *Movable Books: An Illustrated History* (London: New English Library, 1979). My brief description of mechanical books is drawn in large part from Haining’s account.
- ¹⁰ As Eric Griffiths once remarked, ‘[a]ll writing is dramatic, though not all writing is theatrical. “Dramatic” in the sense that writing is an act of supplication to voice’: *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018 [1989]), p. 12.
- ¹¹ *The Speaking Picture Book*, [n/p]. Haining devotes a page or so to *The Speaking Picture Book* (*Movable Books*, pp. 136–7), and notes the particular success of H. Grevel & Co. in Britain. Theodor Brand is said to have patented the invention in 3 December 1878 (*Commissioners of Patents’ Journal* [27 January 1880], 286).
- ¹² ‘The Cow’, *The Speaking Picture Book*, p. 5.
- ¹³ Charles Baudelaire, ‘Morale du joujou’ (1853), in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Y. G. Le Dantec and Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 524–30 (p. 525). (‘All children talk to their toys’: ‘A Philosophy of Toys’, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. by Jonathan Mayne [London: Phaidon Press, 1964], pp. 197–203 [p. 198].)
- ¹⁴ Baudelaire, ‘Morale du joujou’, p. 529. (‘The overriding desire of most children is to get at and see the soul of their toys’: ‘A Philosophy of Toys’, p. 202.)
- ¹⁵ Baudelaire, ‘Morale du joujou’, p. 530. (‘But where is the soul? This is the beginning of melancholy and gloom’: ‘A Philosophy of Toys’, p. 203.)

- ¹⁶ [Anon], 'Speaking Picture Book', *Scientific American* (20 March 1880), 179.
- ¹⁷ Haining notes in the course of his survey one version of *The Speaking Picture Book* which begins with a prefatory verse: 'It's meant for children good and mild, / Not for the rude and naughty child/Who cries and stamps with rage [...]' (*Movable Books*, p. 136). On the basis of surviving copies, it's safe to assume that the verse didn't always work.
- ¹⁸ Charles R. Acland, 'Introduction', in *Residual Media*, ed. by Acland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. xiv.
- ¹⁹ Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 5.
- ²⁰ Among those to describe the théâtrophone's importance is Melissa Van Drie. See, for instance, her chapter 'Know It Well, Know It Differently: New Sonic Practices in Late Nineteenth-Century Theatre-Going. The Case of the Théâtrophone in Paris', in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 205–16.
- ²¹ David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 130. 'It is impossible to say just what I mean!' complains J. Alfred Prufrock, 'But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen': 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber, 2015), p. 8.
- ²² Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, p. 130. For more on the magic lantern, see Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*, trans. by Richard Crangle (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 264–96.
- ²³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871–72), ed. by W. J. Harvey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 226.
- ²⁴ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 15.
- ²⁵ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, pp. 18, 15.
- ²⁶ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 17.
- ²⁷ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 16.
- ²⁸ Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–2 (*italics in original*).
- ²⁹ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 59. Kittler expresses a similar sentiment when he says that 'phonographs can store articulate voices and musical intervals, but they are capable of more and different things': *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999 [1986]), p. 22.
- ³⁰ Thomas A. Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', *The North American Review* 126.262 (May–June 1878), 527–36.

- ³¹ Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', pp. 527–8. See, for instance, Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005 [1987]); Susan Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound: Technology, Culture & the Art of Studio Recording from Edison to the LP* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); and David J. Steffen, *From Edison to Marconi: The First Thirty Years of Recorded Music* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2005).
- ³² [Anon.], 'A Wonderful Invention – Speech Capable of Indefinite Repetition from Automatic Records', *Scientific American* 37.20 (17 November 1877), 304.
- ³³ John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), [chapter 4](#); Brett Brehm, 'Paleophonic Futures: Charles Cros's Audiovisual Worlds', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 45.3–4 (2017), 179–97. I chart the transition from shellac to vinyl in *Modernist Invention: Media Technology and American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), [chapter 3](#).
- ³⁴ '[T]he true third dimension of the printed page is the recording.' Thus runs the record-sleeve blurb of *The Caedmon Treasury of Modern Poets Reading Their Own Poetry*, TC 2006 (1957). For more on Caedmon Records in particular, a leader in the spoken word industry, and for more on the rise of audiobooks in general, see Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); and Jacob Smith, *Spoken Word: Postwar American Phonograph Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
- ³⁵ The best introduction to disability and 'ableist' discourse remains Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).
- ³⁶ Mara Mills, 'Print Disability: Die Ko-Konstruktion von Blindheit und Lesen', in *Disability Trouble: Ästhetik und Bildpolitik bei Helen Keller*, ed. by Ulrike Bergermann (Berlin: books, 2013), pp. 195–204; Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*, pp. 59–157.
- ³⁷ Brian Hochman, *Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 98. Some 'home recordings' do survive from the 1890s, and a number have been digitized in the UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive: <http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/homewax.php> [Accessed 17 May 2018].
- ³⁸ George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*, intro. Michael Kreyling (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 145. For Hochman's response to Cable, see *Savage Preservation*, pp. 73–96. For a study more broadly concerned with the period's preoccupation with technology and representation, see Sam Halliday, *Science and Technology in the Age of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James: Thinking and Writing Electricity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- ³⁹ Edward Bellamy, 'With the Eyes Shut' in *The Blindman's World and Other Stories*, with a prefatory sketch by W. D. Howells (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1898), pp. 335–65 (pp. 336–7).
- ⁴⁰ Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*, pp. 44–6.

- ⁴¹ See, for instance, Friedrich Kittler, 'Dracula's Legacy' (1982), trans. by William Stephen Davis, *Stanford Humanities Review* 1.1 (1989–90), 143–73; Leanne Page, 'High Performance Technologies in Stoker's *Dracula*', *Victorian Network* 3.2 (Winter 2011), 95–113; and James Riley, "A Wonderful Machine": Phonography, Technology and Recording in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in *Telegraph for Garlic*, ed. by Samia Ounoughi (London: Red Rattle, 2013), pp. 93–106.
- ⁴² Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 205.
- ⁴³ Stoker, *Dracula* p. 206.
- ⁴⁴ Stoker, *Dracula* p. 206.
- ⁴⁵ Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', 532 (*italics in original*).
- ⁴⁶ Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 53. For the purposes of historicizing Stoker's purchase on technology, it's worth remembering that the novel's date of publication (1897) belies the length of the compositional process itself, which is thought to have commenced as early as March 1890. See *Bram Stoker's Notes for 'Dracula': A Facsimile Edition*, annotated and transcribed by Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller, foreword by Michael Barsanti (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2008).
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- ⁴⁹ Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*, pp. 47–53. In anglophone circles, Robida's fortunes have risen lately thanks in large part to the work of Arthur B. Evans and Philippe Willems, whose edition of *Le Vingtième Siècle* (1882) includes a full introduction, biography, and suggestions for further reading: *The Twentieth Century*, trans. by Philippe Willems, ed. by Arthur B. Evans (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).
- ⁵⁰ Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*, p. 47.
- ⁵¹ See, for instance, Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 160–2.
- ⁵² Albert Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul* (Paris: Librairie Illustrée; Librairie M. Dreyfous, 1879), p. 1. ('a career of adventure': *The Adventures of Saturnin Farandoul*, trans. by Brian Stableford [Encino: Black Coat Press, 2009], p. 559. Further translations are taken from this edition.)
- ⁵³ For one especially illuminating approach to the feuilleton, see Christopher Prendergast, *For the People by the People? Eugène Sue's 'Les Mystères de Paris': A Hypothesis in the Sociology of Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003).
- ⁵⁴ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, p. 56. ('six superb Denayrouse diving-suits as a souvenir', p. 54.)
- ⁵⁵ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, p. 64. ('the precaution of bringing a pocket telephone so that their conversation, conducted at a depth of seven or eight meters, would not require excessive vocal effort', p. 59.)
- ⁵⁶ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, p. 284.

- ⁵⁷ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, p. 57.
- ⁵⁸ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, p. 219. ('machine-builder of rare distinction', p. 163.)
- ⁵⁹ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, 220. ('Only one thing annoyed him: no confidant was within reach to whom he might express the joy of his triumphs and the enthusiasm of his scientific discoveries. Robinson had had Friday, but Bixby seemed condemned to solitude. Our energetic scientist having resolved to fill this lacuna, he meditated for two days and then invented the phonograph', p. 165.)
- ⁶⁰ Robida, *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*, p. 221. ('not the simple instrument that we know ... imperfect phonograph', p. 165.)
- ⁶¹ The phrase *idiot savant*, which Robida seems to have in mind here, had slowly been gaining currency since Édouard Séguin's use of it in *New Facts and Remarks Concerning Idiocy* (New York: Wood, 1870). For an overview of Robida's purchase on 'le mythe d'Edison', see André Lange, 'Entre Edison et Zola: Albert Robida et l'imaginaire des technologies de communication', in *Albert Robida du passé au futur: Un auteur-illustrateur sous la III^e République*, ed. by Dabiel Compère (Amiens: Encrage, 2006), pp. 89–116.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 221–2 ('repeats what is confided to it but does not reply ... No more boredom, no more solitude; he had a confidant for his exuberant soul. All his thoughts could be confided to the phonograph – which, being superior to the vulgar phonograph, replied to him. When the weary scientist was avid for a long conversation by his fireside, he began a pleasant conversation with his phonograph that sometimes lasted long into the evening', p. 165.)
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 451. ('necessity is the mother of invention', p. 316.)
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- ⁶⁵ Jules Verne, *Les tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine* (Paris: M. de L'Ormeriaie, 1981 [1879]), p. 38. ('all the inflections of the distant voice', my translation).

Prose Sense and Its Soundings

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My computer file name for this essay at its draft stage, though the inference only belatedly dawned on me, was not just a mnemonic shorthand for the anthology's conjunctive rubric (as intended) but a past participial modification that happened to rephrase my particular emphasis in microcosm: to wit, though with none intended, 'LitSound.' The visibility of literary writing – first condition of its legibility – is indeed, even in silent reading, the place where phonetic sound, quiescent but essential, is brought to light even when not into earshot. But what place is that, in its functional displacement from script through enunciation on the way to perceived literary scene? As the beginning of an answer only, then: lit sound – textual voicing ignited in the heat (often frictional) of phonemic decoding – and thus shedding a certain light in turn on the question of where, as well as how, we read.

A counter-case. The orthographic fact that *listen* is a strictly visible anagram of *silent*, and would never be even latently sounded by the sense of our reading, is thus the negative model of a grounding textual sound, or sounded ground, often maximized in literary writing – even when not termed, as it well might be, the generative work of every *silent listen*. So, instead of that strictly grammic shuffle, let me offer the positive *anaphone* instead, as motto here, pivoting on an audible chiasm across past participle and vernacular noun: the eared read.

On the way back to my chief exhibits from the hyperphonetic narrative prose of Charles Dickens, a contemporary writer's move from *literature* to *aurature* can help, for starters, in grasping the invisible phonography of fiction's prose poetics. Aurature: with its overlap – and undertone – of aura and erasure at once, of phonic ambience floating free of inscription. According to conceptual poet John Cayley in a recent digital project, the instigating work of electronic (or one might say e-lexical) 'listening' occurs in the 'data body of the writer,' cognate in this way, but ambiguously, with electronic prostheses.¹ Repurposing the voice-recognition protocols of

Amazon's phonorobotic Alexa technology for a 2015 experiment called *The Listeners*, Cayley's own voice enunciates the question 'Where are the listeners?' The halting pre-programmed answer, after the robot's 'deep breath,' is eked out as follows: in 'the normalized, the regularized, the grammaticalized enclosure.'² This is the space that Cayley's installation renders allegorical, it would seem, in a plywood closet lined with sound-absorbent material – like the surface of the literary page itself, suffused with the sound of a phonetic script whose aurality it cannot give back directly. Hence, for any phonemically attuned textual auditor, the metaphonetic overtone of 'sigh' in Cayley's associated image of the body's 'silent silo.'

But just that metaphor from built space and its storage capacity deserves further reflection as to locus and dimensions – and has received it, indirectly, from Steven Connor. Glossing, as I had done at book-length in *Reading Voices*, 'what is called subvocalisation,' Connor generalizes: 'Literature does not silence sound: it auditises the field of the visible.'³ Even there, the unwitting latent ambiguity of 'silence sound' (verb/noun or inverted noun/verb) evokes the variable inflections of text production – as in the comparable switch deliberately staged by the gerund rather than participial priority of my phrasing 'reading voices.' Ambivalent localization is certainly Connor's larger point in stressing an ambient 'white voice' (rather than 'white noise'): 'The one who reads silently ... is suffused by his or her inner sonority, if inside is exactly where it is, if sonorous is exactly what it is.'⁴ Connor comes down more decisively two pages later, proposing this voice as neither inside nor out. In its 'pantopicality,' the reading function has 'absconded from space, or instituted another.'⁵

Such is then 'architecture of vocality' in an 'arena of internal articulations.'⁶ This is a zone not 'vestigial,' in derivation from some primary orality, but 'virtual' and encompassing: an 'inner hearsay' that, varying Connor's phrase for the resultant 'field of the visible,'⁷ we might term the generative force field of the audial. For it is a simple fact of morphophonemic language that syllables are not herded into wording until heard, somewhere, as formative lexical entities. In a binarism to which we will return via semiotic theory, their virtuality as integers of meaning is only thus actualized.

Indeed, among the two dozen issues Cayley finds raised for prosthetic culture by such robotic speech production, in the course of his venture in 'aurature,' his accompanying essay lists – if without the primacy that I will give it here – 'the inner voice; the voice of reading.'⁸ Alexa, Siri, you name her. As an inbuilt affordance of the operating system, though born along with the apparatus of texting, this phonetic answering machine,

as it were, is the new counter-Muse of the already written. By such an algorithmically coded voice we are reminded that even the ‘grammatized enclosure’ of ordinary writing, like Alexa’s name might suggest, is an inert and a-lexical structure, strictly latent, with no utterance to call its own. None to speak of – or with, or from. In grammar, as with phonorobotic codes, ‘functionality’ must be engaged, activated, vocalized – if only inwardly (Cayley) or virtually (Connor).

One is tempted, then, to say that literature itself has always been, for the typical reader, a voice-activated operating system, even when read in privacy and silence: a process code-driven, mediate, and ultimately material, if invisibly and inaudibly so, in its transmit from page through subdued musculature to summoned but muted acoustic momentum in the inflected flow of meaning. (See, below, for the latest thinking on the exception deafness makes.) Literature, yes, long before podcasts, has always been a streaming device. To say so is to help specify what I meant to advance, after a decade’s worth of widespread scholarly interest in Victorian media technology in connection with literary writing, by my epilogue to *Novel Violence* on ‘Novel Criticism as Media Study.’ In more canonical terms, we can vary (by way of anchoring) Georges Poulet’s famous remarks in ‘The Phenomenology of Reading,’ where he describes the nature of internalized textual meaning as ‘the thoughts of another, and yet it is I who am their subject ... I am thinking the thoughts of another ... as my very own.’⁹ Translate that from a phenomenological precept to the stratum of subvocal percept as follows: in decoding script, I am subject to the otherness of phonetic forms as if they were my very own. These are forms spoken not by me exactly, not in my particular pitch of voice, but by a derivative aurality as a kind of literalized sympathetic vibration with the text. Words, that is, induce the voice that produces them in an automatic feedback loop. It is as if they spring into action only by hearing themselves said.

Prose Fiction as Voice-Recognition Technology

Anachronism can, indeed, offer its own long, rather than wrong, view. Its terminological time-warp is certainly one place to begin in accounting for textuality’s staying power as a time-based medium, like music. A lot like. A hybrid of percussion and string instrumentation in the silent tensions of tongue and larynx, traditional books are their own kind of synthesizers, albeit pre-electronic: converting differential signals into operational, if suspended, sound – with the force of meaning pulsed out, so (not) to speak, ‘under one’s breath.’ Then, too, storybooks have always

been graphic novels, their word pictures etched by scripted enunciation. This is what Voltaire famously meant by writing as a painting of the voice.¹⁰ Illustration is ancillary. This is also to say that novels, every bit as much as poems, have always involved phono-graphic (sound-writing) technology, well in advance of the audiobook phenomenon. Way before Edison, just thumbs on the page tended to press the mute button, though never damming up the subvocal flow. It is, therefore, by my voicing, not my voice, that the words come into recognition of their own meaning: their conveyed meaning in and for me.

Edward Allen's look into the anomalous gadgetry of that post-Dickensian *Speaking Picture Book* in the present volume has its own way of reminding us of this (see [Chapter 10](#)). That 1893 curiosity piece can be thought to exaggerate, to the point of lampoon, the foundational interface between sounds (limited to speech marks) and picturing (mental) in standard reading practice. This is a connection ordinarily performed in tandem not by pulling a string to pluck sound from the bowels of a contraption, but by sounding under erasure the vowels and consonants needed to activate wording. With no 'innards' to engage but the body's own 'inhibited' musculature (as neurology has it about the silenced body in reading), books speak their pictures into virtual existence only through that phenomenological mirage leveraged, not by pulleys, but by a silently in-toned (inwardly voiced) text – even while one may feel, as Connor suggests, paradoxically surrounded by and immersed in that putative interiority. By the laboured mechanics of the *Speaking Picture Book*, an articulatory norm is thus adumbrated even in its naïve if ingenious dumbing down. While you have to 'play' its submerged version of a curiosity cabinet like the stops on a pipe organ in order to 'accompany' the pictures, in standard reading you must 'perform' the syllabic notations in front of you before there is anything to picture in the first place.

I've said 'standard reading' twice, advisedly. This is a process about which neurophysiology has more to suggest, concerning the 'inhibited' musculature of 'repressed' phonation, than does any neuroesthetics of not-strictly perceptible literary space.¹¹ And at just this level of linguistic processing, the subvocal reading on which so much literary sonority depends comes into contrast with both the graphic and the phonic deficits of challenged literacy. At one end of the scale, Matthew Rubery has argued that blind listeners receiving text through audio recording, in its evolution from vinyl through tape and disk to on-line streaming, is a kind of transferred 'reading' in its own right.¹² At the other end of the spectrum – with all volume, both audial and phonemic, dialed out – the

latest work in deaf studies rethinks soundless literacy as installing a new bottom line, so to speak, strictly graphological, in the idea of textual transmission. By way of an unexplored parallel with Friedrich Kittler's sweeping theory of the 'Mother's Mouth' in the founding oral pedagogy of Romantic literary writing, for instance, Jonathan Rée explains that 'Literacy is imparted to hearing children ... as a kind of supplementary technique – an auxiliary method for representing spoken forms which they can already recognize and repeat, and whose meanings and grammatical relations they already implicitly understand,' with writing therefore 'an optional superstructure, an afterthought.'¹³ Deaf readers, on the other hand, 'comprehend language without its acoustic materiality; for them, speech is always secondary to language, as writing is for hearing readers.'¹⁴ And yet, as Jennifer Esmail emphasizes, 'Nineteenth-century deaf poets ambivalently maintained an idea of "vocality" in their poetry while underscoring how that imagined "voice" was a silent construction of print.'¹⁵ Christopher Krentz wants similarly to suggest that '[i]n the silent, visual space of the text, [deaf people] found a place where the differences between hearingness and deafness appeared to recede.'¹⁶ Phrased this way, here would be a space approximating the unlocalized aura of the subvocal in Connor's e-vocation of the unvoiced.

Although not incorporating inner speech into their reading practice, the deaf are understood by such disability scholars to process the written text in a manner not dissimilar to that of hearing readers – as, in Lennard Davis's formulation, 'neither silent nor auditory ... a go-between linking the silence that surrounds it to the auditory world.'¹⁷ Because deaf readers do not, Davis further argues, translate the printed word into an aural 'hallucination' (cousin, no doubt to Saussure's 'acoustic image'), Davis wants to stress a kind of scriptive purity in the process: namely, that the deaf engage with the very distillation of writing as opposed to speech. As Davis sums up this claim, 'the deaf experience the text at the degree zero of writing, as a text first and foremost. That is, to be deaf is to experience the written text in its most readerly incarnation ... as language itself.'¹⁸ The 'zero degree of writing' is one thing; written 'language' is another. Suffice it to say that the 'language itself' (graphophonemic at base) that this essay is out to 'audit' is only thrown into relief against this different background in deafness theory.

We are still, of course, a far cry from the *Speaking Picture Book* of Edward Allen's commentary (see [Chapter 10](#)). But it is worth stressing again that somewhere between a simulated sonics and a silent phonics of reading – in an encounter with 'language itself,' yes, but only when

processed phonemically in the decipherment of writing – lies the focus of this essay. So it is that the pre-cinematic fascination of the *Speaking Picture Book* in regard to its separately activated soundtrack – anachronism again, and another coming right here – enrolls this mechanism on the roster of certain metamedial *bibliobjets* in Conceptual art that have responded over recent decades to the ‘de-accessioned’ library book (an ugly word, as well as the new ‘found object’ of appropriationist art) in the epoch of print’s digital eclipse.¹⁹ Such discards, once repurposed as art pieces, have found numerous ways to reflect on and even elegize the residual codex form – or to exaggerate its sonic quotient, in the coming example, to the point of material dead metaphor. Grant, if you will, that books, considered as time-based texts, have always been cinemato-graphic, a kind of kinetic-writing: differentially paced in the reeling-by of activated syntax, no sprockets or framelines necessary to clock the graphophonemic flow. But allowing for the serial dynamics of decipherment is one thing. To submit the book page to a kind of electronic treadmill of audio/visual malfunction is quite another – and exactly the point of John Roach’s 1997 *Pageturner*, reinstalled in 2015 in a show on conceptual bookwork (‘Odd Volumes’) at the Yale Art Gallery.

In Roach’s case, what the viewer, never allowed to become reader, approaches is a Fluxus-like suitcase containing the most sonorous prose in English fiction: an old hardback edition of the collected Edgar Allen Poe. Its pages are rapidly flipped through by four small humming fans activated by an electronic sensor as you approach near enough to even imagine reading. All that you can then make out is that the windswept pages are transferred by videocam to a small TV monitor in which they offer only a mere blur of print unsynced with any possible reading speed and accompanied by no sound other than the miked fan motors. Sheer mechanical process without voiced product. Conceived exactly a decade before the introduction of Kindle, Roach has mounted a premonitory satire of e-reading. If books, when operated by private ‘screening’ at the pace of their own lexical frame-advance, have always been kinetographic tracks – call them ‘silent talkies’ – nonetheless the inhospitable videography of the counter-punning *Pageturner* robs them of the soundable sense necessary for any headlong fascination.

Across the gallery at the same ‘Odd Volumes’ exhibit was another bookwork broaching, in an opposite though equally motorized fashion, a tacitly anachronistic figure for the reading process at large. Mary Ziegler’s *The Necessity of Friction*, from 1994, is identified by caption as ‘found copy of Lenard Gross’s *How Much is Too Much*, electric motor, steel, magnesium, and

sandpaper.’ Braced spine-up by a cantilevered armature, the identified hard-back text by Gross is pressed against the rotating sandpaper plate, its abraded circular striations resembling nothing so much as the grooves on a quasi-vinyl disk. As a champion of ‘prose friction’ in a ‘narratographic’ approach to Victorian writing, often manifested as the against-the-grain flux of phonetic materiality in the production of sense (or what I called in the closing sentence of *Novel Violence* ‘a certain interference in the system’²⁰), I can certainly appreciate the titular question of the slowly ‘used up’ book in light of the artifact’s own title. In this madcap vicious circle, it is as if the codex had become in its own right a bulky stylus wearing thin the mock-phonography of its own satirized ‘resistant reading’ on the wheeling plate it scrapes against. This incurs, of course, as the appropriated and entirely silenced volume implies, decidedly too much friction – and constitutes too much a travesty, in its hyper-material mode, of any inherent textual phono-graphy – to count as reading.

In the broader vein of conceptual bookwork, such parables are familiar enough: book reading under palpable erosion; the codex itself in planned obsolescence. And in our present context, if this suggests that books have always been phonographic records in some sense, than yet again anachronism can help concretize a media archaeology. Compare Ziegler’s with another conceptual book, an actual hand-held object in this case, appearing under the punning phonocentric title *Flip Read* (2005) by British artist Heather Weston. This is a traditional precinematic ‘flip book’ whose artificial motion is reduced to photo close-ups of a woman’s lips miming in serial pages the question ‘What would you do with the Volume turned off?’ It is every book’s tacit question. And never more explicit, before Weston’s pantomime codex, than in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (1992). In this novel, openly named for the eponymous phonetic syncopations of its own prose, the personified book speaks to the reader in apostrophe on the last page, and about just such ‘speech.’ We audit the very libido of the writing, stoked by textual transference: ‘Talking to you—and hearing you answer—that’s the kick.’²¹ Again, in codex hardware, the textually engineered silence of voice-recognition. Colloquial high aside (‘that’s the kick’), here is the textual *reflex* of reading spelled out. For the talking and the answering are one and the same, simultaneous, phonetically co-engendered. They are part of the closed-circuit auricular (because to begin with *aurocular*) economy of silent phonation in bringing printed talk to mind – and mind’s ear.

Morrison’s apostrophe is thus as much metalinguistic as it is metafictional. Graphophonemic structure is of course the basis of English and other Western ‘tongues.’ That’s where any discussion like the present must

take its start: from sounded scratch, the grammaphonic stylus of playback (rather than pen of inscription) in motion across the syntactic track. With new evidence just now, and more coming, this was the premise of my study *Reading Voices* when its title was proposed as a clause rather than a phrase. If, under the shadow of e-reading since, there seems to have been a more persistent technological subtext to the discussion so far, that's fitting enough. For this chapter will depend – in its most suggestive anachronism – on the very concept of mediality introduced into an otherwise too abstract semiotics of the literary sign function when its determinants are studied in exile from their graphophonemic roots. Entailed in this countermove is a modern sense of the word *medium* not used in Dickens's Victorian day – but invaluable nonetheless in explaining the continuous *graphonic* charge (literary fusion of the linguistic given) that animates his own prose.

Phonemes Anonymous

On the way back from the sonorities of Morrison to those of Dickens (in lieu of the silenced Poe) – via a route that reverses one literary-historical trajectory of metalinguistic writing traced in my sequel to *Reading Voices*, twenty-five years later, under the title *The Deed of Reading* – we benefit from making stops at two plateaus of high modernism, James Joyce first, then Virginia Woolf. We do so, in this context, so as unpack more fully, across the prose of each, the former's resonant portmanteau term about textual self-resonance: the 'phonemanon' as the true linguistic basis of every literary phenomenon. As the immediately preceding pun suggests, in characterizing a sound 'mugophonisoised'²² – as if broadcast by megaphone, with its own extra nasal play on 'nize' as 'noise' – such is the literary feature whose first phenomenal impact is indeed phonemic, its amplification (however mega-, or meta-) being nonetheless phonic, not sonic. This seems just the point, as well, with the 'anon' of Joyce's linguistic metathesis (and stylistic meta-thesis) in that punning tongue-twister of a malapropism (and medial master trope) 'phonemanon.' The byplay there concerns not just the adverbial 'soon'-again of syllabic sequence in the continuous 'wake' and undertow of phonemic wording; emphasis falls as well on the 'anonymous' of just such sounds in transferential manifestation between absent oral source and absent vocal recitation in full-bodied form. Whereas Walter Ong, in nuancing his dichotomous title *Orality and Literacy*, would have proleptically denominated technologies like the phonorobotics of Alexa a 'secondary orality,' like all pre-recorded sound

from Edison to i-Tunes, the Vox populous (but anonymous) function of silent reading is what I have termed, and will again audit in pending examples, as a 'secondary vocality' not bardic but subvocalic.²³

We can cast up the essential idea here in yet another technological anachronism. Books have always been play-back machines of a strictly 'monoral' fidelity. When Roland Barthes writes about 'The Voice of the Reader' in *S/Z*, he is using the term 'Voice' in its strictly metaphoric sense, as one of the codes enlisted to 'speak' the 'stereography' of the classic text – not to sound its stereophony.²⁴ Before any such figurative voice 'de le lecteur,' however, we can designate the subsisting and more originary *voix d'une lecture* (of a 'reading,' not a reader) – or, again, the secondary vocality of text production. Such is a reading requiring my passive body, but neither begun nor ended there: instead, a topography – depersonified in the circuit of wording – that amounts to the sort of mediatory zone we tend to think of lately as an interface. Call it legibility's *intervox*.

From Signs Back to Medium

Time now, and on the subject of time itself, for the promised example from Woolf's modernism – as it aids in testing the limits of phenomenological semiotics in Charles Sanders Peirce, as recently explored by Mark B. N. Hansen (to be discussed below) in connection not with literary narrative but with the granular texture of pixel imaging. Hear – as if you almost do – the striking of Big Ben near the start of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, in the rhetorical immediacy of the passage's narrative past tense: 'There! Out it boomed.'²⁵ Operating within the broader 'symbolic' status of language at large, in Peirce's most familiar terms (arbitrary symbol as opposed to mimetic icon or material index), Woolf has more specifically deployed 'indexical' and 'iconic' features as well: in other words, a deictic (or 'pointing') adverb plus an onomatopoetic verb (*boom* 'ultimately imitative,' say the dictionaries). Here, then, is the *intervox* of textual audition at a self-dramatized minimum. After this inverted grammar ('Out it boomed'), as if the force of sound precedes its naming – virtual before actual once again – we come, two sentences later, upon an associational metonymy that in its own right indexes, though by a sheerly figurative contiguity, the metal belling of Big Ben in its aftermath as a spread of 'leaden circles' that concentrically 'dissolved in the air.' Yet in between these two evocations of first impressions (firstness in Peirce), the intervening sentence has closed its own circle in the move to thirdness (symbolization).²⁶ It has done so across another echoic iconicity that performs what might be called

a syntactic onomatopoeia of ding-dong iteration, this in a rhythmic shift from sensory impact to meaning: 'First a warning, musical; then the hour, *irrevocable*' – all carried on the homophonic inner ear of one 'vocal' after another. This last is to say that in such a condensed phenomenology of time – in transition across its Peircean trichotomy from sensed duration and suspense (firstness) through identified sound waves (secondness) to the interpreted signage of the hour (thirdness) – what comes first for the reader is the pulse of prose itself. In another variant of Peirce's multiplied triadic formulations, the 'virtual' (i.e., potential or hypothetical) experience of lived duration approaches the only 'actual' to which it can attain when audition is made *to signify* as 'interpreted' hourly indicator.

In applying a Peircian logic of sensation to the content of Woolf's passage, one thus senses a missing term. To explain what 'communicates' the semes of firstness, secondness, and thirdness (quality, quantity, interpretation; potential, actual, categorical) in secondary representation (literature, film, painting, sculpture, dance, etc.), one requires an account of medium as well. Gilles Deleuze may have been radically misjudging Peirce, as recently claimed in an exacting position paper by media theorist Mark B. N. Hansen, in thinking that one therefore needs, in screen viewing, to posit a feature of sheer potential *before* the materialization of firstness. As Hansen has no trouble showing, the latter term already includes all conditional possibilities in Peirce's definition, a 'perceptual hypothesis' rather than a perceived object or entity.²⁷ Still, it does seem sensible (I choose the word advisedly) to insist, in literary rather than screen studies, that when reading about the way the world reaches us in gradually abstracted signs of itself (the Peircean premise), we are already transacting with a separate and precedent set of linguistic signals: that is, arbitrary signs. Compared to Deleuze's insistence on the serial engramme (or photogram) before the moving image, a dubious 'zeroness' (according to Hansen) elided in process (which one might just as well call the underside of firstness), we may nonetheless identify the equivalent motoring unit of literature as the *phonogram*.²⁸

This is a stratum of text production never more obvious, as we move now to Dickens, than when there is a graphonic mismatch operating not just bilaterally but bilingually. Such is the syllabic friction brought out by the first sentence of *Little Dorrit* – 'Thirty years ago, Mars *eilles lay* burning in the sun, one *day*' – where the odd rhyming specificity of place against singled-out diurnal frame (in an entirely typical seasonal heat), while triggering an extended chiming passage full of 'staring' and 'glaring,' is also thickened by its own long-*a* bilingual mix in 'Mars *eilles lay*,'

with the phrasing's false alliteration as well as orthographically masked assonance.²⁹ No channel, no continent, imposes a bar on lexical dexterities in this Dickensian smelting pot of graphonic phrasing. The playing field of such eye/ear tension isn't just English, but language itself, literary mediality degree zero. This is to say, therefore, that prose sense comprises, as plumbed, all three Peircean categories: in just the overlap of potential impression with emergent actual (rather than merely virtual) object under interpretation – as long as the root of that potential is understood to be linguistic even before descriptive.

Despite his many coinages, Dickens did somehow neglect to invent the use of 'medium' in our sense. But he was no stranger to a technological imagination of the reading act that anticipates the kind of electronic conceptual bookwork discussed earlier, video or merely rotary-motored. In his last completed novel, the full set of Gibbon that will test (beyond redemption) the recitation skills of the imposter Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend* is laid out in Boffin's Bower for eager decoding by the overpaid reader: arrayed 'like a galvanic battery.'³⁰ The simile itself speaks volumes, since the surcharge of meaning is more than a latent pun there. All that is able to power the stored energy of the tomes is, in fact, the voice, necessary, in Dickens's most pointed send up, to keep Polybius from transgending into 'Polly Beeius' (as presumed 'Roman virgin').³¹ English, like any language, is an occult science until you've mastered it. But Dickens brings to his own preternatural mastery other secrets not easy to explain – or, better, brings them up from within the abiding mystery of style itself, delivering the medium with the message.

Sequestered Resonance: With No One *Where* to Listen?

A more specific sense of verbal secretiveness was long ago lobbed into literary-critical discourse by the novelist Graham Greene – to become the source of a minor cottage industry of speculation ever since. For it was hardly specific enough. In an essay on Dickens from 1950, Greene speaks of a 'secret prose' that is, figuratively, indirectly *heard* rather than read.³² Without deigning (and certainly without laboring) to pinpoint his sense of the phrase 'secret prose,' Greene does seem to have something more particular in mind than his lone example might evince. Secret? Encrypted? Or just private? What does the adjective really wish to evoke? It isn't easy to say, because Greene doesn't. He simply alludes to a self-evident 'music of memory' in *Great Expectations*, with its 'delicate and exact poetic cadences,' a music 'that so influenced Proust.'³³ Here is how

Greene sums up and shelves the point: such prose is meant to capture the rhythm of 'the mind speaking to itself with no one there to listen.'³⁴ No one? No one *else*? Or, in a more radical sense of self-evacuation into text, no one left there at all on the scene, at the site of articulation? It takes a moment to ponder this, since, again, Greene doesn't do it for us.

Perhaps we're to recognize the seeming hyperbole of 'secret' (rather than *introspective*, say) – for the timbre of such burrowed monologues – as carrying a certain canonical provenance. It's easy to imagine that, in writing of Dickensian poetics, Greene has the formulation of another 'Eminent Victorian' in mind: John Stuart Mill, for whom 'eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*.' That famous maxim is soon rounded out, and in Mill's own italics: '*Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude*, and bodying itself forth in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind.'³⁵ In threefold semiotic rather than rhetorical terms: the verbal *symbol* thus transfers from author to auditor in such cases an approximate *icon* of the affect thus *indexed* – with Peirce's thirdness (from a separate trichotomy) looped back through firstness to secure the achieved intimate recognition of secondness: the feeling figured as well as felt. Between Mill's and Greene's proposals, the correlation is hard to miss. Memory's music spoken to oneself with no one there to listen; feeling confessing itself only to itself – as such, the defining features of 'secret prose' and Mill's true Poetry (however impressionistic and debatable the claim in each case) speak to each other rather directly. But if both introvert prose and its cousin inwardness in verse eventually come into contact with the reader, we need further to ask: in what material form, exactly, is such speech found 'bodying itself forth'? Or bearing down harder on Mill's terms: what 'bodily form' of 'symbols' – the alphabetic characters of symbolic language – could possibly render the 'exact shape' of confessional reflection?

Dickensian prose is full of tacit answers to this. But only if there *is* someone there to listen – or at least an apparatus of uptake at the site of comprehension. To count as language, secrecy must have its say after all, even if the listening is depersonified, produced in relay via our own silent enunciation. Whatever Greene may have seen, or heard, in the lone passage from *Great Expectations* he offers up, it has been left unguessed by further commentary, which seldom even mentions this free-floating example in the many allusions over the years to Greene's pithy descriptors. What happens when one actually reads the three sentences of this paragraph? 'It was fine summer weather again, and, as I walked along, the

times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned.³⁶ The summer weather that comes ‘again’ is, of course, a recursion in two time scales at once, annual and biographical. Pip is back: back in the past, back at the home he has foregone – and this in a pastoral ambience of agricultural recurrence, all fruitfulness and nurture, with the bitterness of the past no sooner summoned up in recall than dissipated. Pip has returned for his cruel sister’s funeral, and everything feels for a moment more relenting than she ever was. For ‘the times when I was a little helpless creature’ – not one survived period of time indicated here, but the many separate episodes (‘times’ plural) of mistreatment – ‘and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned,’ with the last unrhythmical twist of that sentence like a snap of grammatical recoil as well as emotional reversion (as if to say, ‘and believe me, my sister never spared me!’).

And then the crux of this revisitation is transacted across the close repetition of the verb itself: ‘But they returned with a gentle tone upon them that softened even the edge of the Tickler’ – blunted in recollection, that is, the former sting of the sister’s punishing weapon, even as the long vowelizing of ‘tone’ (in emphatic variance from ‘returned’) is lightened, visually as well as aurally, by its anagrammatic embedding in ‘*softened*. Given the diffused sensation and ambivalent sense of that ‘gentled tone’ (whether dimmed in hue or timbre, or both), the further alphabetic transfusion is a case, once again, of mediality degree zero. The orthographic mix offers, that is, a sub-representational fillip unusable as sign – but available from within the conditioning fund of language as its stylistic ingredients felt in potential. What is thus enacted in dental assimilation (‘gentled tone’) is the verbalizing of a simpler adjective in the softened edges of its own prose – one phoneme overlapping the next in syllabic troping of a moderated starkness, as immediately paired, in ‘For now,’ with the indexical function of deixis: ‘For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when ...’

Right here and ‘now,’ that is, Pip pivots forward in prognosis. For ‘that the day must come when it would be well for my memory ...’ – what? – to recover these better feelings? To fix on some such amelioration? So we would expect the sentence to go, based on an idiomatic model like ‘it would be well for me to bear in mind.’ But the temporal swivel of the whole passage is actually hinged about the unwritten shift from ‘my memory’ as subject to ‘the memory of me’ as object, the very crux of autobiographical retrospect rehearsed in this one musical chord change: ‘be well,’ that is, ‘for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me.’ The logic of an entire genre

(the first-person Bildungsroman) turns on a phrasal dime. Memory can be made 'well for me' again only if 'others walking in the sunshine should be softened' – like Pip's own purging of regret – 'when they thought *of me*' (emphasis added in an inflection that the reader, in producing it on the narrator's behalf, is the only one there to hear). So, too, with the projected bond, phonemic as well as affective, between the diphthongized vowels rhyming 'thought' with the reiterated 'softened.' In Mill's metaphor of 'eavesdropping', there is more than the phantom 'tone' to be sounded into sense by such wording.

Underhearing Words

In thinking of the 'music of memory' in Dickens, one might naturally be drawn to *David Copperfield* as well, and to David's childhood fantasies regarding his 'secret' love for Little Em'ly, caught up in reveries that again elicit the kind of transegmental drift (as in 'gentle/d tone') that is only the tip of the *frictional* iceberg in graphonic reading: the cutting (rent) edge of wording as, yes, the open secret of its inherent plasticity. The effect is manifest twice here in the orbit of a waking dream in which David and Em'ly 'were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, *never* growing older, *never* growing wiser, children *ever*' (with my emphasis on a prospect so much *never to be* that the very rhythm of its forecast is negated the third time around as a kind of disenchantment of the entire mantra).³⁷ Locked in a kind of firstness (or 'perceptual hypothesis') never 'actualized' (Peirce's secondness again), the fantasy passes into symbolization in the very mode of its own lexical evanescence: 'Some such picture, with no real world in it, but bright with the light of our innocence, and vague as the stars afar off, was in my mind' – held in mind, that is, as sheer virtuality. The tinny rhyme of 'bright with the light' gives way, yields sway, to the finer dia-phonous chiming, in this music of memory, that carries the melody from the ligature 'of *our*' to 'stars *afar* off,' rounded in valediction by the chiasm of '*afar* off.'

So it is that what I'm evoking here as an underhearing of words (and have previously called their 'evocalization'³⁸), even when it might resemble an overreading of them, gravitates toward the zero degree of achieved phrase before the possibility of first scenic impressions. This, once again, is the substrate of prose as medium before it is put into play as representation or virtual presence. Analysis is one word for its decipherment, and in this sense (or both senses once more) is *sounded* from the ground up. Interpretation is thus the close structural

complement to reading – again its intervox – within an already analytic frame. As seen here, the intensive pressure of graphonic reading only drills down to what attention is built up from in the first place: attention before perception. ‘Prose sense’ in my compound title, then, covers the semantic load of narration in its full semiotic gamut. It runs, at the descriptive level, from the firstness of cognitive stimulus through the secondness of recognition to the thirdness of categorical terminology itself, naming, categorizing, interpreting – all transpiring within the plot. But this chapter’s compound topic includes what silently respire to make such meanings breathe. So the ‘sounding’ of sense, in the title’s tandem emphasis, touches in a double manner on the fundament that precedes such semiosis: not just the first stirrings of perception but the medial enunciations that format and fuel its very potential for emergence – and do so differently for literature than for film, telescoping, oil painting, radio listening, aurature, you name it.

We may certainly sense this level of prose operation, conceived as secret or not, or just subliminal, in returning to an earlier passage in *Great Expectations* building toward the one cited by Greene, where again, as in *David Copperfield*, the warpings of libidinal fantasy are sustained upon covert ripples of intonation in the flow of text production. Before the wounds of memory are passed through the chord changes of ‘music,’ in Greene’s terms, many an undermining irony, *underheard* via the subtext of the language in its primal processes, has been sounded beneath Pip’s recollected sense of things. Early on, after Miss Havisham three times tells him, like a charm or a curse, to ‘Call Estella,’ he feels the absurdity of ‘bawling Estella to a scornful young lady neither visible nor responsive.’³⁹ She does eventually respond and emerge – as if already confirmed (in the symbolic thirdness of a name he’s just learned) by an phonetic underlay of the inscription itself, a flicker of the medium from within the conjuring of a more than literal candlepower: ‘But she answered at last, and her light came along the dark passage like a star.’⁴⁰ By synecdoche: light for lamp. By metonymy: glow for the aura of aloof beauty (the so-called genitive metaphor for the brightness she *is* as well as bears). And finally by simile and syllabic slippage: that glinting ‘a st-’ that makes what amounts to the prose’s clutched unconscious stammer at the name E-st-ella in its etymological association with icy distance.

The same medial rather than strictly semiotic ironies attend a later turning point in Pip’s relation to his erotic fixed star. Long before the ‘secret’ ingrown prose of his chastened return to the marsh landscape in Greene’s chosen passage, with its tonal purgations, Pip is lounging there

on the eve of his original departure ‘for London and greatness.’ We thus follow his progress (and moral regress) – listen as well as watch – as ‘I made my exultant way to the old Battery and, lying down there to consider the question whether Miss Havisham intended me for Estella, fell asleep.’⁴¹ Again, a cross-word double cross at any rational level – as if we could hear the Freudian jokey substrate of the monitory unconscious welling up to punish him in an almost slapstick slant rhyme: a veritable metapun on the very pipe dream his reverie entails. Once more, the zero degree of graphonic possibility is engaged. By something approaching sheer inadvertency, the internal slant rhyme at ‘ella/ fell a’ has made itself felt before immediate logical repression – and with no transgender wordplay (fella) needed. It has done so, we can only think, as if to spell out lexically, without narratively dispelling, the radical oneiric instability of this elusive dream girl. Here is prose *friction* chafing at the bit of its own initiation at the sounded threshold of sense.

One last anachronism, then. Literary reading has always been an interception technology. Such audiovisual forensics begin, at the graphonic level, with signals processed beneath the radar of meaning – but not beneath the sonar of its being made. Made, or ironically scrambled in reception. And so, in media-archeological terms, there is certainly one anachronism above all to *resist* in any refigured encounter with literary textuality. The speed of reading is never in the Mach range, never supersonic. Across the auditized field of the intervox (as decoded interface), invested reading, unavoidably ‘there to listen’, takes its subsonic cues from the pace of syllabic action in process. One level down from ontological semiotics – there, where the forms of narrative event are ‘underread’ on the run – its phonics remain virtual (again, that formative zone of present potential) precisely in needing no *actual* sound to engage the music, as well as mechanics, of interpretation.

Notes

¹ John Cayley, ‘Aurature/Aurality’, <http://programmatology.shadoof.net/?aurature>.

² Cayley, ‘Aurature/Aurality.’

³ Steven Connor, *Beckett, Modernism, and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 113.

⁴ Connor, *Beckett, Modernism, and the Material Imagination*, p. 106.

⁵ Connor, *Beckett, Modernism, and the Material Imagination*, p. 108.

⁶ Connor, *Beckett, Modernism, and the Material Imagination*, p. 107.

⁷ Connor, *Beckett, Modernism, and the Material Imagination*, p. 107.

⁸ Cayley, ‘Aurature/Aurality.’

- ⁹ George Poulet, 'Phenomenology of Reading', *New Literary History* 1 (October 1969), p. 56.
- ¹⁰ Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique* Vol. IV (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1879), p. 157: 'L'écriture est la peinture de la voix; plus elle est ressemblante, meilleure elle est' (Writing is the painting of the voice; the closer the resemblance, the better it is.) This closes the brief section on 'Orhtographe' absent from most modern abridged editions.
- ¹¹ See, for example, in one of the most recent studies in this vein, M. Perrone-Bertolotti et al, 'How Silent Is Silent Reading?: Intracerebral Evidence for Top-Down Activation of Temporal Voice Areas during Reading', *The Journal of Neuroscience* 32.49 (2012), 17554–62.
- ¹² Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
- ¹³ Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses – A Philosophical History* (New York: Metropolitan, 1999), p. 112.
- ¹⁴ Rée, *I See a Voice*, p. 116.
- ¹⁵ Jennifer Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Athens: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), p. 23.
- ¹⁶ Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 22.
- ¹⁷ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 117.
- ¹⁸ Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 61.
- ¹⁹ See Garrett Stewart, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- ²⁰ See Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 29, 115.
- ²¹ Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 229.
- ²² James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. 258.
- ²³ Chapter 2, 'Secondary Vocality', in Stewart, *The Deed of Reading: Literature • Writing • Language • Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. 41–75. This is a proposal elaborated elsewhere, in connection with Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), for an essay of mine called "'Secondary Vocality" and the Sound Defect', in *Sound Effects: The Object Voice in Fiction*, ed. by Jorge Sacido-Romero and Sylvia Mieszkowski (Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2016), pp. 32–57. This concept of 'secondary vocality' develops a notion first explored in *Reading Voices*, including the history of silent reading's orthographic facilitation in work by Paul Saenger subsequently collected in *Space Between Words: The Origin of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). My own emphasis on graphonic tension, in literary language particularly, has recently been taken up by Mandy Bloomfield's *Archoepoetics: Word, Image, History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016) in her reading of Susan Howe (p. 66) and Maggie O'Sullivan (p. 126). My concept of the 'transegmental drift' as

flashpoint for phonemic reading in cross-word ambiguities of juncture has also enjoyed a recent fond parody – via seismic allegory – in the book *Strand* (New York: Roof, 2005), under the title ‘Tectonic Grammar,’ by conceptual poet Craig Dworkin. More broadly, a reader of poetry hyperattuned to the phonetic grain of Romantic verse is Susan J. Wolfson, in all of her works but especially, perhaps, *Reading John Keats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), where my own ‘audits’ are cited in passing (pp. xv, 166).

- ²⁴ Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 151–2.
- ²⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, 1990), p. 4.
- ²⁶ See Robert Burch, ‘Charles Sanders Peirce’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/peirce/>.
- ²⁷ Such is the main thrust of Mark Hansen’s critique (‘Algorithmic Sensibility’, pp. 11–13) of Deleuzian film theory, which, as he demonstrates, underestimates the ontological exhaustiveness of the Peircean trichotomy. And yet in any given manifestation of screen image, as in any verbal text, especially when the cusp between firstness and secondness seems actually to be the subject of representation (as in the Woolf passage about the suspended audial impression of Big Ben), one can see the need for recognizing an underlying transmissive means as first cause for any such staging of the signifying triad – or of any other scene set in words.
- ²⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 32.
- ²⁹ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. by Stephen Wall and Helen Small (New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 1, 15.
- ³⁰ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. by Adrian Poole (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 5, 62.
- ³¹ Dickens, *Mutual*, pp. 5, 66.
- ³² Graham Greene, ‘The Young Dickens’, *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (New York: Viking, 1951), p. 53.
- ³³ Greene, ‘The Young Dickens’, p. 52.
- ³⁴ Greene, ‘The Young Dickens’, p. 53.
- ³⁵ See John Stuart Mill, *Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties* (1833), e-text www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/jsmill/diss-disc/poetry/poetry.soi.html.
- ³⁶ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. by Charlotte Mitchell (New York: Penguin, 1996), pp. 35, 278.
- ³⁷ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. by Jeremy Tambling (New York: Penguin, 1996), pp. 10, 145.
- ³⁸ See [Chapter 5](#), ‘Evocalizing Prose’, in Stewart, *Reading Voices*, pp. 192–231.
- ³⁹ Dickens, *Great Expectations*, pp. 8, 59.
- ⁴⁰ Dickens, *Great Expectations*, pp. 8, 59.
- ⁴¹ Dickens, *Great Expectations*, pp. 19, 147.

Dissonant Prosody

A. J. Carruthers

Now her áll in twó flocks, twó folds – black, white; | right,
wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
But thése two; wáre of a wórlđ where búť these | twó tell, each
off the óther; of a rack
Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, | thóughts
against thoughts ín groans grínd.

G. M. Hopkins, ‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’

For Daniel Albright, the ‘greatest master of prosodic dissonance’ was none other than Igor Stravinsky, one

eerily sensitive to verse movement: some of his finest works are experiments in prosody, from the *Three Japanese Songs* (1913) on – indeed, he considered the true subject of his ballet *Apollon musagète* to be the iambic foot, even though the ballet contains no singing whatsoever. Nevertheless, Stravinsky never hesitated to write music that obviously contradicts every metrical element of the text he set. I feel that the most ravishing tune he ever wrote was his setting of W.H. Auden’s lullaby ‘Gently, little boat,’ in *The Rake’s Progress* (1951), in which the main beat keeps falling on words like *the*.¹

Falling feet-first on the *the*, Auden set harshly, Stravinsky uses musical metrics to contradict the set metrical text. Rather than bringing together musical and textual metrics, Stravinsky’s experimental musical prosody derives its power from their disjunctive overlay (music *over* poetry). This was to be of interest to Stravinsky in *Poetics of Music*, derived from his Harvard lectures, where he both interrogated the nature of musical time – ‘chrononomy,’ clarifying the relation between meter and rhythm – and between consonance and dissonance: ‘the use of dissonance demands the necessity of a resolution. But nothing forces us to be looking constantly for satisfaction that resides only in repose.’ This gave way to nothing other

than an emancipation of dissonance: 'For over a century music has provided repeated examples of a style in which dissonance has emancipated itself.'²

To some degree twentieth-century poetry tells a similar story: that of a slow emancipation of dissonance, and a critical clarification of the analogy between poetic meter and dissonance in the musical sense. Despite critical anatomies of the problem of the musico-poetic relation that have clarified the gap that separates harshness and harmony, the notion of poetic 'harmony' as tantamount to the 'music of poetry' still prevails.³ We see this in the fourth essay of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* where he draws attention to contradictions arising from the common equation of poetic musicality with smoothness:

Such phrases as 'smooth musical flow' or 'harsh unmusical diction' belong to the sentimental use of the word musical, and are perhaps derived from the fact that the word 'harmony' in ordinary English, apart from music, means a stable and permanent relationship. In this figurative sense of the word harmony, music is not a sequence of harmonies at all, but a sequence of discords ending in a harmony, the only stable and permanent 'harmony' in music being the final resolving tonic chord. It is more likely to be the harsh, rugged, dissonant poem (assuming of course some technical competence in the poet) that will show in poetry the tension and the driving accented impetus of music. When we find a careful balancing of vowels and consonants and a dreamy sensuous flow of sound, we are probably dealing with an unmusical poet... When we find sharp barking accents, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, and long lumbering polysyllables, we are probably dealing with *melos*, or poetry which shows an analogy to music, if not an actual influence from it.⁴

To read musicality in poetry as tantamount to harmony in music is like saying only the final resolved chords of a classical sonata comprise its 'music,' or, in Stravinskian mode, to read dissonance as simply that which awaits satisfaction in final repose rather than a thing to be explored in itself. If we were to establish some basis for a new ethos of musico-poetics, or even just clarify the music-poetry analogy, it would be inadequate to base it around some notion of music as the *maintenance* of harmony – dreamy-sensuous-smooth-flowing – in short, an Orphean sonicity. Rather, as Frye posits, to get to the crux of *musical* poeticity is to take the 'sequence of discords' as the closest capture of an analogous relation between poetry and music, and the source of its power.⁵ If the *maintenance* of harmony was analogous to end rhyme, can we then say, analogously speaking, that the sequence cannot be resolved? Provided we clarify the difference between

meter and rhythm, prosody and rhythm, how might we consider the parallel relation of rhyme and rhythm to analogous associations of harmony and dissonance?

Rhyme is more complex, as will be gone into further below, but dissonance, once it has crossed over those analogical faultlines, certainly comes to concern the matter of poetry and, specifically, poets who have either been accused or praised for their tendencies towards it. Citing Frye, an entry for dissonance by Lloyd Bishop in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia for Poetry and Poetics* stresses that alongside Robert Browning, Gerard Manley Hopkins was one of the more notable users of dissonance.⁶ Dissonance may not necessarily mean a lack of poetic unity. Michael Sprinker, in *A Counterpoint of Dissonance*, turns his analysis on the poststructuralist implications of prosodic dissonances in Hopkins's various articulations of his unconventional metrics. For Hopkins 'the more highly differentiated and thus varied the rhythm (Hopkins mentions caesura, tonic accent, emphatic accent, breaking of vowel sound, alliteration, and rhyme as means of varying the rhythm), the greater the potential for formal unity.'⁷ Dissonance may, however, spell difficulty for readers, critics, or even those engaged in the writing of dissonance. Well aware of the difficulty of his verse, Hopkins thus would write to Robert Bridges of the 'licence' given to metrical patterns in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' as a kind of 'strictness.'⁸ We can listen then to how Hopkins marks it, diacritically, in 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves,' that severe, depressive journey into the dark night of the soul where dissonance is something more akin to a torture rack of thinkerly dialectics: 'thoughts against thoughts in groans grind.' There, what one imagines to be a stress on GROANS (bacchius: short-long-long) ends up an oddly stressed cretic (long-short-long). Or, in a different manner, from 'The Windhover,' where 'sheer plod makes plough down sillion | Shine.' What to make of the break here calls for some inventive speculation: – PLOD here I read as an almost onomatopoeiac plea for a literal plunge of foot – occurrent in difficultly stressed poems like 'Tom's Garland' with 'Little Í reck ho! lacklevel in' and PLOD unstressed; 'nor yet plod safe shod sound.'

Can such experimental uses of meter be understood prosodically, and if so, what does this offer for critics seeking sound either in an historical sense (how readers have heard such poems), or in lieu of listening *in theory*? What of the 'stigma of meter' and Hopkins's 'obscurity,' as Meredith Martin has explored?⁹ What about the sheer difficulty of these lines and graphic metrical marks? Out of what historical contexts have such metrical experiments arisen, and what do such experiments do

in *poetics*, for theories of poetic listening? John Hollander, in a chapter entitled 'Observations on the Experimental,' in *Vision and Resonance*, is able to speak of 'metrical experiment,' from Milton, through the Romantics and Emerson as achieving a certain 'sanctity' that would then inform twentieth-century American poetry. It had to stem first from the 'free growth of metrical laws' out of Emersonian accentuals, finding its way then towards Whitman's oracular-'musical' rejection of the *architektonike* and the finished, polished rhyme of regularity and elegance.¹⁰ Yet of all the 'scholar-poets,' Hollander claims, 'Hopkins comes closest to specifying his metrical intentions with great precision,' a precision whose terms of exposition emerge from the poems themselves; metrical tension can be 'violently metaphoric' per the reflexivity of the ploughing and plodding in 'Harry Ploughman,' and from above, we might add, 'The Windhover.'¹¹ In the same chapter, Hollander then makes observations on William Carlos Williams's 'variable foot,' diagramming its triadic, strophic pattern as visual prosody,¹² and Charles Olson, to whom a meta-poetics of the typewriter's rhythms, the clatter and bang of its keys, can be compared.¹³

Though not quite at the level of sanctity, degrees of dissonance are familiar territory in modern and contemporary American poetry and its various strands of metrical experiment. Reading dissonance with a close eye and ear to prosody after Williams and Olson – after second or third wave modernisms – can take into consideration a robust field of contemporary scholarship on poetry and sound, given landmark studies of sound in modern and contemporary poetics like *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (1998), edited by Charles Bernstein. Marjorie Perloff's contribution to the collection reimagines not only free verse as, still, metrical, but also women's nonlinear poetics like those of Susan Howe and Joan Retallack as reorganising sound configurations 'according to different principles,' some still stressed, and in some manner, metrical.¹⁴ Roughly ten years later Perloff, with Craig Dworkin, would edit *The Poetry of Sound / The Sound of Poetry*, moving discussions away from 'scientific,' prosodic analysis and turning an interdisciplinary ear to dissonant prosody as *poetics* in the literary-critical sense, with attention to noise, voice, echo and experiments with material and visual textuality in relation to poetic sound. Like *Close Listening*, analyses of performance take centre stage, as in Hélène Aji's chapter on Jackson Mac Low.

Susan Stewart's leading chapter in *The Poetry of Sound / The Sound of Poetry*, titled 'Rhyme and Freedom,' asks how it has come to be that 'as

early as Aristotle's denigration of mere verse in the *Poetics*, and especially under modernist theories of free verse, rhyming has been viewed by many as both a purely formal device and a kind of restraint.¹⁵ Rhyme in an historical *now*, Stewart tells us, happens to be more complex than we might think (and that there's more of it than we think). As scholar-poet, Stewart stops short of using the word dissonant in reading rhyme in Hopkins's 1885 sonnet 'The Soldier,' which she provides both as prose and in Hopkins's lineated version. Hopkins places a virgule splitting the poem's hexameters down the middle, also which lays out, Stewart tells us, a 'set of fissures' that we see for instance in the opening line: 'Yes. Why do we áll, séeing of a | soldier, bless him.' Crucially, the diacritical marks stressing the words means 'the emphasized monosyllables are like an x-ray of the conventional syntax.'¹⁶ So then this syntax 'is in tension with the dense language of the poem that remains unmarked.'¹⁷ Unwedge from the 'childish' formality of traditional meter, Stewart recounts, via Richard Aldington, the ensuing surprises 'of content and perspective' in Hopkins's rhyme.¹⁸ This is metrical intention of a sort, insofar as it is a representation of 'the soldier's own point of view.'¹⁹ Still, metrical *experiment* in Hollander's sense can only match with prosodic dissonance where such dissonance concerns meter, which is not the case with prosodic dissonance in nonmetrical verse. Stewart's reading of Hopkins in terms of rhyme's freedom is open to dissonant implications. Rather than reading rhyme as points of endline fixity, Stewart's reading of Hopkins moves back into the axial divisions of the virgiles, or the line's meat. The tension between marked syntax and the apparently unmarked stuff of language, 'the frail and foul clay out of which this art is made,'²⁰ is the ground of fissure in Hopkins's poetic language. If rhyme is the harmonic endzone for the line, the rest is dissonance, or dissonant potential, or at least an area open to axial fissure or phonotextual tension.

In another take on Hopkins from Garrett Stewart's 1990 book *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*, we take a similar route through English rhyme but with a different sense of where such deeper goings-on move us through historical languages of invention: 'It might be argued that such cross-lexical slippage is merely an aleatory offshoot of English morphophonemic structure, a risk of word division that has no formal place in English poetics between Chaucer and the modernist extravagance begun, roughly speaking, with Hopkins.'²¹ Thus if the roots of modernist extravagance, even disruption, may be found well before in English rhyme's systematic and canonical practice – and such practice

may not always have welcomed such disruptive outworking of rhyme – Hopkins’s rhyming practice is, Stewart suggests, part of a ‘larger system of grammatical torque and lexical strain’ that can be heard marking a point of transition between nineteenth-century sonority and the more ‘irregular, modernist texturing of the line.’²² Stewart notices therefore James Milroy’s reading of ‘gradience’ as a key factor in gauging these effects, Milroy being especially enticed by rhyme in ‘The Wreck of the *Deutschland*’ to the extent that he is able to read the line from stanza 26 (‘The down-dugged / ground-hugged / grey’) as one part of an ‘extended rhyme.’²³ More exactly it is the ‘strained phonic gradience’ of Hopkins’s rhymes that is the audible cause of all this ‘transegmental dislocation,’ to cite Stewart’s segmentalizing reading of Milroy’s logics of rhyme.²⁴ Not just alliterative, then, Stewart hears the textual increments of gradient rhyme transegmentally, and in lines such as these gradience is borne out of Hopkins’s work with word-chains and inventive etymologies in his journals, with entries like the following: ‘*slip, slipper, slop, slabby* (muddy), *slide*, perhaps *slope*, but if slope us thus connected what are we to say of *slant*?’²⁵ Or ‘slack,’ a recurring descriptor of inscape, slack against stress of rock or brow of cloud.²⁶

These are those paracheistic moments – incremental, assonantal, alliterative – at which we hear internal rhyme and heed such transegmental dislocation. I hear it in ‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’ with the incremental drift from ‘flocks’ and ‘folds,’ or the ideational flipping of ‘right’ to ‘wrong,’ which then sets us off through ‘reckon,’ ‘reck,’ ‘rack’ transegmentally drifting under the wrung of ‘selfwrung,’ which, in turn, turns ‘selfstrung,’ and so on. The literary-critical ramifications of this are alarmingly strong. Enough of this ‘graphonic eccentricity’ will have led some readers to hear something linguistically and possibly even thematically ‘ironic’ in Hopkins’s gradient rhyming.²⁷ As Stewart boldly wagers, literature as a whole may start to take rhymed discourse as something that speaks for the entire literary condition, rhyme being crucial to reading effects.²⁸ If we hear extended rhyme transegmentally, catching it once it slips at this dislocative juncture, what strikes our ears as ‘dissonant’ will be both lexical and geometric. Given the dislocated axes of gradient rhyme and rhymed echo are now vertical or horizontally zigzagged rather than crammed to the end of lines, the ear has some occasion to escape the compartmentalizing pull of the eye. Or, eye leads ear. Listening to such dislocative effects may first catch the eye, as Horace put it in *Ars Poetica*: *Non quivis videt inmodulata poemata iudex* (‘Not every critic sees an inharmonious verse’). Yet in any event, what we hitherto call

'listening to reading' necessitates a dual pathway of the graphically sighted and phonically arresting; for how the critic may or may not *see* dissonance in poetic sound depends on precisely how the critic has managed to catch audible sight of those senses of prosodic and segmental disjunction, how the critic catches on, or has caught up to, the metrical codes and underlying prosodic cues in dissonant verse.

Fast forward to modernist poetics in the twentieth century, and the avant-garde would seem to have ushered in a total revolution in dissonance, both through the relation it forged with music particularly in sound poetry, and I will show briefly below, in the anarchic, procedural rhythmic of Jackson Mac Low, writing in the latter half of the century. For modernist poetry after Hopkins, and the slew of difficult and experimental poetics that then follow such strains of phonic gradience, such *listening to reading* may require some new impetus to transform critical models or critical paths that have previously been confined to types of verse deemed more suitable for such analyses. My question then is whether opening our ears to prosodic dissonance can shed light on the kinds of works that do not regularly enter into such discussions, which is to say that some general theory of dissonance must speak not for just one kind of poetry but across different histories of poetics. The avant-garde too partakes of prosody, I am stressing, and this too has bearing on the literary condition as we now heed it. Prosodic dissonance lies at the heart of the soundscapes of Gertrude Stein in ways that call for new analyses, or the soundscapes of Kurt Schwitters and Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, the latter of which has come to the attention of avant-garde studies in more recent times, in ways that bilingualise these questions.²⁹ If we can allow such estranging phonic dissonances to lay out some preliminary critical path, we might begin to ask how might they provide foundations for a transformation of the relation between sound and sound structure in ways not reducible to the modern or post-modern exigencies of broken or segmented sound in poetry written predominantly for English-speaking readers. How we hear or *hear-see* this through the patterning of dissonant verbal scores, or indeed how we fail to hear such dissonances or see such scores, will depend on how much we have allowed prosodic dissonance to enter into the critical and historical imagining of new soundscapes. Whether these audible strains come all the more harshly, and curiously, to our ears, will depend on the critical path we choose to take through the languages of poetic invention, and how we may find it agreeable, or disagreeable, to heed dissonance in poetic sound.

Writing Dissonant Hopkins: Mac Low's 'Event Metric'

The North American poet Jackson Mac Low (1922–2004), a professed 'pragmatist,'³⁰ counted Hopkins among his significant inspirations.³¹ Mac Low, whose first poems were written during the latter period of the first avant-gardes, and last in the new century, fits well the description of Frye's 'musical' poet: in his stanzaic and verse works we find sharp, barking accents, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, long, lumbering polysyllables, even the use of musical scores to mark pitch, intervallically, and tone. Patrick F. Durgin, commenting on Jackson Mac Low in the 1970s, notes that while the 'dialectic between procedure and chance helped to make Mac Low more responsible to and for his prosody than perhaps anyone else whose work was attuned to such literary values, it sympathetically and even correctively deranged the circuits of influence that we associate with any concept of "tradition."'³² Where prosody meets tradition, Mac Low disrupts these circuits of influence with his own version of such literary values. Thus reading Mac Low as a poet-prosodist helps chart ways in which procedure, aleatoric and chance operations, whether of an American pragmatist variety in the works of John Cage, in the mathematic mechanicity of the Oulipeans, or indeed in other variants thereof, illuminates and challenges prosodic analysis. Mac Low's accentual verse represents a different kind of response to tradition than is otherwise attributed to contemporary poets. Rather than reacting against prosodic traditions with free verse, as the modern narrative sometimes suggests, the procedural prosodics of Mac Low are but one example of how, in the mid-to-late twentieth century, metrical constraint came to be reconsidered in experimental poetry.

In the work of Mac Low meter is crucial in a broad sense as providing the disciplined framework for poesis through unpredictability. In all his works, the role of the stanza in Mac Low's work is significant. Three works that are of concern here, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*, 154 *Forties* and his last works incorporating Stein and Hopkins, the *HSC* and *HSCH* poems. My claim is this: understanding Mac Low's peculiar prosody can enhance a reader's sense of his verse, and some of the trouble around 'difficulty' and experimentality can be surmounted when one reads Mac Low with a renewed acceptance of the artifice already inherent in modern prosody. Mac Low variously made mention of his path to an experimental rhythmic, the following instance being a 2001 conversation in Tucson, Arizona in which Mac Low reads a striving toward 'maximum euphony' as emergent in the eighteenth century and dominant through the nineteenth century until

the cacophony of modernism. In response to the further suggestion of a 'euphony of cacophony' in both Gertrude Stein and Hopkins, Mac Low speaks of Hopkins as

someone who influenced me in every way. He and Donne, especially Hopkins. In fact, when I want to emphasize certain syllables, I use his method, which is to use acute accent, sometimes italicizing a whole word. His main way of writing was to count the beats and not the feet of the line, so he might have a whole bunch of things that are clumped together. He has all sorts of wonderful consonant clumps. He's really ... does anybody know the poetry of Hopkins? All the poems we have, they are mainly in some sense religious. He was a Jesuit priest, and he died of it, because they kept putting him in these various Jesuit houses in England and Ireland. I'm sure that everybody got dreadful flus. He wouldn't have written those poems if he wasn't that type of poet.³³

The emphasis on foot not by syllable but by word was taken up not only by Mac Low but also Robert Creeley, and the indeterminate nature of word clumps, hyphenated or not, binds Mac Low's practice to the kind of quantitative foot of Hopkins, whose abstraction Mac Low compared to Wilfred Owen: in his words, a kind of 'aliteral assonance'.³⁴ Here we may keep in mind those aspects of numerological and nomological procedurality contemporaneous to experimental poetics that define Mac Low's practice, or what Michael O'Driscoll has called, in his reading of Mac Low's *Light Poems*, 'algorithmic digraphism.' The digraph, two letters representing one sound ('ph'), for O'Driscoll captures the indistinguishability of the numerological and nomological in Mac Low: 'numbers produce names of light and other textual elements, but the names also produce numbers in the sense that their typographic placement on the page governs prosody and therefore controls lineation and the poetic measure of the poem.'³⁵ Further, the use of broken meter goes beyond pentameter or musical quantity:

Mac Low's methods of composition are also keenly dependent on the numeric - his deployment of aleatoric/deterministic operations at times draws from, amongst other source, the Rand Corporation's publication of *A Million Random Digits and 100,000 Normal Deviates* (a favourite of John Cage as well). Throughout Mac Low's career he often relies on numbered playing cards, the correlation of letters and their numeric equivalents, the careful enumeration of characters or pages in a given source text or the painstaking measurement of typographic placement in the resulting poems or target forms. Finally, one might point to the

surprising and often deft use of poetic meter, measure, or quantity in Mac Low's poetry - this observation perhaps serving as a reminder of the manner in which all poetry is, and has always been to some degree, indebted to the numeric. Beyond, however, any notion of musical quantity, or recognizable meter such as pentameter - broken, in Ezra Pound's famous formulation, or not - Mac Low's methods of composition make that indebtedness evident.³⁶

Formal unity or finality is arrived at via what O'Driscoll terms 'painstaking' or 'careful enumeration'; a numerical sensibility that is quantitatively metrical but not metrical by default. Key here is the *character* of being strict which on the one hand leads to an anarchistic indeterminacy, or on the other hand 'anarchist authorship,' as Dani Spinosa put it. But this enumerative metric is, after all, notational and performance-oriented. For Durgin, the key to Mac Low's notational poetics, both in form and in method, is Mac Low's 'event metric':

From 1955 through 1963, Mac Low referred to the way 'words' and 'silences' meshed as an 'event metric' for his work. Visual effects are, he insists, byproducts of the dictates of the score; 'I hardly ever think of writing for the printed page primarily.' Still, 'if you don't see it [as poetry], you're just not hearing the poem,' he adds; the 'asymmetry method' might result in a work whose paramount feature is 'sound [or] visual image.' Eventually the poem will be performed. And that will be decisive.³⁷

The dictates of the score apply to Mac Low's *Assymetries* works, which make use of the visual and spatial capacity of the page (they must be 'realised'), but what remains at the core is what these scores are doing as poems, as poetry and in prosody, which leads Durgin to comment:

As for the name, we have to be mindful of the ramifications of form and method. Mac Low reinvents prosody by calibrated coincidence with compositional method. To my mind, this makes him the poet *most responsible to his prosody* [my emphasis] in his milieu, alongside Hannah Weiner. In the 20th century, I am hard pressed to think of anyone else responsible to their prosody to such an extent, after Kurt Schwitters (another fan of columns and grids). Symmetry refers to regular stanzaic verse, which had been the result of his previous experiments in 'chance-acrostic' composition, such as the *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*.³⁸

To read or to have acknowledged Mac Low's prosodic dissonance, as a poet *most responsible* for his prosody in contemporary poetry alongside Weiner, which I cannot help but think echoes Hollander's metrical intention, I want to take as exemplary several instances in which the metrical experiment is

most strongly in play, graphically and aurally, treating sounding as notational practice, paying special attention to diacritical markers as core to this responsibility or intention.

The 2012 publication of a full edition of *154 Forties*, for one, reveals just the kind of commitment to dissonant prosody Mac Low had, and just how much his prosodic work was tied to the scoring of dissonance. In it he uses what he calls

‘prosodic devices,’ including nonorthographic acute accents, two kinds of compound words (often neologistic), and ‘caesural spaces.’ Nonorthographic acute accents indicate stresses, a device borrowed from Hopkins, usually in places where which syllable should be stressed may be ambiguous. These are at rare times substituted by underlined italicized letters.³⁹

Few of these devices lead to textual harmony. The *Chicago Review* would put it like this: ‘the relentlessly knotty and obstinate quality of the *Forties* will be familiar to readers from any stage of Mac Low’s career: ungainly technical jargon, lines that run on too long, stresses that fall on the wrong syllable.’⁴⁰ Even so, the reviewer concludes that ‘This ungainliness is precisely what works about his poetry, indicating the dissonances between conventional poetic content and procedural form that give his output its energy.’⁴¹ But it is often not the wrong syllable; more often than not it is a deliberate reversal of Hopkins’s foot. Hear, for instance, the accent placed at the *end* of word-clumps in one of the *Forties* poems, contradicting the patterns of sprung rhythm in a section titled “READING AS A SERIES OF REACTIONS” (here I number each of the stanza’s six lines for clarity of reproduction):

- 1 Reading-as-an epic poem written-in-a-bóok but positioned on stage
- 2 unseating themselves in-an-imposition-on-the-áudience unaccepted
- 3 violating conventions of how to speak or act as in a painting
- 4 standing-in-a-sandbox-in-a-désert wearing the very same clóthes as
the desert’s on
- 5 fire deliberately stupid and funny taking a high – tóne
- 6 seeing plays and Pina Bausch in place⁴²

Written in part at the Naropa Institute in 1994, and no doubt taking in language from seminars and readings, the citational flair of the *Forties* needs to take into account the how such accentual verse works with sonic materials like tone, heard here at the end of one extended, quoted phrasal foot as ‘tóne’ – subordinating tone not to pitch but stress, a tonal dance that centres around the question of performance, then including a reference to a pioneer of modern dance, Pina Bausch. With the marks on ‘bóok,’

‘audience’ and ‘désert’ falling at the *end* of word clumps, these conglomerate feet are direct reversals of Hopkins’s, which fall at the beginning.

More lyrical stanzas follow this one, until in the seventh stanza ‘what you cán’t do with speech’ turns into ‘the ré – formátion of listening.’⁴³ The very next poem, also begun at the Naropa Institute, titled ‘SPEECH AND THOUGHT BETWEEN US,’ reads in part (the six lines of the stanza I here again number for clarity):

- 1 Speech and prose were equated by Wordsworth establish a difference
- 2 why imitate speech? it is only such-an-abhórrence of speech
- 3 form is nó an extension of content a confrontátion-with-form to
struggle it out
- 4 process of learning to write the fantasies-of-what-it-méans-to-be-a-
writer black
- 5 árts movements narrative-to-represent-a-voíce thought to be
mý-voíce
- 6 Who ám I? asked Ramana Maharshi⁴⁴

Wordsworth’s equation of speech and prose, I cannot help thinking, is intentionally sent up by the poem’s last line, ‘an axis of thought between us,’ an oddly compacted line reminiscent of the Hopkins epigraph that heads this essay, if less dissonant. It is a mistake to imagine that the more ‘egoic,’ yet still algorithmic work of Mac Low, particularly late Mac Low, is somehow at a remove from poetic thinking or the careful construction of poetic meaning. It’s just that the *decideability* of meaning and of subjectivity, seen syntagmatically through the ‘axes’ of these stanzas, are left more chancily open, heard as above through a relentlessly fragmented and clumping rhythmic. As with Hopkins, this leads to a grinding, or grounding, of thought around or through tone, voice, speech (here, I imagine, the thought of another, fragments heard in some discoursing on poetry and subjectivity).

Not all the Hopkins-inspired poems follow this specific aspect of Hopkins’s poetics though. The *HSCH* poems (with ‘seed’ and ‘source’ texts derived from Gerard Manley Hopkins, Gertrude Stein, Lewis Carroll and Charles Hartshorne) incorporate Hopkins using the diastic method, and are performed with the following suggestion: ‘I pause for three andante beats between every two strophes (a thousand and one, a thousand and two, a thousand and three), and I ask others who read them to do so’⁴⁵ In ‘Hopkins 12,’ with the supplementary title ‘Wrinkles’ Wisdom Despairs Most Leadenly, Bays at Age, Long May Long,’ Mac Low experiments with tercets that use the last line to trail or echo either unstressed at the outset, as in ‘Beauty’s sign’s motion: / known messengers begin, / begin,

sparely begin' or begun with strong stresses like 'Keep these deaths / fresh and fast, / fastened sweetly, freely.' But the final line gives us something unusual: 'We most leadenly / bay at age, / long may long.' Here 'long may long' can be sounded as a molossus of three stressed syllables, scanned "bāys at äge, / lōng māy lōng."⁴⁶

In the *HSCH* poems, what is derived from original sentences come out as line units that again resemble 'sentences,' given the helping words, prepositions and conjunctions that determine the matter-of-fact tone of these works. There is an antimetrical strain here, much like in the 'nonmetrical quatrains' of the *Twenties* (implying a metricality in much of his other work). Take the following quatrains from the poem 'Measures,' in *Bloomsday*, dated 23 April 1983, New York, in which running-over lines get increasingly dissonant while maintaining phrasality, where words drawn 'from breath' come out 'as strongly as words can make up vows as instruments.'⁴⁷ We are listening to a poem apparently *about* measure; if the unit of measure is the Olsonian word, drawn from breath, that can make up vows 'as instruments,' so then musical measure overwrites metrics, plus word over footed syllable. Yet there are plenty of poems in *Bloomsday* that seek prosodic dissonance through strongly syllabic means, like 'Antic Quatrains,' dated March 1980, New York:

Along a tarn a delator entangled a dragline,
Boasting o' tonnages, dogies, ants, and stones
As long as Lind balled Gandas near a gas log
As it late rigatoni and a tag line.

...

Tilden's Illiad tabled alliteration
And a gainless Sartrian ass aired abattoirs
As tonsils' orneriness assigned Ortega
To distillations antedating Sade.⁴⁸

Sense which then is unwedged along several kinds of lines (tag lines, drag-lines), not simply because these are nonmetrical quatrains, but because the *count* of the line is separated from the question of metricality, and because rhythm alliteratively opens rather than bars sense, defying rhetorical or even referential reading (Sartrian antedates Sade; **d**elator [Latin for denouncer] pre-echoes **d**ragline; Tilden's / tabled wedges between **I**lliad / **a**lliteration). There is little authorial 'governance' or mastery of metrics in these botched, irregular rhythms, implying a difference between those poems in which the poet is prosodist, responsible for the acute accents, and

those where the poet allows the reader to make those prosodic decisions. In *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*, Mac Low's principal acrostic work, there is a part titled 'Plant Poem For Iris Lezak Whom I Love,' which includes double acute and grave accents handwritten above the Latin names of the plants:

Moderately Loud, Fast
Phl̄eum, praténse Leek (Garden) *Állium pórrum* *Narcíssus tazétta*
Tillándsia ūsneōides
Pogónia òphioglossōides Ornamental Orchids *Euástrum,*
*Micrastèrias*⁴⁹

Though following a rough acrostic gives little to meter, the aid to stress in this work is in the most basic sense a way of making sense of difficult-to-pronounce Latin names of flowers. Mac Low had noted of his sequence *Twenties* (1989–1990) that his placing of acute accents over the vowels of accented syllables was 'either to indicate which of two words are meant (since there's no context to help the reader) or to show which syllable of a lesser-known word or name is to be stressed.'⁵⁰ Less an aid to stressing lesser-known words as enunciative overdetermination, in *Stanzas* Mac Low uses diacritics for the following lines from a section titled 'Prologue The Golden Poems.' Taken together, the poem spells an acrostic for the poem's title, which is sourced from the Mu'allaqat, seven 'hanging' odes from the pre-Islamic era:

poet rema o lāt o gath upward ē
 tōp heā ē
 gath o lāt deser ē Nō
 poet o ē m sūc⁵¹

No lines more dissonant than these appear in all of the *Stanzas*. Less cryptic as stressed to the full, lexical fragments get disjunctively 'sliced': the gap between gath and upward sounds 'gatha,' referring to Mac Low's gridded performance pieces. It is turned upside down (not-hanging) with respect to 'The Suspended Odes'; so it is 'tōp heā ē' (hear 'top heavy'). Only the remaining full words, 'poet' and 'upward,' are left unstressed, whereas large, neume-like tildes begin to score tone in the manner of Mac Low's sung-word scores (Gathas or 'Phonemicons,' letter-pitch equivalence scores) in 'heā' and 'deser' (hear heat, desert).

What Mac Low does not give easily to readings if they are at all based on judgement or taste. Perloff compares Mac Low's diction in *Stanzas*

for *Iris Lezak* to Cage's in their acrostic procedures, which Cage adopted from Mac Low, and felt were 'tardy.' In Cage, wing words are generated according to taste, thus the result 'is an idiom markedly different from Mac Low's, especially in its vocal quality, Cage preferring softer, blending sounds to the harshly stressed monosyllabic nouns, separated by strong caesuras, that we find in "Call Me Ishmael."³² Its lyric time is slow, exaggeratedly so, as the stanzas acrostic tercets go: 'Circulation. And long long / Mind every / Interest Some how mind and every long.'³³ The sheer length of the beats, 'lóng lóng' | 'mínd and évery lóng,' drag out, spell out, and then sustain each line. Quantitative means bequeath literary effects: the sounding of these lines thus stressed may grind one's ears, harshly, or so you may hear it.

Outscape: Emancipation of Dissonance

How we listen takes time, in time. Sounding has happened, is happening now and marks this present. None of this is ahistorical. We are listening closely to Mac Low's dissonant metrical and nonmetrical sound and are doing so with contemporary ears. The nonblending, harshly stressed monosyllabic nouns show us a certain musico-poetic *melos* that Frye might have noticed, and that contemporary readers might flatly reject (or no longer have the ears for).

The purpose of this excursion is to table the claim that prosodic dissonance depends largely on the *matter* of listening; to listen to dissonant prosody, to feel its appeal, might itself be a sonically materialist attention, a certain kind of textural audition in which harshness makes its affects and thoughts, grinding sound to its particulars. This essay began exploring the fact of inharmonicity in poetics as not simply the province of the moderns. It was not just all that fracturing, nor the avant-garde historically understood, that gave a poet like Mac Low all the equipment for mounting an unusual prosody. This has to be part of a larger dynamic: instances of inharmonicity and harshness in poetry can be taken as something that close listening can take up across many varieties and traditions of poetics. Of course, in certain kinds of experimental poetry, reading dissonance into prosody, and prosody into dissonance are the kinds of moves that do have their polemics; the difficulty here is precisely how to productively open up the field of prosody to directions in contemporary poetics.

Frye, whose observations on dissonance began this inquiry, in *Anatomy of Criticism* parodically coined the term 'outscape' ironising Hopkins by proposing a 'lyrical counterpart ... of what in drama we call the mime, the center of the irony which is common to tragedy and comedy' which, Frye concludes, 'is a convention of pure projected detachment, in which an image, a situation, or a mood is observed with all the imaginative energy thrown outward to it and away from the poet.'⁵⁴ Something like an outscape forms a critical rhythmic for contemporary poetic sound. Dissonant prosodics, dissonant poetics: the dissonant prosody of Mac Low gets us to the decentered, 'outwards-thrown' energetics of the contemporary metrical contract, exteriorised rather than interiorised, hardly settled, humorous more than ironic, and often in dispute. It may be the case that procedural form and generative constraint has replaced or taken the place of meter. Yet whether Mac Low is using meter in the specific sense, or measure in a broader sense, or whether this is an isolated prosody in particular or a procedural-prosodic (composite) poetics in general, there is no doubt that Mac Low's use of accentual markers, his striving for some kind of graphic marking of rhythm in a period in which many poets had all but fled from prosodic responsibility, occasions a kind of *notationality*; a notational poetics engaging metrical experiment.

Whether this means that a poem is a kind of 'score' I am not so sure. I am speaking primarily of the likeness of poetry to forms of notation, of their scorelike quality or claims to notationality. The assertion that poems are scores I find troubling. For this we need to disaggregate the notational function and the score, what gets scored on it (notes or other like characters). And I want to stress something else here that I've held in reserve, particularly the fact that Mac Low's poetics of notation was so tied to an interest in music, as was Hopkins's. Yet such musico-poetics does not give us a full picture of what happens in the graphic and phonic increments of the text; for again if *inharmonic* brings poetry closer to music, the inharmonically attuned *critic*, after Horace (hear again, 'Not every critic sees an inharmonious verse') might have caught on to music's dissonant transposition into poetry. Music itself, musical writing, has to be discussed. For this we might look at various of Mac Low's scored works for performance, especially his 'Phonemicons' and works with shaping tones on sheet music. Equally on this front, to imagine in the phonic gradience of Hopkins some likeness in microtonal music would then lead to further complexities that cannot be gone into here, suffice to say that

not all poems, not even if they are 'scorelike,' are actually scored works for performance.

The harsh 'musicality' of the versification in Hopkins and Mac Low brings us back to the metrical contract that to them mattered most; we may return to some understanding of what it could be that could take the prosodic in(ter)vention of Hopkins, inscape, to a kind of 'outscape': sound unbound to indefinite exteriors, sound abandoned to the fluxes of extreme alterity. Through the 'event-metric' of performance, finite, yet indeterminate, poem becomes prosodic score, score for dialectical dissonances: thoughts groaning and grinding against thoughts, or 'SPEECH AND THOUGHT BETWEEN US,' enrhymed particulars thrown outward in projected detachment from the single register of the poet to the dissonant registers of contemporary audition.

Notes

¹ Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 241.

² Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music, In the Form of Six Lessons* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 34. If musical dissonance was no longer 'tied down' and held back at Stravinsky's time of writing, we may observe, in parallel, readings of modern poetry that entertain the old opposition between free verse and verse form, metrical and nonmetrical poetry. But what is especially curious is how these binaries have evolved in discussions of poetry and poetics over the last decade. Perhaps the chief binary of this period in criticism has been between 'experimental' and 'lyrical.' This binary has had various levels of success and failure in its critical articulation. The value of listening for dissonance and euphony is that it offers modes of reading across historical poetic cultures and periods. Dissonances in poetry and poetics (distinct from 'musico-poetics') can find themselves historically pertinent, for example, in discussions of German Romanticism. For David Nowell Smith, the phrase 'prosodic dissonance' is key to the sounding of Hölderlin and clarifications of the poetry-verse distinction ('Poetry-Verse', p. 149).

³ See, for instance, James William Johnson's excellent entry for 'Lyric' in Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, eds, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 713–27. This overview showcases several definitions and kinds of lyric, crucially historicising the emergence of a sense that the lyric could be defined *against* its non-musical qualities.

⁴ From the 'Fourth Essay: Rhetorical Criticism', in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 256.

- ⁵ Frye hears dissonance beyond analogy in other poets: thus Robert Browning's 'speed' and 'sharp accent' are the musical features in his poetry, as poet and amateur musician, evident in *Fifine at the Fair* (1872). Paul Laurence Dunbar is musical, Frye adds (and it might then come as no surprise that he is one of a select group of poets, Browning included, to integrate musical scores into the body of his poems, in 'Whistling Sam' [1899]). Robert Southey never quite clarified harmony in *epos*, though I would add that Southey's long poems are musicating in Frye's sense. Take the following from the Advertisement to the second edition of Southey's *Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem* (1796): 'With respect to the occasional harshness of the versification, it must not be attributed to negligence or haste. I deem such variety essential in a long poem' (p. 8). Southey would later use these terms in reference to William Cowper.
- ⁶ Lloyd Bishop, 'Dissonance', in Preminger, Alex and T. V. F. Brogan, eds, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 298–9.
- ⁷ Michael Sprinker, *A Counterpoint of Dissonance: The Aesthetics and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 27.
- ⁸ Sprinker, *A Counterpoint of Dissonance*, p. 27.
- ⁹ Meredith Martin, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Stigma of Meter', *Victorian Studies* 50.2 (Winter 2008), 243–4.
- ¹⁰ John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 231–2. The chapter is titled 'Observations on the Experimental.'
- ¹¹ Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, pp. 232–3.
- ¹² Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, p. 236.
- ¹³ Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, p. 239.
- ¹⁴ Marjorie Perloff, 'After Free Verse: The New Nonlinear Poetries', in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. by Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 106.
- ¹⁵ Susan Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', in *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 30–1.
- ¹⁶ Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', p. 33.
- ¹⁷ Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', p. 33.
- ¹⁸ Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', p. 33.
- ¹⁹ Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', p. 33.
- ²⁰ Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', p. 33.
- ²¹ Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 70.
- ²² Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 87.
- ²³ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 87.
- ²⁴ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 90.
- ²⁵ Humphry House, ed, *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 9. From 'Early Diaries (1863).'
- ²⁶ House, *Journals and Papers*, pp. 119, 178, 208–11, 221, 235, 238.

- ²⁷ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 97.
- ²⁸ Stewart, *Reading Voices*, p. 97.
- ²⁹ I am primarily referring to the publication of two books: Amelia Jones's *A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004) and Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo, eds, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).
- ³⁰ See Anne Tardos' Foreword to the *154 Forties*, p. xii.
- ³¹ I emphasize Hopkins's influence but of course there were many others. To put it in Jennifer Scappetone's terms, we can add Hopkins, alongside modernism in Stein and Pound, to the complex, cross historiographical and historicist 'traffic' at play in Mac Low's lyric work (Scappetone, 'Traffics of Historicism', pp. 189–92). It is beneficial as well to remember Mac Low's American contexts, coming out of the American tradition and its specific prosodic, notational and musico-poetic practices. Robert Grenier, for one, associated with Language Writing, would write his honours thesis on William Carlos Williams, proposing an 'organic prosody,' with an especially illuminating discussion of Williams' use of an analogous musical bar (Grenier, *Organic Prosody*, pp. 36–7). In 'Projective Verse' (1950), Olson would charge that breath, line and the typewriter (the ideal machine to score breath), would render rhyme and meter less relevant for the moderns. David Antin, in his 1968 'Notes for an Ultimate Prosody' would take something of a similar line, claiming that the contribution of meter to understanding the sound structure of poetry is and has been 'trivial.'
- ³² Patrick Durgin, 'Becoming Literature: Jackson Mac Low and the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E of Intermedia,' Text delivered to the National Poetry Foundation Conference on 'The Poetry of the 1970s', 2009, <http://thoughtmesh.net/publish/printable.php?id=60> [accessed 2 February 2018], n.pag.
- ³³ Jackson Mac Low, 'Making Poetry "Otherwise": Jackson Mac Low in Conversation', *Jacket2* (October 2007), <http://jacketmagazine.com/34/mac-low-iv.shtml> [accessed 2 February, 2018], n.pag. The question was put to Mac Low by Charles Alexander.
- ³⁴ Mac Low, 'Making Poetry "Otherwise"', n.pag.
- ³⁵ Michael O'Driscoll, 'By the Numbers: Jackson Mac Low's Light Poems and Algorithmic Digraphism', in *Time in Time: Short Poems, Long Poems, and the Rhetoric of North American Avant-Gardism, 1963–2008* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), p. 125.
- ³⁶ O'Driscoll, 'By the Numbers', pp. 116–17.
- ³⁷ Patrick Durgin, 'Witness Jackson Mac Low and Gerhard Richter: Generating the Haphazard', *Jacket2* (August 2014), <http://jacket2.org/commentary/witness-jackson-mac-low-and-gerhard-richter> [accessed 2 February 2018], n.pag.
- ³⁸ Durgin, 'Witness Jackson Mac Low and Gerhard Richter', n.pag.
- ³⁹ Jackson Mac Low, *154 Forties* (Colorado: Counterpath, 2012), p. xiii.
- ⁴⁰ Sam Rowe, 'Review of Jackson Mac Low's *154 Forties*', *Chicago Review* 58.1 (Summer 2013), 144.
- ⁴¹ Rowe, 'Review of Jackson Mac Low's *154 Forties*', p. 144.
- ⁴² Mac Low, *154 Forties*, p. 286.

- ⁴³ Mac Low, *154 Forties*, p. 287.
- ⁴⁴ Mac Low, *154 Forties*, pp. 288–9.
- ⁴⁵ Mac Low, *Thing of Beauty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 421–2.
- ⁴⁶ Mac Low, *Thing of Beauty*, p. 418.
- ⁴⁷ Mac Low, *Bloomsday* (New York: Station Hill, 1984), pp. 54–5.
- ⁴⁸ Mac Low, *Bloomsday*, pp. 67–8.
- ⁴⁹ Mac Low, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (Barton: Something Else Press, 1971), p. 185.
- ⁵⁰ Mac Low, *Twenties* (New York: Roof Books, 1991), n.pag.
- ⁵¹ Mac Low, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*, p. 334.
- ⁵² Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry On & Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 293.
- ⁵³ Mac Low, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*, p. 89.
- ⁵⁴ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 297.

*Deafness and Sound**Rebecca Sanchez*

In 2003, Jonathan Sterne observed that ‘scholars of speech, hearing, and sound seem largely ignorant of the cultural work on deafness.’¹ Since that time, a growing body of work has sought to bridge the gap between deaf and sound studies by considering the relationship between deafness and a range of phenomena of interest to sound studies scholars: music and sound art,² vibration,³ cultural meanings of listening and sound,⁴ and the development of sonic technologies,⁵ and literary depictions of sound and silence.⁶ As this work has demonstrated, the richness of the intersections between deafness and sound, and their implications for literary study, has much to do with the multifarious meanings of deafness.

As Mara Mills explains, ‘a *deaf spectrum* – or “deafnesses”; – has replaced the deaf/hearing binary in both the biomedical and cultural realms.’⁷ While deafness is often inaccurately perceived as a total absence of sound, in reality deaf people have access to a range of acoustic information, both with and without technological mediation. The near-universal measure of hearing loss is the pure tone audiogram, which registers the decibel level required for individuals to perceive a range of auditory frequencies (typically between 125 and 8,000 Hz). Levels of hearing loss are categorized from ‘mild’ to ‘profound.’ Even ‘profound’ hearing loss, however, is a range indicating that an individual cannot detect tones at a number of frequencies when they are played at or over 90 decibels. As this description suggests, these classifications are necessarily imprecise, often functioning to mask the individual and idiosyncratic ways individuals perceive sound. Because the audiogram plots hearing thresholds at a variety of pitches, and because hearing loss is variable, diagnostic labels are based on taking an average of the individual’s performance. So one might simultaneously have ‘profound’ and ‘mild’ or no hearing loss (or be both profoundly deaf and hearing) in the same ear, depending on the pitch. Deaf people, that is to say, inhabit soundscapes that are often effaced or poorly understood.

Crucially, and as deaf experience highlights, the experience of a soundscape is also shaped by sensory and cultural information beyond the auditory. Deaf people's experience of sound is multisensory and multi-modal, prosthetic, and interdependent. Sound can be experienced tactilely as vibration or through Tactile ASL or BSL (TASL and TBSL) and Protactile (PT) techniques, which signing deafblind people use to access both linguistic and environmental information; visually, when sound waves interact with a visible medium; and prosthetically, by recruiting human and non-human subjects in the vicinity as sound detectors, noting, for example, when people turn in a particular direction as an indication of a sonic event in that area or receiving feedback about one's own sounds through the reactions of others.⁸ Deaf people also engage in complex interdependent relationships with interpreters (whether via signed or spoken language) that similarly function to extend the sensorium beyond the traditionally understood boundaries of the individual corpus.

Deafness is also culture. Many deaf people consider themselves to be members of linguistic minorities, cultural groups with their own languages, literatures, histories, and social norms. Membership in these groups (sometimes distinguished from biomedical deafness with the use of a capital D) is predicated upon a range of factors including family background, fluency in the signed language of the community in which one lives, and level of hearing loss. There are individuals with mild hearing loss who identify as culturally deaf (indeed, some have argued for the inclusion of the hearing children of deaf adults [CODAs] in this group), and there are individuals with profound hearing loss who do not. These identifications can change over time and can be context dependent. The label 'deaf,' that is, does not necessarily provide any specific information about people, whether in terms of the amount or quality of what they hear, their education (manual, oral, a mixture, something else), their communication preferences, or their family background, all of which play a part in determining someone's 'deafness.' And attentiveness to the cultural and physiological development of our contemporary understanding of deafness helps us to similarly denaturalize the auditory and listening practices of hearing people.

As Sterne has observed, 'it is impossible to "merely describe" the faculty of hearing in its natural state [...] The language that we use to describe sound and hearing comes weighted down with decades or centuries of cultural baggage.'⁹ Just as the construction of the category of able-bodiedness or straightness is predicated upon the construction of disability or homosexuality, respectively, the construction of our understanding of hearing is based on our creation of the category of deafness. Far from constituting

essential states, and as discussed in more detail below, these groupings as we currently understand them emerged in response to specific cultural, technological, and political developments.

Moreover, and as is particularly significant for considering the intersections between deaf studies and other areas of inquiry, deafness is methodology. As I argue elsewhere, deafness (as culture, as epistemology, as relational form) functions as a lens through which we can interrogate a range of processes and cultural artifacts.¹⁰ Like crippling or queering a text or body of knowledge, deafening as a verb is not dependent on the presence of an identifiable deaf subject, but rather involves, in the context of sound, engaging with deafness's multisensory and active listening practices, the expansion of the sensorium beyond the individual corpus and, as a result, the development of complex interdependent relationships with both human and non-human entities. These deaf critical methods operate productively to re-center our understanding of sound as both acoustic and cultural phenomena.

Part of the process of deafening involves bringing an awareness of deafness as epistemology into conversation with other bodies of knowledge. Deafening our understanding of the category of hearing, for instance, highlights the co-constituency of both hearing and hearing loss as measurable categories, the broad cultural significance of the technologies (the phonautograph, the telephone, the audiometer) that made this measurement and classification possible by altering our relationship with sound through transduction, recording, and transmission of auditory signals over great distances. While the fact of these intersecting histories has frequently been noted, the implications of these objects' embeddedness in very particular ideas about how bodies can and should function, the historical and contemporary disciplining of non-normative bodies, and the construction of these norms themselves is far less remarked.

As Jonathan Sterne demonstrates in *The Audible Past*, many early attempts to transduce sound to a visible medium were in deeply imbricated in efforts to make speech visually available to (and therefore reproducible by) the deaf. Alexander Graham Bell and Clarence Blake's 1847 ear-phonautograph, for example, was explicitly conceived, in Bell's words, as 'a machine to hear for them.'¹¹ Rather than being a neutral explanation of function, Bell's description reflects deeply held beliefs about deafness (and non-normative embodiment more broadly). Put another way, the ear-phonautograph was intended as a machine to make deaf people hearing, to 'cure,' or at the very least minimize, their difference through the acquisition of speechreading and verbal speaking skills.¹²

Technologies of sound transduction like the ear-phonautograph both produced and responded to a fetishization of normative verbal speech (the equation of such speech with intelligence and with agency) that was both eugenic and xenophobic at its core.¹³ Rather than constituting an addition to deaf people's existing communication skills, oralists like Bell firmly believed that the techniques of speaking verbally and speechreading made available through this technology must entirely replace signed languages and the cultures that had developed around them. With the development of transduction and transcription devices, hearing loss moved from a fact of human existence that signified differently in different contexts to a problem that it was the responsibility (indeed, moral duty) of modern science to 'fix.'

Many of the same technologies perceived to be capable of 'fixing' deafness, however, had directly contributed to the perception that it was a problem in the first place. The advent of the telephone, for example, moved long distance communication away from letter writing, which had been accessible to both hearing and deaf people. The shift from silent films to talkies similarly functioned to exclude deaf people from a significant component of popular culture. These developments altered the ways deaf people were able to engage with society, and they impacted the ways hearing people perceived them. They also changed the meaning of hearing itself. As Sterne explains, 'sound reproduction came to be represented as a solution, not only to the physical fact of deafness or hardness of hearing, but, more important, to the social fact of unaided hearing [...] sound reproduction required a notion of hearing in need of supplementation.'¹⁴ This shift impacted the relationship of all people, regardless of their hearing status, to their senses by normalizing the usage of at least certain kinds of auditory prostheses.

In addition to social meaning, machines invented to transduce and record sound also provided the physiological boundaries of hearing by biocertifying hearing status.¹⁵ Like the phonautograph, the devices involved in this process were designed to reflect and replicate specific ideas about sound and normativity. Early audiometers were developed using the telephone, and as Mara Mills demonstrates, the use of these devices to categorize and assign value to the idiosyncratic ways that individuals had always processed sound also had strong economic motivations. The first mass data on auditory thresholds was gathered as part of a project co-sponsored by the New York League for the Hard of Hearing and American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), who together built the first commercial audiometer.¹⁶

AT&T was interested in gathering information on thresholds of intelligible speech so as to be able to design their telephones to match the average ear (a concept that was itself novel) and to make the system economically viable by 'reduc[ing] speech by eliminating its imperceptible or inessential components,' or, rather, the components deemed inessential by those making the decisions.¹⁷ As Mills explains, 'the telecommunications empire ... was concerned with efficiency and cost. In the hopes of connecting its system to the average ear, and in turn exploiting that ear's limitations to establish the requisites for "intelligible" transmission across imperfect lines ... AT&T launched a comprehensive study of speech and hearing in 1913.'¹⁸ This work led to the establishment of the categories of hearing loss (mild, moderate, severe, profound) as well as the category of normative hearing: taxonomies still in operation today. As this history highlights, it is not only the cultural significance of sensory capacity that is constructed, but the physiological boundaries as well.

Part of what this history of sound technology reveals is that 'deafness' comes into being, both biomedically and culturally, to stand in as the supposed other of sound. And when hearing and deafness (or disability and able-body-mindedness) are constructed as binaries, our understanding of the individualized ways in which people interact with auditory signals is impeded, and the vibrantly diverse range of listening practices that we engage are rendered invisible.

By contrast, approaching deafness as methodology allows for a centering of experiences often perceived as marginal. In this capacity it operates similarly to the ways that Chris Krentz, drawing on Toni Morrison's famous formulation, articulates a 'deaf presence' in literary works that inhabits all discussion of 'silence, sound, and deaf-related metaphors' and functions to shape perceptions of both deafness and auditory phenomena, as well as to advance literary disability studies beyond analysis of representation.¹⁹ It is important to recognize the ways that such de-centering of normative listening and hearing practices (and specifically literary descriptions of these practices) grounded in deaf and deafblind epistemologies predate the emergence of either sound or deaf studies as fields. Perhaps the most famous example of such work is the writing of Helen Keller. In the early twentieth century, faced with publishers who pressured her to write only about her personal experiences rather than her political investments, Keller used her situation to make the personal political by denaturalizing sensory perception. 'Every atom of my body is a vibroscope,' she declared in *The World as I Know It*, a text which highlights the tactile, olfactory and gustatory experiences that hearing and sighted people often

miss.²⁰ Attending to what Steve Goodman describes as the ‘ontology of vibrational force’ that exceeds the ‘phenomenological anthropocentrism of almost all music and sonic analysis’, Keller’s account provides insight into undertheorized practices of registering and interpreting vibrational input.²¹ In their foundational analysis of the relationship between deaf and sound studies, Michele Friedner and Stephen Helmreich argue for the definition of sound itself in these terms: not as specifically bound to the human ear, but as ‘vibration of a certain frequency in a material medium’ so as to emphasize the role of sound not only in the context of deafness, but also in aquatic environments.²²

Keller’s account of her own vibrational epistemologies demonstrates the synesthetic experience of deafened encounters with sound, as well as the role of culture in shaping sensory perception. Firing back at skeptics who insisted that her experience of auditory and visual phenomena was second-hand and therefore not valid, itself a rejection of the kinds of interdependent relationalities and world-knowing engaged in by many deaf people, Keller explained her engagement with music in normatively legible ways:

The loftier and grander vibrations which appear to my emotions are varied and abundant. I listen with awe to the roll of the thunder and the muffled avalanche of sound when the sea flings itself upon the shore. And I love the instrument by which all the diapasons of the ocean are caught and released in surging floods – the many-voiced organ. If music could be seen, I could point where the organ notes go, as they rise and fall, climb up and up, rock and sway, now loud and deep, now high and stormy, anon soft and solemn, with lighter vibrations interspersed between and running across them. I should say that organ-music fills to an ecstasy the act of feeling.²³

Jeanette DiBernardo Jones has suggested that we describe such deaf practices of interacting with music as ‘hearing deafly’ or ‘Deafly’ to recognize the range of experiences individuals have with music and to disrupt the common assumption that hearing is necessarily superior to deafness.²⁴ Keller’s account of hearing deafly highlights the nuanced ways vibration can be interpreted as well as music’s visual aspect: the relationship between frequency of pitch and placement of notes on a vertical axis (‘I could point where the organ notes go’).

The passage also registers what Jessica Holmes describes as ‘the contextual interdependence of the senses as they govern musical experiences.’ ‘Ultimately,’ Holmes explains, ‘deafness demonstrates that listening encompasses a full spectrum of sensory experience, musical contexts, individual preferences, cultural practices, and social experiences – what amounts to an ever-evolving set of listening states.’²⁵ Keller’s account

challenges the idea of a clear demarcation between senses when experiencing music, as her description moves between visual, tactile, and emotional metaphors to register dynamic shifts.

This synesthetic listening and its role in deaf experience is also central to much signed language literature. 'Eye Music' by deaf poet Ella Mae Lentz, for instance, plays on the visual relationship between the lines of the music staff and the fluid movement of telephone wires when viewed from a moving car.²⁶ The rise and fall of the wires establish visual rhythms, punctuated by the appearance of percussive telephone poles and shifts in the number of wires as well as the speed at which they are encountered produce varying visual frequencies. Music, the poem suggests, is about pattern, rhythm, and movement, elements that can be experienced visually as well as aurally. In turning our attention away from its auditory aspects (sound, listening, and instruments, the poetic signer notes, are not needed), 'Eye Music' highlights the importance of visual components of all music: the written score and the movement of the conductor's arms, which the poem's telephone wires blend into towards the end of the piece.

In American Sign Language (ASL), the multisensory nature of listening is registered through its sign, which can also be used to signify 'to hear,' and translates roughly as 'reception.' It is formed by making a bent 3 handshape that, when referencing aural listening, is placed at the ear. The sign can be moved to the eyes or hands to indicate visual or tactile input. One can, in ASL, 'listen' with one's eyes or hands, a recognition of the ways that, as Lentz's poem demonstrates, it is not only the auditory system processes and interprets sound (and not only auditory information to which one can or should be attentive). When we think of deafness as methodology, part of the activeness of the verb involves incorporating this understanding of sensory perspective, moving beyond discrete senses to consider the multi-sensory and multimodal ways we interact with the world around us.

Both Holmes's and Keller's accounts of deaf listening also highlight the role of culture. Keller was frequently criticized for using metaphor to describe sound, as though anyone who uses language, regardless of his or her sensory capabilities, encounters sound without the mediation of that language and metaphor. The thunder 'rolling,' the sea 'flinging' itself at the shore are not 'natural' descriptions but reflect the shared linguistic conventions of English language speakers and readers. And they would be no more or less 'natural' were they written by someone who was not deaf. Hearing people hear sound in these ways because they are pre-loaded with such metaphoric images to help them make sense of and communicate with others about acoustic surroundings.

As Michele Friedner and Benjamin Tausig explain in the context of their work on the cultural significances of sound in communities in India and Thailand, 'sensory capacities are not biologically determined before a person steps into a network of cultural projects and local distinctions. Rather, these *emerge within* social, political, and economic contingencies.'²⁷ The ways that hearing people 'hear' sound is always already influenced by these contexts, a fact highlighted by eighteenth and nineteenth century studies of individuals who had grown up outside of human communities and who responded non-normatively to loud noises. In *The Audible Past*, Sterne recounts one such study involving a boy named Victor who was found living in the woods in 1801 and who, despite being hearing, did not respond in predictable ways to 'slammed doors, jingled keys' or gunfire.²⁸ In her work on hearing loss in factories, Karin Bijsterveld similarly demonstrates how 'noise' came to acquire new meanings in the context of industrialization.²⁹ As this analysis suggests, hearing is not apolitical or natural, but is naturalized within social contexts that are ideologically inflected in ways that structural ableism and audism often prevent us from registering.

This insight into the learned nature of interaction with sound is central to much of the work of contemporary sound artist Christine Sun Kim, who describes such normative behavior as 'sound etiquette.'³⁰ Kim's work explores her experiences of sound and sound etiquette as a deaf person to destabilize hearing audiences' perceptions of both acoustic phenomena and deafness. In 'Game of Skill 2.0', which was on display at MoMA PS1's 'Greater New York' exhibit from 2015 to 2016, Kim invited audiences to experience deafness not by engaging in the highly problematic exercise of using ear plugs to 'simulate' deafness (as a loss of access to sound), but by having participants deafen their experience of sound (specifically and significantly their experience of aural language) by engaging in multisensory and multimodal practices of listening. The installation consisted of cables hung above head-level to which radio devices were attached via magnets. Participants moved around the room holding radio devices with rods that they attempted to keep stable on the cables in order to hear the prerecorded track, consisting of a text composed by Kim and voiced by an interpreter, which stopped playing when the radio became detached from the cable. To understand the track, participants needed to adjust their pace, repeating sections that had become garbled, attempting to fill in gaps in the words they were able to hear, attending to verbal speech actively through multiple parts of their bodies.

As Kim explained in an untranslated ASL video that summarized the conceptual elements of the exhibit for deaf signing viewers, deaf people are far more likely to have experience with a range of modes of listening and communicating, whereas hearing people are less likely to have intimate experience with this kind of communicative labor. 'Growing up with ASL, writing, speaking, and gesturing,' Kim explains, 'I feel like I had a bit of extra work and that I engaged in a range of modes of listening ... while hearing people, generally speaking, tend to have one or two easier, more passive ways of listening. I surmised that this might lead them to take listening for granted.'³¹ The game of skill aims to denaturalize that aural listening experience for participants, who must think critically about how they hear by detaching aural input from understanding.

This sensory blurring is also incorporated into Kim's visual art on display at the Rubin Museum as part of their 2017 'The World is Sound' exhibit. These pieces, which provide visual 'captions' of non-verbal phenomena (the sound of passing time, the sound of obsessing) by 'hijacking' musical notation for dynamics (*p*, *f*, *sfz*) in order to visually communicate information about speed, temperature, the duration of thoughts, and anxiety levels. The drawings ask viewers to visually process, in the language of sound, experiences that are not typically thought of in terms of either sight or hearing. Such synesthetic listening and interpretive practices are posited as forms of deafening and presented alongside the work of hearing artists as equally valid methodologies for engaging with sound.

In her description of the work, Kim touches on the ways that translation between modes of sensory perception is also linked to another aspect of the critical methodology of deafening: the expansion of the sensorium beyond the individual corpus, particularly through signed language interpreters. 'I find that interpreters are full of musical dynamics,' Kim explains. 'They take my voice, retool and refashion it, and then deliver it to an audience,' a process that involves a transformation of her voice from its embodied, 4-dimensional ASL form to spoken English.³²

Indeed, critical deafening involves a range of methods of reconceptualizing the boundaries of the self. Such expansion may take place with assistive technologies such as hearing aids (which amplify sound) and cochlear implants (neuro-prostheses that reroute auditory input directly to the brain, bypassing the ears), or by recruiting others to become auditory prostheses. Both the presence and location of loud noises, for instance, can be inferred by paying attention to the ways in which hearing individuals behave. This interpretation and manipulation of predictable responses of hearing people to sound is captured in a popular Deaf joke, a version

of which was included in a 2008 Pepsi Super Bowl commercial 'Bob's House.'³³ To summarize: two deaf friends arrive on the street of their friend to pick him up for the game, but they do not know which house is his. They drive down the street honking their horn, not to alert their deaf friend Bob to their presence, but rather to cause the hearing people on the street to wake and turn on their lights. The house that remains dark is correctly identified as belonging to their friend. The joke gets at the ways that potentially useful information about the environment is encoded in hearing peoples' responses to sound, and how deaf epistemologies capitalize on that information.

That skill at extending the sensorium beyond the body of the individual (the use of other people as prosthetics) is on display in another of Kim's pieces, *Face Opera ii*.³⁴ In this work, Kim (and then others) control a tablet that lists concepts ('nudity,' 'I want to trust you,' etc.) that a conductor translates into a facial expression. The ideas are presented in a variety of fonts, and at times Kim moves a particular word back and forth in a kind of visual stutter before swiping to the next concept. A conductor, who sits with her back to the audience, interprets the concept (as well as the emphasis of the font and swiping pattern) through non-manual signals including facial expression and body language. A choir of prelingually deaf people (who, like Kim, are facing the audience) then reflect that expression. As Cassie Packard explains in an article on Kim's work, '*Face Opera* alluded to the extent to which ASL relies upon facial expression and implied that attention to the nuances of facial expression can constitute hearing.'³⁵ In her description of the performance on her website, Kim elaborates that manual production is only part of ASL; non-manual signifiers including facial expression are one of five grammatical parameters.³⁶

More than presenting a fact about deafness, or even about music (the often-overlooked facial dynamics of opera music that Holmes notes in her analysis of Kim's work³⁷), *Face Opera ii* offers another accessible example of deafness as critical practice: the act of experiencing sound by turning the people around oneself into auditory prostheses. This expansion instantiates novel and non-normative forms of relationality between the individual and those who provide this input, either knowingly (as with interpreters) or not (when deaf people infer the presence of sound based on the reactions of hearing people around them).

This framing is particularly significant for thinking about the complex, ethically charged, interdependent relationships deaf people have with interpreters to whom they often outsource the processing of certain sensory information. Spoken, signed language, and cued speech interpreters

transduce auditory signals into visual (signed language, cued speech, close range mouth movements for the purpose of speechreading, transcription in the form of CART) or tactile (TASL, TBSL, PT) input. These interactions require close and often physical contact, as well as a great deal of intellectual shared labor as multiple cultures, languages, and linguistic registers and modalities are negotiated in real time. Interpreters and deaf clients who repeatedly work together often develop a shorthand for negotiating shared knowledge (vocabulary, information about speakers). Here, some of the cognitive processing typically conceptualized as being done independently by an individual is shared. Often, particularly in academic or technical contexts, interpreters serve as conduits, passing along information they may themselves not understand, relaying signals that the deaf person then more fully unpacks given her specialized knowledge.³⁸

Such interdependent relationships shatter the myth of independence. As feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay has argued, no human exists entirely independently, and the fetishization of this state is both pernicious to those whose relationships of care are most readily apparent and represents a missed opportunity to explore alternative forms of relationality.³⁹ In addition to challenging the idea of autonomous individuality in which much post-Enlightenment Western political philosophy is grounded, the interdependent (indeed interpenetrative, in the sense that another subject is performing tasks usually thought of as being essential to or constitutive of the individual) relations into which deaf people enter also complicate assumptions about the significance of verbal voice, the conflation of such voice with agency, and the dismissal of subjects who engage in alternative methods of communication and whose agency is articulated in ways that are polyvocal.⁴⁰

As Amanda Weidman notes, ‘the assumed linking of a voice with an identity or a single person overlooks the fact that speakers may have many different kinds of relationships to their own voices or words, or that a single “voice” may in fact be collectively produced.’⁴¹ Voicing – expressing an agency, narrative, or words, that are not one’s own through one’s body – is a central component of both the ways deaf people interact with signed language interpreters and the grammatical structure of signed languages themselves. In ASL, for example, a key component of narrative is role shifting, the adoption of something of the physicality of characters in a narrative (their eye lines, styles of movement, and expressions) that goes beyond description to enact the voices of others. Much ASL storytelling and poetry capitalizes on ethical questions raised by such boundary blurring between subjects. In Debbie Rennie and Kenny Lerner’s ‘Missing

Children,' for example, the poem's ethical problematic (the difference between the individualized care given to some missing children in the United States versus the lack of care given to children living in war zones) is instantiated in Rennie's embodiment (her 'voicing') of these characters. As a white-female-presenting signer moving between the position of the poetic signer/speaker in the frame of the text as well as the characters encountering violence within it, Rennie's embodiment of the children both opens a space for their 'voices' to be registered and signals the impossibility of giving others full agency through one's own body. The poem can direct our attention to the plight of its characters (and real children like them) as the signer makes present something of their physicality (their expressions and eye lines, their styles of movement), but those stylized movements always take place within the frame of the signer's own body.⁴² Such embodied polyvocality has much to contribute to conversations about the practice of textual voicing as well.

As this chapter highlights, deafness is central to a range of topics of interest to scholars of sound and literary sound studies, both as a constellation of physiological, cultural, and political epistemologies that have always been intertwined with understandings of the meaning of sound and as critical methodology that brings to the study of acoustic phenomena an emphasis on multisensory and multimodal sensory perception, the expansion of such perception beyond the individual subject, and interdependent relationality that grows out of this expansion. As an increasing amount of scholarship moves past the tired idea of deafness as sound's opposite to interrogate these complex areas of intersection and co-constitution, richer understandings of both deafness and sound (and the cultures that surround them) will continue to develop.

Notes

¹ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 346.

² See, for example: Jessica Holmes, 'Expert Listening Beyond the Limits of Hearing: Music and Deafness', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70.1 (2017), 171–220; Jeanette DiBernardo Jones, 'Imagining Hearing: Music-Making in Deaf Culture', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. by Blake Hoke et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 54–72; Christine Sun Kim, 'The Enchanting Music of Sign Language', *TED Fellows Retreat*, 2015. www.ted.com/talks/christine_sun_kim_the_enchanting_music_of_sign_language; Christine Sun Kim, 'Game of Skill 2.0', MOMA PS1 2015–2016, momaps1.org/csk. Translation by author.

- ³ See Michele Friedner and Stephen Helmreich, 'Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies', *Senses Society* 7.1 (2012), 72–86.
- ⁴ See Hilde Haualand, 'Sound and Belonging: What Is a Community?' in *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, ed. by H-Dirksen L. Bauman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 111–23; Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), pp. 53–90; Mara Mills, 'Deafness', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 45–54; Jonathan Sterne, 'Hearing', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 65–77; Michele Friedner and Benjamin Tausig, 'The Spoiled and the Salvaged: Modulations of Auditory Value in Bangalore, India and Bangkok, Thailand', in *Remapping Sound Studies*, ed. by Gavin Steingo and Jim Skyes (Durham: Duke University Press), forthcoming.
- ⁵ See Sterne 2003; Mara Mills, 'Deafening: Noise and the Engineering of Communication in the Telephone System', *Grey Room* 42 (2011), 118–43; Mara Mills 'Hearing Aids and the History of Electronics Miniaturization', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 73–8.
- ⁶ See Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007). As Krentz argues, 'depictions of silence, sound, and deaf-related metaphors' produce a 'deaf presence' in U.S. literature that operates to shape perceptions of both deafness and auditory phenomena.

It is common to indicate a distinction between physiological and cultural deafness with the use of a capital D in the case of the latter. This practice dates to a presentation given by James Woodward (then of Gallaudet University) in 1972 (published in 1978). As Woodward and Thomas Horejes explained in 2016, the distinction was never intended as a taxonomy; 'People can be both "deaf" and "Deaf" at the same time' (James Woodward and Thomas Horejes, 'deaf/Deaf: Origins and Usage', in *The Sage Deaf Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. by Genie Gertz and Patrick Boundreaut (Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2016) pp. 284–7, p. 285. The distinction, they note, is also inadequate to attend to the intersectional identities of deaf people and the different significances attached to deafness in diverse cultural contexts. Since the 1970s, however, it has been used to create a binary division between different 'kinds' of deaf people and to assign value to individuals perceived to occupy one or the other group. To avoid this problematic bifurcation, throughout the chapter, I will use the lower case.

- ⁷ Mills, 'Deafness', p. 45.
- ⁸ For more information about ProTactile, see aj granda and Jelica Nuccio's work at www.pro tactile.org.
- ⁹ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 10. In a 2015 entry on hearing, Sterne added that 'Both listening and technology are prior to hearing, and investigating the scene of audibility always reveals power relations that subtend its most basic sonic possibilities. Every configuration of hearing and sounding implies people, power, and placement.' Sterne, 'Hearing', p. 72.

- ¹⁰ Rebecca Sanchez, *Deafening Modernism: Embodied Language and Visual Poetics in American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), pp. 2–3. This work draws on Lenny Davis's call to take up deafness as a 'critical modality' that he argued would enrich our understanding of metaphoric uses of language pertaining to deafness in literature. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 100.
- ¹¹ Alexander Graham Bell, quoted in Charles Snyder, 'Clarence John Blake and Alexander Graham Bell: Otology and the Telephone', *Annals of Otology, Rhinology, and Laryngology* 83.4 (1974), 30.
- ¹² Between 1912 and 1918, Bell served as chairman of the board of scientific advisers to the Eugenics Record Office, and he wrote and lectured passionately, particularly in his 1883 lecture 'Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race', about the importance of eliminating deafness through social engineering and selective breeding. (Alexander Graham Bell, 'Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race', *Memoirs of the National Academy of Science* Vol. II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1884), pp. 179–262).
- ¹³ For more on the conflation of racial, ethnic, and ableist prejudices in the construction of the idea of a 'standardized' American English in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Signed Languages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- ¹⁴ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 83.
- ¹⁵ Ellen Samuels coined the term biocertification in her book *Fantasies of Identification* to refer to 'the many forms of government documents that purport to authenticate a person's social identity through biology, substituting written descriptions for other forms of bodily knowledge and authority.' Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press), p. 122.
- ¹⁶ Mills, 'Deafening', p. 120.
- ¹⁷ Mills, 'Deafening', p. 121.
- ¹⁸ Mills, 'Deafening', p. 120.
- ¹⁹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Reprint edition, 1993), pp. 5–6; Krentz, *Writing Deafness*, p. 13. To be clear, analysis of representation is a vital part of literary disability studies; much more work is needed to carefully unpack the ways disabled characters and story lines are figured in literature (for an excellent example of such work see Maren Linett's *Bodies of Modernism: Physical Disability in Transatlantic Modernist Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), in particular the third chapter which unpacks the treatment of deaf characters in modernist texts). But analysis of explicit references to disability should not be the only way we conceptualize the intersections of literary and disability studies. Paying attention to the epistemologies and methodologies of disability in conversation with framings of disability as identity enables

more nuanced analysis of the intersection of social, physiological, and political forces that shape disability experience. For a more extended version of this argument, see the introduction to Sanchez, *Deafening Modernism*.

- ²⁰ Helen Keller, *The World I Live In* (New York: The Century Co., 1920), pp. 49–50.
- ²¹ Steve Goodman, 'The Ontology of Vibrational Force', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 70–72, p. 70, p. 71.
- ²² Friedner and Helmreich, 'Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies', 72–86, p. 78.
- ²³ Keller, *The World I Live In*, pp. 52–3.
- ²⁴ DiBernardo Jones, 'Imagining Hearing', pp. 54–72, p. 55.
- ²⁵ Holmes, 'Expert Listening Beyond the Limits of Hearing', 171–220, p. 212.
- ²⁶ Ella Mae Lentz, 'Eye Music', *The Treasure: ASL Poems* (San Diego: DawnSign Press, 1995), DVD.
- ²⁷ Friedner and Tausig, 'The Spoiled and the Salvaged', p. 19.
- ²⁸ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 12.
- ²⁹ Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound*, pp. 53–90.
- ³⁰ Sun Kim, 'The Enchanting Music of Sign Language', 2015.
- ³¹ Sun Kim, 'Game of Skill 2.0.'
- ³² Christine Sun Kim, 'The World Is Sound', Rubin Museum, 2017. <http://rubinmuseum.org/mediacenter/christine-sun-kim-the-world-is-sound>
- ³³ 'Bob's House', PepsiCo SuperBowl Commercial, 2008. www.pepsi.com/bobshouse/
- ³⁴ Christine Sun Kim, 'Face Opera ii', The Calder Foundation, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/68027393>
- ³⁵ Cassie Packard, 'Deaf Artist Christine Sun Kim Is Reinventing Sound', *Vice* (2015). www.vice.com/en_us/article/8gdwkp/gifted-dynamic-and-deaf-rising-star-christine-sun-kim-creates-art-that-reinvents-sound-679
- ³⁶ Kim, 'Face Opera ii', <http://christinesunkim.com/performance/face-opera-ii/>.
- ³⁷ Holmes, 'Expert Listening', pp. 211–2.
- ³⁸ For more on the details of these interactions, see Teresa Blankmeyer Burke, 'Choosing Accommodations: Signed Language Interpreting and the Absence of Choice', *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 27.2 (2017), 267–99.
- ³⁹ For more on the ethical implications of interdependent relationality, see Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
- ⁴⁰ The over-signification of verbal voice also, as Hilde Haualand demonstrates, leads to a devaluation of non-Western community structures. Hilde Haualand, 'Sound and Belonging: What is a Community?' in *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, ed. by H-Dirksen L. Bauman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 111–23.
- ⁴¹ Amanda Weidman, 'Voice', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 232–45, p. 237.
- ⁴² Debbie Rennie and Kenny Lerner, 'Missing Children', in *Signing the Body Poetic: Essays on American Sign Language Literature*, ed. by H-Dirksen L. Bauman et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), DVD.

CHAPTER 14

Vibrations

Shelley Trower

As a repetitive movement, vibrations take us beyond any single period. This chapter will set out with a brief chronological outline of how vibrations figure in scientific and literary texts from the eighteenth century to twentieth-century Modernism. Literary studies of vibration often engage with the links between literature and science, ranging from physiology and physics to medicine and psychology, and also forms of spiritualism which drew on scientific concepts. Such emerging disciplines developed new theories of sensory and extrasensory vibrations. I will outline approaches to the transmission of scientific and spiritualist concepts of vibratory energies and atoms through literature, going on to consider literary form and materiality themselves as vibratory (focusing briefly on Joseph Conrad's work). Moving further beyond the entrenched confines of literary periods, I will then relate analysis of literature in its material forms to the work of music and sound studies scholars who are interested in the materiality of sound as vibration, focusing initially on contemporary bass music, and how it can affect its audience palpably and without linguistic signification. This latter area of research provides pointers for how literary approaches might engage with the materiality of texts and of reading/listening experiences, and, further, with an expanded sense of sound as a form of vibration that extends into the 'infrasensory' and operates both within and beyond discourse. I seek to move beyond critiquing texts and discursive constructions in terms of their historical periods, towards what Rita Felski describes as cross-temporal networks which 'force us to acknowledge affinity and proximity as well as difference, to grapple with the coevalness and connectedness of past and present.'¹ In common with 'postcritical' approaches such as Felski's, I wish to explore other models and methods of reading, such as those which attend to the sensory dimensions of literary form.²

The chapter's focus will come to be on borderline infrasound: vibrations on the edge of hearing. Sound is a category of vibration defined through subjective perception, while infrasound helps illustrate the instability of its borders and the limits of human experience.³ By considering sound as a form of vibration we can move not only beyond an 'ear-centric' perspective (sound is palpable), but also beyond a sensory one.⁴ Vibrations move in and out of human sensory categories. What follows ranges widely from metaphorical and textual vibrations (especially in literary studies), to phenomenological vibrations (in sound and music studies), and ontological approaches to vibrations (a sub-field of sound studies). The final sections of this chapter develop a case study that takes in these diverse approaches to consider how Charles Dickens's fiction, in its sonorous materiality (read out loud or heard inwardly), records a phenomenological experience of railway vibrations for its readers, while it also conveys a sense of their existence as borderline infrasound and of vibratory occurrences that escape perception and discourse. I consider how Dickens's narratives interweave with nineteenth-century scientific and medical discourse which in its preoccupation with how vibrations escape perception itself points to the limits of discourse. The various approaches to scientific-literary discourse, and to textual and musical materiality in their specific historical periods, need not disavow the existence of vibrational frequencies that transcend periods, in their recurrence across time.

Literature and Science

During the eighteenth century, anatomists and physicians increasingly used musical strings to convey an image of nerves as solid, rather than tubular structures. No longer did animal spirits necessarily flow through the nerve-pipes; vibrations could transmit sensations to the brain (although they could not themselves be sensed).⁵ In the nineteenth century, the nervously vibrating body became part of a universe which physicists and other scientific and spiritualist writers increasingly understood to consist of vibratory energies. Joseph Priestley, Thomas Young, Hermann Helmholtz, Edmund Gurney and many others, as I have discussed in *Senses of Vibration* (2012), used sound as a model for various kinds of vibrations, including those of the human nerves, frequencies of light and heat, electricity, X-rays and radio waves and spiritual energies imagined to radiate through the ether.⁶ In one sense, as an exemplary model, sound became the pulsating metaphorical heart of the vibratory paradigm, as where Helmholtz used the musical scale to explain that light exists beyond the sensory thresholds:

'The ear is sensitive to about ten octaves of different tones, while the eye is sensitive only to a musical sixth. With both sound and light, however, vibrations exist outside of these ranges.'⁷ Everything became sonorous (and ultra- and infrasonorous), but sound also lost its distinctive physicality becoming just one form of vibration among a universe of vibrations that radiate beyond our sensory thresholds.

Vibratory concepts circulate beyond any single period and can be useful as a means of approaching continuities and juxtapositions which the boundaries of period-based literary specialisms sometimes discourage. *Senses of Vibration* maps out a paradigm of vibration through multiple kinds of scientific and literary texts spanning from eighteenth-century physiological associationism and Romantic poetry to nineteenth-century medicine, Victorian novels and early twentieth-century science fiction. Others have shown how the vibratory paradigm of Victorian science – with Helmholtz as a major representative – lives on in literary modernism. Gillian Beer, pioneer in literature and science studies, paved the way for vibratory links between Victorian and modernist physics and literary texts in *Open Fields* (1996), with its analysis of how Virginia Woolf's work is grounded in nineteenth-century wave theory.⁸ More recently, Vike Martina Plock's essay 'Good Vibrations: "Sirens," Soundscapes, and Physiology' (2009) considers how James Joyce's interests in the physical, physiological, and emotive production and reception of sounds reference Helmholtz's acoustical studies, especially his understanding of hearing as a form of sympathetic vibration.⁹

Tim Armstrong's chapter in *Modernism*, 'The Vibrating World: Science, Spiritualism, Technology' (2005), briefly introduces nineteenth-century theories of vibratory energy before moving onto the understanding of the atomic structure of matter as insubstantial, 'electrons whirling through empty space', developed by Ernest Rutherford early in the twentieth century.¹⁰ These scientific developments paved the way for Albert Einstein's theory of relativity which struck a further blow to any sense of a solid and observable universe, contributing to a modernist sense of a world that could only be imagined, or at least could not easily be separated from our accounts of it. Armstrong explores how a range of modernist texts registered and incorporated the new science. D. H. Lawrence's Effie in *The Lost Girl* (1920) describes life as 'a mass of forces', for instance, while William Carlos Williams used the '*field*' of the new physics as an organizational metaphor: 'conceived as the dynamic space of the page or as the space of action.'¹¹ In Armstrong's chapter, vibrations are a starting point for the literary-scientific depictions of a world fundamentally in flux; vibrations are an image of the non-solid, of movement in general, of process and relations.

The collection *Vibratory Modernism*, edited by Anthony Enns and Trower (2013), develops a more specific focus on vibration across a range of modernist literature, along with art and theatre – again showing how earlier models and theories of vibration, as far back as Pythagorean antiquity, remained in play.¹² Justin Sausman's chapter, for example, attends to how the language of vibration was taken up in gothic-occultist and canonical modernist fiction. He shows that vibrations played a prominent role in the occultism that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an occultism that produced hybrids of modern physics and older esoteric ideas. His chapter traces how these vibrations were 'translated' into literary texts, adapting Bruno Latour's description of how the process of disseminating new scientific or technological projects transforms those projects. For Sausman, the meanings of vibration thus shift away from their function as the physical basis of occult forces as literary writers adapt occult terminology to articulate modernist aesthetics, an example being how Woolf refers to the 'quiver' of Minnie Marsh's inner essence in 'An Unwritten Novel' (1921) to indicate that behind the appearances of everyday life lies something ungraspable in fiction.¹³

Other chapters in *Vibratory Modernism* similarly trace the circulation of concepts of vibration through science and literature (and art and theatre), including Andrew Logemann's, which again deploys Latour's concept of translation to consider how changing models of atomic or subatomic structure played out in Wyndham Lewis's and Ezra Pound's Vorticism movement.¹⁴ Further, Lewis and Pound sought in their Vorticist writing 'to move beyond mere engagement with the concepts of physics', as Logemann puts it, 'to a strikingly literal enactment of scientific ideas.' They considered a new aesthetic approach necessary to respond to the atomic model of physical reality, of matter as constituted through the related vibratory movements of matter and energy. Lewis and Pound used vibratory energies as a model for the circulation of artistic ideas which radiate their influence outwards from the poet. Thus for Pound in 'The Wisdom of Poetry' (1912), the poet's formal control of language enables him to imbue the poem with 'radioactive intensity', to emotionally affect the 'hearer'.¹⁵

Logemann's chapter can help illustrate how such approaches to vibration as I have outlined them so far can be characterised as literary studies, while they also engage with the history of science. Beyond a more sustained focus on literary texts than is usual for historians, an obvious characteristic of many of these studies is a heightened attention to literary form and reception. Logemann is focused on how scientific concepts

provide a model for Pound's poetry as a formal structure impacting on its audience, while other literary studies of sound and vibration consider the effect of poetry in its oral, sonorous forms (see [Chapters 3 and 12](#) in this volume).¹⁶ As part of a vibratory world, literature emerges as sonorous. It does more than describe vibrations; rather than being set apart from it, literature participates in the world it describes.

Texts and Voices

Julie Napolin's essay, "A Sinister Resonance": Vibration, Sound, and the Birth of Conrad's Marlow' (2013), considers how Joseph Conrad reflected on the physics of vibratory energies, of a universe conceived of as resonant forces and matter, to develop a sense of universal interconnectedness upon which he could base a model of literary communication.¹⁷ In 1898, Conrad wrote to Edward Garnett to describe a dinner where he discussed contemporary ideas about vibrations (involving the theory of ether, an extremely fine substance thought to transmit vibrations and to permeate all space – including the interstices between particles of matter – helping to pave the way conceptually for the atomic theory of matter):

All day with ship-owners and in the evening dinner, phonograph, X rays, talk about *the* secret of the Universe and the non-existence of, so called, matter. The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness. [...] And, note, *all* matter (the universe) composed of the same matter, matter, *all* matter being only that thing of inconceivable tenuity through which the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound, light, etc.) are propagated, thus giving birth to our sensations – then emotions – then thought. Is this so?¹⁸

This quotation illustrates how modern physics connected with the logic of eighteenth-century associationism, according to which sensory experience is the basis of all mental life. David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) describes how sensations – transmitted as vibrations along the nerves – are combined through the process of association thereby developing into emotions and memories and thought.¹⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century the individual mind is situated as part of an etherial universe that is unified as vibration, which Napolin argues provided Conrad with the sensory conditions of potential solidarity. She considers how Conrad reflected on the physics of vibratory energies, of a universe conceived of as resonant forces and matter, to develop a sense of universal interconnectedness upon which he could base a model of literary communication.

Within Conrad's novels, Marlow, Jim, and the ship in *Lord Jim* (1899), for instance, undergo tremblings and shivering movements which draw them together in a material continuity that breaks down the boundaries of matter and individual bodies. Kurtz's and other voices vibrate through those who speak and hear them. Regarding the book itself, in his Author's Note to *Youth* (1917 edition), Conrad writes that *Heart of Darkness* (1899) 'had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear long after the last note had been struck.'²⁰ Conrad envisaged the narrative – mediated through the storytelling voice of Marlow and in the 'ring' of sentences but also as the physical, subatomic basis of the pages themselves – as vibrating its readers.²¹

Kurtz's and Marlow's voices have undergone extensive analyses in terms of characterisation and narrative form, and also, most recently, sound technologies. For Ivan Kreilkamp, in *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (2005), *Heart of Darkness* draws on a phonographic logic to depict disembodied voices, which, like the written text itself, lack any stable connection to a storyteller/author. Conrad's novel forms part of Kreilkamp's more general argument that voice thrives in heterogeneous ways within modern print culture, despite the tendency among some earlier commentators to either neglect or to consider the vocal a remnant of a lost pre-modern past.²² Sam Halliday's *Sonic Modernity* (2013) builds on Kreilkamp's study to develop an analysis of Kurtz's voice as remembered by the equally disembodied Marlow:

He was very little more than a voice. And I heard – him – it – this voice – other voices – all of them were so little more than voices – and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense.²³

As Halliday comments, this passage alludes to the sinister quality sounds can acquire when detached from visible bodies, and in addition, when 'stripped of linguistic sense.'²⁴ Halliday suggests that Conrad had music in mind as his model for representing the ineffable. Much as the novel itself has 'a tonality of its own, a continued vibration', the voices depicted within it linger here 'like a dying vibration', and we are thereby encouraged to perceive the text as a sonorous as much as semantic form that impacts on its readers in a comparable way to musical vibrations on hearers. Conrad, then, illustrates a growing area of investigation into how literature not only describes vibratory energies and soundscapes but can itself be vibratory.

Demonstrating that voices survive in modern literature, Kreilkamp is among an increasing number of critics, book historians and reading studies scholars who challenge understandings of the printed book as a silently consumed object, taken in solely through the eyes. After a period of almost exclusively ocular conceptions of reading, ethnographic and feminist strands of reading studies generated increased interest in the 1990s in the interactive relationship between orality and literature, and in embodied and sensuous experiences of material books.²⁵ Matthew Rubery furthers this trajectory away from the silent book in recent work which brings together book history, reading and sound studies, observing that we tend to vocalise inwardly when reading (see also [Chapters 10](#) and [11](#) in this volume) as well as how books are read out loud and heard in the form of audiobooks.

A comparable shift has taken place in music studies, in which a focus on the aurality of music has paralleled that on the visibility of literature. Music and sound studies scholars have increasingly come to focus on how sonorous matter is palpable as well as audible, in a comparable way to how reading material is understood to be audible as well as visible – both become multisensory. Much of this work in music has focused on contemporary bass and sub-bass music, which can take us a step further than books; books cannot vibrate us palpably in quite the same direct way that bass music can. Nevertheless, an excursion into sound and music studies can provide some parallels from a different disciplinary perspective, which I will outline here before returning to literature with the case of Dickens.

Bass Music

We can find precursors for a sub-field of music and sound studies that attends to bodily and sensory reception of sonic vibrations, such as Don Ihde's phenomenological description of his 'whole body' reverberating to Beethoven's music,²⁶ while its recent emergence tends to cluster around bass and sub-bass. By attending primarily to experiences of sonic materiality, Julian Henriques was among the first to analyse collective experiences of bass and sound system culture, in his article 'Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session' (2003), and later his full-length study, *Sonic Bodies* (2011).²⁷ Contributing to this study of how Jamaican sound system culture is configured by material and corporeal vibrations, Henriques observes the importance of embodied voice in Jamaican culture – including its expressive traditions of performance and dub poetry – but

his focus turns also to the bodily reception of sound. He describes, for example, the ‘visceral experience of audition [...] Trouser legs flap to the bassline and internal organs resonate to the finely tuned frequencies, as the vibrations of the music excite every cell in your body.’²⁸ Many similar accounts of the corporeal impact of bass and drums – from 1970s Jamaican sound system culture through to the various forms of bass-driven dance music which flourished through the 1980s and 1990s and beyond (such as techno, drum n bass, dubstep), and also African and other forms of music – can be found in cultural and music and sound studies, magazines and memoirs and novels.²⁹ Paul Gilroy’s essay, ‘Between the Blues and the Blues Dance: Some Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic’ (2003), provides another early, and semi-autobiographical, account of being vibrated by bass: having watched cornflour on a speaker responding to the sound vibrations of his favourite music, ‘I wondered how my own body might be affected by the sonic pounding to which I have regularly exposed it. [...] I can recall wondering how Sir Lee’s “Whip Them No Skip Them” earth-quaking from the wardrobe-sized speaker boxes of a south London sound system, was reshaping my cells, blood, and sinews.’³⁰ As Paul C. Jasen has put it in his *Low End Theory: Bass, Bodies and the Materiality of Sonic Experience* (2016), bass-centric musics, often tracing some lineage to the Jamaican sound system, have an ‘explicitly material aim, being designed to modulate flesh and space.’³¹ For Jasen, experiences of bass vibrations can be theorised to help counter the almost exclusive concern with aurality shared by sound and music studies. He argues that anxieties about and disdain for non-Western musics led researchers to neglect ‘sound-body questions’ (anxieties ‘distilled’ in *Heart of Darkness*, for example, ‘through a narrator increasingly haunted by ambient percussion – the “tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swilling, a tremor vast.”’)³²

Similarly noting that critics and historians of the black Atlantic soundscape had barely discussed bodily encounters with musical sound, Gilroy’s memory leads to his argument against the ‘idea that we encounter sound only, or even mainly through our capacity to hear and to make interpretive sense of it’³³ (which we might compare to Halliday’s comment that sound as vibration in *Heart of Darkness* is ‘stripped of linguistic sense’³⁴). Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson’s *Discographies* (1999) trace the demand that music be meaningful back to Plato’s suspicion of music as sound, where we find the beginnings of a Western philosophical tradition of seeing music’s physicality and its bodily affects beyond language and reason as problematic.³⁵ Here we can unearth a slightly earlier turn to bass in cultural and political theory: observing that cultural theorists

and others had more recently highlighted music's corporeality, Gilbert and Pearson refer to the specific frequencies of bass: 'it is precisely the bass end of the frequency spectrum – comprising of the slowest vibrating sound waves – that provides listeners and dancers with the most *material*, most directly *corporeal*, types of experience. It is the bass and the sub-bass which are felt at least as much as they are heard.'³⁶ Picking up on the work of Henriques and others, music scholar Nina Sun Eidsheim, in *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (2015), also considers music's vibrational qualities beyond bass, maintaining that 'not only aurality but also tactile, spatial, physical, material, and vibrational sensations are at the core of all music.'³⁷ For Eidsheim, a vibrational theory of music allows us to move beyond its 'sound, signal, and signification (or symbolic) levels' to consider it as relational, to acknowledge our participation in music as bodies in spaces.³⁸ She considers how music as vibration is realized by different parts of our bodies, some of which are especially sensitive to bass and infrasonic vibrations, such as the abdomen in which resonance occurs in the 4–8 hertz range potentially amplifying a vibration up to 200 per cent.³⁹

Bass vibrations are often subjected to high levels of control in order to manage audiences' bodily experiences, and to regulate and traverse the boundaries between pleasure and pain, music and noise. Henriques argues that 'the depths of the low bass frequencies' have a 'weight and depth of attack ... compared to the more tamed, more domesticated, culturally recuperated mid-frequencies, or the more theoretically constituted object that "music" is most often considered to be.'⁴⁰ Bass sounds have a 'force of attack and sharpness of edge' that can threaten violence and thus need to be carefully managed.⁴¹ He discusses in detail the array of technologies, the extensive skills and expertise of sound engineers, crewmembers and music producers (who often consider themselves 'scientists of sound') that goes into controlling the vibratory frequencies of Jamaican sound system music to conduct the crowds 'safely through the procession of the night.'⁴² As another commentator, Joe Muggs put it in a short essay about dubstep in *The Wire* (2012), 'Bass demolishes, blurs, overwhelms, but it also commands people to build, to create systems to contain and channel its frequencies.'⁴³ Steve Goodman's *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (2009) samples a much wider array of musical and artistic and military sound systems which use sound vibration – especially infrasound – to modulate affect, considering how sound as a physical force can be experienced as unpleasant and threatening, and can even damage the body, as well as having much more desirable effects.⁴⁴

Gilbert and Pearson, along with Henriques, Goodman and others, emphasise the collective experiences of low frequency vibrations as a counter cultural force of resistance, a means of taking back some control or of 'affective mobilization', and in some cases of projecting a subcultural identity.⁴⁵ Brandon LaBelle also writes about the importance of control in this context, as well as the multisensorial palpability of bass music, focusing on lowrider car culture in Los Angeles, a culture 'originating mainly within Mexican-American and African-American youth groups' and oriented around bass in cars. *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (2010) refers to the sound systems installed in the cars, which are themselves vibratory technologies:

[T]he car creates noise and vibration through its impact and contact with road surfaces while musicalizing what it means to be on the road through its own entertainment systems. [...] Automobiles are vibratory machines that not only provide forms of tonality, but a deep bass that is more tactile than sonorous: the automobile is a conducting mechanism that, when fitted with 15-inch sub-woofers in its trunk – itself a resonating chamber – may produce frequencies ranging below 20Hz and decibels well above legal limits. In Los Angeles, such sonority takes on magnificent proportions, turning the entire car into sonic technology.⁴⁶

The noise and vibration produced by the car's contact with the road surfaces combine together with the 'bass that is more tactile than sonorous' to create an experience of music through the entire body. As the vehicle's vibrations form part of that musical experience, LaBelle talks about the control of these alongside the control of the bass music. One of the ways external car noise is managed is through road surfacing: highway construction often incorporates layers of rubber within the road structure to absorb the vehicle noise rather than amplifying it. Surface vibrations can thereby contribute to the background noise effects while allowing the music to dominate and to pulse out across the streets: 'the mega-bass sound systems continue a tradition of modification and customization, aligning the automobile in the making of cultural identity. [...] The rumble of bass and beat, which are mostly felt and heard as surprising vibrations, as sound pressure and oscillating wave, as *throb*, function as part of the identity of the car and its driver.'⁴⁷

These varied studies of musical vibrations share an interest in how bass exists around the threshold between the audible and palpable, affecting parts of the body beyond just the ears, and in how technologies (from sound systems to road surfacing) are used to modulate its effects. After one further excursion through sound studies' interests in bass into infrasound

(below 20 Hz), I will return to literary form as an earlier way of channeling such borderline vibrations, tracing efforts to control noise and vibration in the modern industrial context with new frequencies emerging on nineteenth-century railways.

Extrasensory Vibrations

An early set of claims made by sound studies as it began to take shape around the start of the twenty-first century was its ability to challenge established forms of epistemological knowledge. Sound surrounds and enters the body, resonating within it, breaking down the boundaries between exteriority and interiority, object/process and subject, whereas viewers are at a distance from the objects they perceive.⁴⁸ It is by now just as customary to argue against such observations and their idealisation of hearing,⁴⁹ but some studies of vibration have shifted the emphasis from the experience of hearing towards the ontology of vibration, and in doing so have furthered challenges to established categorisations and boundaries and an approach to un-knowing.

As Goodman has put it, 'Sound is merely a thin slice, the vibrations audible to humans or animals.'⁵⁰ According to this definition, 'sound' depends on a subjective category of sensation, and it is edged by an unstable border of infrasound and low frequency noise. Vibrations exist beyond capacities of perception, and thus an orientation towards 'vibrational force', as Goodman puts it, 'should be differentiated from a phenomenology of sonic effects centered on the perceptions of a human subject, as a ready-made, interiorized human center of being and feeling.'⁵¹ Bioacoustic studies show that capacities to sense vibrations vary considerably in other animals. Vibratory forms of communication are crucial to many species which do not primarily hear with ears (such as crickets), and which can detect frequencies far beyond human thresholds.⁵² The lower frequency range of human hearing is generally classified as 20 Hz, although there is no exact lower threshold point below which sound cuts off, as Jasen puts it: 'Instead of a lower "limit" of audition, we are presented with a liminal region across which perceptual faculties break down and recombine while synaesthetic uncertainties flood in.'⁵³ Vibrations may be felt-heard while they also exist beyond the senses altogether: threshold experiences of infrasound can present us with an ontological materiality beyond human perception.

Resisting the preoccupation in studies of music and sound with how these categories (music/sound/noise) are socially constructed or culturally mediated, Jasen's study focuses on the material existence of infrasound.

He refuses to focus exclusively on culturally specific or historicised experiences of infrasound, demonstrating that tremendous efforts across multiple cultures and periods have gone into producing infrasonic vibrations for religious and aesthetic purposes. There is a vast, fascinating history of pre-nineteenth-century and non-Western vibrations which Jasen begins to make evident, making clear that infrasound's effects are far from historically or culturally or geographically unique, even while specific people in specific periods and places generate and talk about vibration in particular ways. A growing number of such studies – some focusing explicitly on vibration while others (like Christoph Cox's essay on 'sonic materialism'⁵⁴) take the matter of sound (art) more broadly as their focus – also share with 'new materialism' a critical view of what they see as the idealist and anthropocentric tendencies of the 'linguistic turn' across the humanities, spanning from literary studies to sound and music studies. Brian Kane has robustly and persuasively highlighted the limitations of 'sonic ontology' as distinct from 'auditory culture', and I do not wish to put forward an ontological approach that considers the nature of sound itself as separate from culture and history.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, I share an interest in the existence of vibratory frequencies that move beyond human perception, discourse and historical-literary periodisations. Studies such as Jasen's are of interest here insofar as they are comparable to recent 'postcritical' attempts in literary studies to get beyond the engrained preoccupation with critiquing texts and discursive constructions in terms of their historical periods, towards a cross-temporal approach as set out by Felski.⁵⁶ In this essay, I will thus shortly allow for points of resonance between Dickens's engagement with nineteenth-century vibrations and contemporary bass vibrations, but let's first take an example of how a literary scholar instead takes vibrations into his analyses of cultural phenomena as historicised, discursive constructions.

Roger Luckhurst's studies *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002) and 'Traumaculture' (2003) examine how cultures of telepathy and trauma relied on certain discourses, or are even 'brought into being through discursive statements', a 'conjuncture of discourses'.⁵⁷ These various overlapping discourses include those of late nineteenth-century physics and psychology (for telepathy), and nineteenth- and twentieth-century medical and psychiatric, legal, journalistic and aesthetic languages (for trauma). In *The Invention of Telepathy*, physicists' writings about sympathetic vibrations and high-frequency wave transmissions contribute to the discursive context for the account of 'N-rays', a construction with no real physical existence that nevertheless contributed to scientific speculations about extrasensory telepathic and spiritual energies. 'In this speculative frame', writes Luckhurst,

William Crookes (then President of the Society for Psychical Research) elaborated his theory of 'psychic force' and of those sensitive to it, claiming that 'A sensitive may be one [...] who, by constant practice, is rendered more sensitive to those high-frequency waves.'⁵⁸ Luckhurst similarly treats the 'traumatic subject' as invented, constituted primarily through discursive statements rather than encounters between sensing bodies and their vibratory worlds. He claims that modern notions of trauma hinge on the discursive shift away from bodily injury to the psychological effects of a railway accident or some other occurrence, reiterating a point made by other critics of trauma.⁵⁹ Vibrations feature again here but at a lower, palpable frequency – those experienced on railways – the effects of which are as imaginary as N-rays, supposedly causing 'railway spine' which Luckhurst sees as an early manifestation of trauma: 'Railway spine implied that the repeated physical shocks of travel might induce cerebral injury.'⁶⁰

In these two different studies, Luckhurst comes across vibrations at both ends of the spectrum: the high frequency, 'ultrasonic' spiritual variety, and the palpable-audible vibrations experienced on the railway which I will come to describe as infrasonic. My point here is that vibrations are of interest in this approach only in so far as they enter discourse: Luckhurst detects them in scientific and medical writing which contributes to the cultural construction of telepathy and trauma, but they are in themselves of marginal interest. It is understandable that literary studies will attend primarily to the powers of language rather than to the ontology of vibratory forces, but his prioritisation of discourse as constitutive of trauma, in particular, seems to elide material existence and may overstate the importance of written words (and thus our importance as expert readers). By attending to the materiality of vibration and to bodily experiences of it, we can allow not only for how literature describes vibrations and participates in discursive constructions, but also for how – and why – literature channels, modulates and even becomes vibratory. Like Felski, I am keen to explore other kinds of 'models and practices of reading that are less beholden to suspicion and skepticism.' The latter, says Felski 'can lead to a neglect of the formal qualities of art and the sensual dimensions of aesthetic experience'⁶¹; I want next to turn to and tune into a sensory experience of literary form.

Dickens's Sound Recordings and Railway Vibrations

The rest of this essay will use Dickens's fiction to illustrate the following: first, the potential for literary texts to be experienced as sonorous and even semi-musical, in this case channelling railway vibrations through its

half-rhymes and rhythms. It will consider literary form as part of much wider efforts to manage and to control vibration, thereby bringing points from vibration research emerging out of sound and music studies to bear on the analysis of Dickens's work. Much as literary texts do not only describe vibrations but can take on measured vibratory form, bass music is experienced as vibrations, which are extensively controlled. Second, through its engagement with both infrasonic and spiritual vibrations, Dickens's fiction will illustrate an expanded sense of sound as a form of vibration that extends into the extrasensory, and operates both within and beyond discourse.

Dickens's renowned public readings are among the best-known instances of the novel as a non-silent form. Kreilkamp contrasts Conrad's depiction of disembodied voices with this earlier figure of the storyteller, who provided a relatively stable form for the novel, an ideal of natural human communication. For an author/speaker like Dickens, the novel passes itself off as his voice as storyteller in print. Dickens's novels also frequently depict voices at a narrative level, in his use of phonography in its pre-technological sense – referring to shorthand as a means of voice recording – 'to infuse writing with all the immediacy of the moment of oral utterance [...] to vocalize writing and to write voice.'⁶² Dickens's public recitations, and the various later impersonations and audiobook versions of his novels, may then be considered a kind of playback of these phonographic recordings.⁶³

Beyond voices and words, Dickens's novels can also be understood to have recorded sounds and other forms of vibration. As John Picker has commented, railway engines dominate the soundscape of *Dombey and Son* (1848), and many critics have discussed how Dickens's writing style conveys the speed of the railway and the rhythm of the carriage wheels on the tracks. The six rhythmic paragraphs of Dombey's journey are a kind of 'prose poetry' or even 'music', which describe the sounds of the railway whilst they also echo its vibratory movements.⁶⁴ The first paragraph describes how the train sets off with its shriek, roar and rattle, and how it makes the streets resonate, before settling into its vibratory speed itself through its repetition and regular rhythm, for a few moments:

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in through the damp earth, booming on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through

the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly with him: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!⁶⁵

Dickens's novel records the railway vibrations in a way that allows playback through reading. As Rubery and others have observed, many readers vocalise inwardly when they read,⁶⁶ and these paragraphs of prose poetry can convey a sonorous sense of railway rhythms to the inner ear. It is not necessary to read the rhythms out loud in order to experience them aurally, although to read them silently can trigger an urge to speak them and in doing so to add a sonorous quality that Dickens himself participated in.

Railway vibrations were a prominent concern in the period. As part of an ongoing widespread anxiety about the effects of technological modernity on the body, medical writers discussed how the vibrations undergone by travellers could cause various kinds of bodily and mental afflictions (dyspepsia, paralysis, anxiety), but could nevertheless escape conscious awareness. Railway vibrations occurred at a new kind of speed or frequency, at which each separate jolt was no longer quite detectable as it joined up into a form of continuous motion.⁶⁷ To counteract such a difficulty with keeping up, with knowing what is really going on, scientific writers attempted to count or to otherwise measure various forms of vibrations, including railway vibrations – and after briefly setting out this context we will be able to see better why Dickens was concerned with this vibration and how his rhythms were a comparable effort to keep up. The mathematician Charles Babbage, for example, devised a technique for getting inking pens to trace railway 'shakes' directly onto large sheets of rolling paper. Bypassing the limits of human perception, he thereby calculated the number of shakes which occurred every second during a railway journey, and covered over two miles of paper with these vibratory traces (for the purpose of assessing for the Great Western Railway company whether broad or narrow gauge lines were 'safest and most convenient for the public').⁶⁸

Railway vibrations, in other words, operated as a kind of borderline infrasound, by which I mean to refer loosely to frequencies of vibration that are slow (and fast) enough to be hovering on the threshold of sensory experience. Physicists such as Helmholtz closely studied the thresholds at both ends of the musical scale (and the light spectrum, as above), sound being audible at frequencies between around 20 and 32,000 vibrations per second. We have also encountered the sonic frequency of 20Hz in LaBelle's car, and it is around this frequency that sound's audibility

becomes palpable, and potentially uncomfortable or even painful. Efforts to control noise and vibration in cars began in the 1920s (when the car radio with all its potential for music was also introduced), but we can trace early attempts to control vibrations in the modern industrial and technological context back to those new kinds of frequencies beginning to emerge with the railway. Much like Babbage, A. Mallock's 'The Study of Vibration' (1907) provides various measures of vibration including diagrams of railway vibrations per second, and also refers to a vibratory frequency range that extends below the threshold of auditory perception: 'The sort of vibration which has caused most complaint from householders – such as the vibration from trains – is of a kind which is too quick to be counted, but not quick enough to be heard; that is to say, from ten to thirty vibrations a second.'⁶⁹

We might see Babbage's interest in calculating which railway lines generated the least vibrations as the first step in a long journey of managing transport vibrations by focussing on the contact surface. Since Babbage, an enormous amount of engineering work has been carried out in the field of noise and vibration control, and measurements continue to be one of the first principles in management so Babbage and other vibration counters can be seen as precursors. Counting may also be a way of avoiding being entirely passive when subjected to sound vibrations, and thereby of reducing their unpleasantness as noise, as well as providing a basis for attempted intervention (as in Babbage's advice to the Great Western Railway to use the apparently smoother and safer broad gauge lines). Elsewhere Babbage drew up a chart of the number of disturbances he suffered from buskers, in an attempt to strengthen the case against 'street nuisances' and thereby introduce preventative laws (a cause in which Dickens was also involved) – another use of measurement in an attempt to intervene, to stop or at least reduce noise.⁷⁰ As Karin Bijsterveld, and James Mansell have discussed, patterns of complaint against industrial and technological noise and vibration have accompanied attempts to control and to regulate them right through the twentieth century.⁷¹

These are attempts to minimise noise and vibration, rather than to generate music, but we might consider Dickens's registration of railway vibrations as another early technique of controlling or channelling vibrations through the organising process of measured literary form, which itself takes on a rhythmic if not quite musical quality. Counting, tracing and recording vibratory rhythms on paper, in their different ways the chemist, Babbage, Mallock, and Dickens were each concerned with documenting a sense of railway travel. They thereby brought its vibrations to their readers'

or viewers' attention, which may have felt important in part because of the dangers of imperceptible railway vibrations as perceived in the period. That Dickens associated the dangers of railway travel with its vibratory movements is indicated by *Dombey's* disturbed state of mind and the repeated final word of the first four paragraphs of his journey, in each case 'Death!'⁷² Towards the end of the novel, Carker's death is repeatedly anticipated by the 'trembling of the ground', a kind of rhythmic warning which heralds the train crashing into and killing him.⁷³ Dickens was also aware of the limited capacity of the senses and of the vibrations that escape them. He evoked the idea that voices last forever on the 'pages' of the air, still in existence but inaudible (taken from another of Babbage's works, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*),⁷⁴ while railway vibrations in a different way threaten to escape a reader's capacity to fully perceive them. The repetitions and punctuated rhythms of the passages encourage reading at a speed which makes it slightly hard to keep up, to process each and every word as it occurs, to take in their semantic sense as well as their sounds. The reading experience may thus be comparable to the travellers' experience of something hovering around the edges of consciousness, not quite fully graspable. On this sensory borderline it may also be comparable to how bass music does not necessarily 'make interpretive sense', or signify, as Gilroy, Gilbert, Goodman and others have discussed.

Instead of alluding to discursive accounts of railway vibrations as contributions to the cultural construction of trauma, using them in the service of debunking or at least critiquing the traumatic subject's narrative, we can consider what it is about these vibrations that helps generate the various attempts to take account of them in discourse. By attending to how railway travel generated a specific frequency, we can consider how it could be heard and felt simultaneously as noise and vibration, causing a particular sense of palpable discomfort, and of something occurring just beyond consciousness. These two interconnected aspects of railway experience may contribute to a desire to organise or even musicalise sound vibrations through literary form, which we could see as a kind of sound technology that predates bass. Whether as a response to the noise of modernity, or as a counter-cultural force, Dickens's rhythms and bass music are both means of reproducing controlled levels of vibration as a pleasurable aesthetic experience. Whereas bass music itself exists at low frequencies of vibration that can be felt and heard, literary form here transforms a sense of palpable, low frequency vibration into a semi-musical experience, and draws attention to the existence of new kinds of infrasonic vibration that extend beyond the limits of human perception.

In an earlier passage, which describes how the building of the railway is itself having a destructive impact on the city of London, Dickens points the way forward to its rhythmic movement through a series of lists. Just the 'first shock' of the metaphorical 'earthquake' caused by the railway building has a staggering multitude of affects, a multitude that again threatens to overwhelm our capacity to count, or to list:

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden huts and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcasses of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness [...].⁷⁵

Parts of this list, from 'Houses' onwards, begin to take on a kind of broken, staggering rhythm, with quite regular stresses and pauses, and half-rhymes (down and ground; stopped and up), but at this point in the narrative it is as though we never quite get going, as we will do later when the trains come into operation. Amidst this irregular series of lists – as though an attempt to document every item through such a lengthy compilation – we arrive at a number: 'a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness.' The list is itself incomplete; following the accelerating repetition of 'and' it nevertheless seems to give up describing the multitude of objects and instead to resort to an approximate large-sized figure, indicating the impossibility of complete documentation. If this is an attempt to take *account* of the impact of the 'first shock', its chaotic rhythm seems to reflect a threatened loss of control in the face of overwhelming disorder. And the list goes on (and this is just the 'first shock'):

There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water

hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.⁷⁶

This passage is typically Dickensian in its juxtaposition of extremes for comic effect: the long list of catastrophic chaos finally being interrupted with this very 'short' summing up of the 'progress' whereby the tracks 'trailed smoothly away...' This smoothness might also point towards that condition of vibration undergone when travelling whereby each separate impulse begins to slip beneath conscious awareness but is nevertheless thought to impact on the body. 'The traveller's mind takes little note of the thousands of successive jolts which he experiences, but every one of them tells upon his body', according to the *Lancet*.⁷⁷ The 'hundred thousand' incomplete things contributing to the 'dire disorder' might be compared to these 'thousands' of barely perceived jolts, both of which seem concealed in the perceived smoothness of rail travel.

Dickens's passages of 'prose poetry' and semi-rhythmic lists indicate how vibration is taken into discourse but also escapes it. The speed at which the rhythms encourage reading, and the extensiveness of the lists, mean that the reader cannot necessarily take in the linguistic sense of every word, and also the author cannot document every one of the 'hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness.' The paragraphs take on their own shape of incompleteness, as there is too much going on too quickly for the lists to ever be finished. What these passages indicate is what is escaping the novel and us as readers, including vibrations that have an existence beyond the limits of human attention and language.

Dickens's Future Ghost

Dickens's works frequently depict sound as a kind of vibratory energy, while his short story 'The Signalman' (1866) delves much further into the spiritual aspect of railway vibrations, pointing towards their existence on the edges of human knowledge.⁷⁸ There is the whole set of nineteenth-century spiritualist discourses among which this story can be situated,⁷⁹ but I would like to indicate how it is inhabited by extrasensory vibrations and temporal disjunctions.

In its opening paragraphs, the narrator describes calling out to the signalman, and before he replies he hears, and feels the passing train: 'there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing to a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down.'⁸⁰ The oncoming train, transmitted through earth and air, both palpable and audible, quickly becomes a threatening, compelling force which he has to resist. It moves along the bottom of a valley with extremely steep sides, contributing to its acoustic effects, along with those of the signalman's bell and the wind in the telegraph wires. If we are seeking a rational explanation for the signalman's sense of being haunted by a ghostly presence, we might find it in the infrasonic potential of these sounds. Infrasonic vibrations aided by specific architectural acoustic conditions can create standing waves and other physical effects to give a sense of a palpable presence just beyond consciousness. Jasen describes how encounters with infrasound can involve such synaesthetic experiences, along with difficulties of localising its source and misperceptions, which can be 'mildly confusing, sometimes utterly bewildering [...]'. When their effects are felt, but the cause or feeling remains a mystery, they become an incitement to the imagination.'⁸¹

Dickens's own experiences of infrasonic locations may thus have contributed to his storytelling imagination, although infrasound does not entirely explain the events within the terms of the story. In contrast to some ghost stories in which the supernatural phenomena are either finally explained away as having a natural cause or as the delusions of its characters, 'The Signalman' leaves the mystery intact. The signalman repeatedly receives a warning from the ghostly figure, but this figure itself turns out to have been a kind of premonition: while the signalman is checking out the reality of the ghost on the tracks, it finally materialises in the real-life figure of the train driver who runs him over. The ghostly figure, then, was not the conventional survival of a past life, but the present inhabited by the future. While *Dombey and Son* gives its readers a sense of the audible-palpability of railway vibrations at a certain speed – too much vibration in too little time – 'The Signalman' confounds its readers' sense of temporality with the figure of a ghost who turns out to have been from the future. The sense of the story is impossible to take in during the temporality of the reading experience as it occurs chronologically. Nineteenth-century concerns about the too-rapid vibrations (or 'shocks') of continuous travel escaping consciousness also seem echoed in more recent theories of trauma which posit that railway accidents occur too suddenly to be processed in the present time.⁸² Railway occurrences, then, may only be fully experienced retrospectively,

or even, when one's death makes that impossible, in advance.⁸³ In both cases, vibrations contribute to a sense of something going on beyond sensory comprehension. The signalman tells the narrator, 'The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else [but the ghost], and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But I heard it.'⁸⁴

In this chapter, vibrations have taken us beyond any single period. Its earlier stages outlined how theories of vibration are conveyed through scientific and literary texts from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, and then, after taking a tour through contemporary music and sound studies, the chapter returned to the Victorian period to explore in more detail how Dickens's work not only describes vibration but itself takes on vibratory form. All the various approaches to scientific-literary discourse, and to textual and musical materiality in their specific historical periods, need not disavow the existence of vibrational frequencies that transcend specific periods, in their recurrence across time. Sound and other kinds of vibration have themselves been defined according to the number of repetitions within exact periods, such as the frequency of 20 vibrations per second, around which sound can exist on the borders of audibility, palpability, and extrasensory infrasound. That Dickens's texts take part in a particular strand of nineteenth-century cultural discourse can itself help to situate their acknowledgement of vibrations beyond discourse. We can find in this period an expanding sense of sound, as a form of vibration that extends into frequencies which may not be heard by the ears but can be felt, or not experienced at all. Physicists drew attention to the extensive range of extra-sensory vibrations and also investigated sensory thresholds and frequencies existing around them, while the railway began to produce an industrial frequency around the palpable/infrasonic region which medical writers observed battering the body beyond conscious registration. Such frequencies would become far more common, indeed would come to pervade many cities and buildings, with the background hum of air conditioning and airplanes, along with the low frequencies of deep bass.⁸⁵ Low frequencies and borderline infrasound can be intensely palpable, pleasurable and/or painful – experienced as music and/or noise – while they can also escape the senses altogether. This chapter has considered how low frequency vibrations can be channelled through literary form as well as in music.

If we are already well-attuned to how literature describes sounds and is sonorous, it may be that vibration can allow us to consider the place of sound

as part of a much broader continuum, and to consider the limits of discourse itself. I have begun to identify some parallel approaches to vibration developed in sound and music studies. Music *is* vibration, but literature is comparable as a material and vocalisable form which can channel and control vibrations, including those existing on the edges of bodily and linguistic sense.

Notes

- ¹ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2015), [Chapter 5](#): 'Context Stinks!', Kindle ed.
- ² For a very different take on methods for approaching how readers do not only interpret or make meaning from textual, linguistic content, see Shelley Trower, Graham Smith, and Amy Tooth Murphy's Themed Section, and especially its Introduction, 'Interviews and Reading', of *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 16.1 (2019).
- ³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sound as 'The sensation produced in the organs of hearing when the surrounding air is set in vibration in such a way as to affect these; also, that which is or may be heard; the external object of audition, or the property of bodies by which this is produced. Hence also, pressure waves that differ from audible sound only in being of a lower or a higher frequency', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017), www.oed.com/view/Entry/185124?isAdvanced=false&result=3&rskey=2vqElH& [accessed August 23, 2017]. See also Jonathan Sterne's discussion of attempts to define 'sound' in sound studies, 'Sonic Imaginations', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–17.
- ⁴ The term 'ear-centric' is used for example by Steph Ceraso, '(Re)Educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences', *College English* 77.2 (2014), 102–23; and in the conference outline for 'Sensing the Sonic: Histories of Hearing Differently (1800–now)', at the University of Cambridge's Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, 15–16 June 2018, www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/27449 [accessed 13 July 2018].
- ⁵ Discussed in the first chapter, 'Nervous Motions', of Shelley Trower, *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 13–36.
- ⁶ Trower, *Senses of Vibration*, especially [chapters 2 and 3](#).
- ⁷ Hermann Helmholtz, 'The Facts of Perception', in *Selected Writings of Hermann von Helmholtz*, ed. by Russell Kahl (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), pp. 366–408 (p. 371).
- ⁸ Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), see especially 'Helmholtz, Tyndall, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Leaps of the Prepared Imagination' and 'Wave Theory and the Rise of Literary Modernism', pp. 242–72 and 295–318.

- ⁹ Vike Martina Plock, 'Good Vibrations: "Sirens," Soundscapes, and Physiology', *James Joyce Quarterly* 46 (2009), 481–96.
- ¹⁰ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 116.
- ¹¹ Armstrong, *Modernism*, p. 118 ('mass of forces'); p. 120 ('dynamic space').
- ¹² *Vibratory Modernism*, ed. by Anthony Enns and Shelley Trower (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 4–6, 14–15. Trower has also discussed links between geology, technology, ancient stones and occult vibrations in nineteenth-century gothic and in modernist fiction, in *Rocks of Nation: The Imagination of Celtic Cornwall* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), [chapters 3 and 4](#), especially pp. 117 and 145–52.
- ¹³ Justin Sausman, 'From Vibratory Occultism to Vibratory Modernism: Blackwood, Lawrence, Woolf', in *Vibratory Modernism*, pp. 30–52 (p. 44).
- ¹⁴ Andrew Logemann, 'Physics as Narrative: Lewis, Pound and the London Vortex', in *Vibratory Modernism*, pp. 80–95.
- ¹⁵ Logemann, 'Physics as Narrative', p. 85. Armstrong similarly, after considering how some modernist poets structured their poetry in accordance with the physics of the field, examines how Pound's doctrines are 'suffused with scientific thinking', including in how he depicts 'poetry in terms of ideas of charge, energy flow and the field', in 'The Vibrating World', p. 131. Logemann focuses more specifically on vibratory movements as a model for poetic influence.
- ¹⁶ Trower has discussed Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetic ideals of communication for example in the first chapter of *Senses of Vibration*.
- ¹⁷ Julie Napolin, '"A Sinister Resonance": Vibration, Sound, and the Birth of Conrad's Marlow', in *Vibratory Modernism*, pp. 53–79.
- ¹⁸ Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 2, ed. by Edward Garnett, 9 vols (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928), pp. 94–5.
- ¹⁹ For discussion of Hartley's work see [chapter 1](#), 'Nervous Motions', of *Senses of Vibration*, pp. 13–36.
- ²⁰ Joseph Conrad, 'Extract From the Author's Note' (1917) to *Youth / A Narrative / and Two Other Stories*, in *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 188–9 (p. 189).
- ²¹ Discussed by Napolin, '"A Sinister Resonance": for example, 'Conrad considered narrative in neither explicitly oral nor visual terms, but rather as the vibrational property that cuts across voice, sound, and image – the act of reading (pp. 72–3). Teresa Brennan makes a comparable point in *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004): printed words and images, 'like auditory traces, have a direct physical impact; their reception involves the activation of neurological networks, stimulated by spectrum vibrations at various frequencies.' Sight is considered the sense that separates, as Brennan points out, and yet these spectrum vibrations 'also constitute transmissions breaching the bounds between individual and environment', p. 10.

- ²² Ivan Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- ²³ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 153.
- ²⁴ Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 36.
- ²⁵ Book historians have at times reinforced a perceived separation between oral culture and print, through their observations of a period when silent reading emerged as the main way of engaging with written texts in contrast to reading out loud (at various stages of development between the fourth and eighteenth century). For a brief but nuanced summary of this transition see Matthew Rubery, 'Introduction' to *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016), Kindle ed. See also Steven Connor, 'Writing the White Voice' (2009), <http://stevenconnor.com/whitevoice.html> [accessed 25 August 2017]. For approaches to reading involving orality and/or embodiment, for example, *The Ethnography of Reading* ed. by Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford, 1993); Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (includes discussion of 1990s feminism) (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2006); Thomas McLaughlin, *Reading and the Body: The Physical Practice of Reading* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).
- ²⁶ Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), p. 75.
- ²⁷ Julian Henriques, 'Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Sessions', in *The Auditory Culture Reader* ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 451–80. Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011).
- ²⁸ Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, p. xv.
- ²⁹ Along with the texts discussed in the rest of this section, see, for example, Matthew Collin, *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House*, 2nd ed. (London: Profile, 2010), Kindle ed.; Matthew Collin, *Rave On: Global Adventures in Electronic Dance Music* (London: Profile, 2018), Kindle ed.; Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), pp. 135–7; Jens Gerrit Papenberg, 'Enhanced Bass: On 1970s Disco Culture's Listening Devices', in *Sound as Popular Culture: A Research Companion*, ed. by Jens Gerrit Papenburg, Holger Schulze (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 2016), pp. 205–14; Luis-Manuel Garcia, 'Beats Flesh, and Grain: Sonic Tactility and Affect in Electronic Dance Music', *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.1 (2015), 59–76; Irvine Welsh, *Ecstasy* (London: Vintage, 2012), [Chapter 9](#), 'In the Jungle', Kindle ed.
- ³⁰ Paul Gilroy, 'Between the Blues and the Blues Dance: Some Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic', in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. by Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 381–95 (p. 390).
- ³¹ Paul C. Jasen, *Low End Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 152.
- ³² Jasen, *Low End Theory*, p. 73.
- ³³ Gilroy, 'Between the Blues', p. 390.

- ³⁴ As above: Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 36.
- ³⁵ Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, *Discographies: Dance, Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 40–3.
- ³⁶ Gilbert and Pearson, *Discographies*, p. 46.
- ³⁷ Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 8.
- ³⁸ Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, p. 155.
- ³⁹ Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, pp. 172–3.
- ⁴⁰ Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, p. 37.
- ⁴¹ Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, p. 37.
- ⁴² Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, p. 114.
- ⁴³ Joe Muggs, 'Meditate on Bass Weight', *The Wire* 341 (2012), 33.
- ⁴⁴ Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare* (Massachusetts: MIT, 2009).
- ⁴⁵ Gilbert and Pearson note that such collective experiences can oppose 'possessive individualism' for example (p. 150). Or, for Goodman, 'a particular concern will be shown for cultures and practices whose sonic processes seek to intensify low-frequency vibration as a technique of affective mobilization', p. xx.
- ⁴⁶ Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 149.
- ⁴⁷ LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories*, p. 150. LaBelle goes on to ask: 'Might the mega-bass, vibratory energy of this sonic-body-machine be heard to further *beat back* the violence streets have come to force onto Mexican-American and African-American youths within this city, as a deflecting shield turned into bass culture?'
- ⁴⁸ See, for example, Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Frances Dyson, 'When Is the Ear Pierced? The Clashes of Sound, Technology, and Cyberculture', in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, ed. by Mary Anne Moser and Douglas MacLeod (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 73–101; and for an overview see Greg Hainge's introductory chapter to *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), Kindle ed.
- ⁴⁹ Jonathan Sterne's 'audiovisual litany' is a key point of reference in this respect, in *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 14–19. The approaches to the ontology of vibration will be discussed over the next paragraphs.
- ⁵⁰ Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, p. 81.
- ⁵¹ Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*, p. 81.
- ⁵² As Peggy S. M. Hill explains, 'airborne sound and substrate-borne vibration signals are used in combination', and the sensory cells that detect substrate vibration also detect low-frequency sound, in *Vibrational Communication in Animals* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 14. This is how crickets, for example, can hear in the range of 2–8 Hz (University of Lincoln, 'Crickets' calling song hits the high notes', *ScienceDaily* (16 May 2013), www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/05/130516063845.htm [accessed 19 July 2018]).

- ⁵³ Jasen, *Low End Theory*, p. 47.
- ⁵⁴ Christoph Cox, 'Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism', *Journal of Visual Culture* 10.2 (2011), 145–61. Also see 'Sonic Realism and Auditory Culture: A Reply to Marie Thompson and Anne Goh', *Parallax* 24.2 (2018), 234–42.
- ⁵⁵ Brian Kane, 'Sound Studies without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn', *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.1 (2015), 2–21.
- ⁵⁶ Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (and see the first paragraph of this chapter).
- ⁵⁷ Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3 ('discourses on which it [telepathy] relied stretch from energy physics to neurology [...]); see also p. 11 for a further example of Luckhurst explaining the importance of discourse, where he argues that telepathy becomes 'an object of knowledge' through 'discursive constellations'); Luckhurst, 'Traumaculture', *New Formations* 50 (2003), 28–47, 28 ('discursive statements', 'conjuncture of discourses').
- ⁵⁸ Luckhurst, p. 88 (N-rays); and 89 (Crookes, quoted from presidential address to the SPR, reprinted *Borderland*, 4/2 (1897), 139).
- ⁵⁹ See, for example, Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- ⁶⁰ Luckhurst, 'Traumaculture', 34.
- ⁶¹ Felski, *The Limits of Critique*.
- ⁶² Kreilkamp, *Voice*, p. 77. For detailed analysis of voices in Dickens, and of the play between read and enunciated language, see Garrett Stewart's chapter 'Evocalizing Prose' in *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), and 'Splitting the Difference' in *The Deed of Reading: Literature, Writing, Language, Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015).
- ⁶³ As Jason Camlot has commented, in 'The Three-Minute Victorian Novel: Remediating Dickens into Sound', in *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies* ed. by Matthew Rubery (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 25–43. See also Rubery, 'Part 1: The Phonographic Library', for discussion of early ideas of phonographically recording Dickens's works, in *The Untold Story*, Kindle ed.
- ⁶⁴ John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Ian Carter reviews the criticism and observes how Carker's last seconds before he is run down by the train, as well as the rhythm of Dombey's journey, convey this tempo, in *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 71–91.
- ⁶⁵ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 298.

- ⁶⁶ Rubery, 'Introduction' to *The Untold Story*, Kindle ed. See also Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), and *The Deed of Reading: Literature, Writing, Language, Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), and Steven Connor, 'Writing the White Voice.'
- ⁶⁷ Shelley Trower, "'Upwards of 20,000": Extrasensory Quantities of Railway Shock', *The Senses and Society* 3.2 (2008), 153–67.
- ⁶⁸ Charles Babbage, *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher* (London: Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864), 320–1. See also my discussions in [Chapter 4](#), 'Pathological Motions: Railway Shock, Street Noises, Earthquakes', of *Senses of Vibration*, pp. 94–125.
- ⁶⁹ A. Mallock, 'The Study of Vibration', *Pearson's Magazine* 23 (March 1907), 322–8, 322.
- ⁷⁰ Discussed in Trower, *Senses of Vibration*, pp. 109–10.
- ⁷¹ Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2008); James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (University of Illinois Press, 2017).
- ⁷² Dickens, *Dombey*, p. 298.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 810, 820–1, 823.
- ⁷⁴ Charles Babbage, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1838), pp. 111–12. Features in *Dombey*, p. 362. Discussed by Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p. 39.
- ⁷⁵ Dickens, *Dombey*, p. 68.
- ⁷⁶ Dickens, *Dombey*, p. 68.
- ⁷⁷ 'Influence of Railway Travelling on Public Health', *Lancet* (8 March 1862), part 8, 258.
- ⁷⁸ Dickens's works featuring sound as a vibratory energy include *The Chimes*, in which the sounds of bells mysteriously communicate with and haunt the protagonist (first published in 1844).
- ⁷⁹ See, for an excellent example, Louise Henson, 'Investigations and Fictions: Charles Dickens and Ghosts', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 44–66.
- ⁸⁰ Dickens, 'The Signalman', in *Three Ghost Stories* (The Project Gutenberg eBook, Transcribed from the 1894 Chapman and Hall edition of 'Christmas Stories', 2013), www.gutenberg.org/files/1289/1289-h/1289-h.htm [accessed 19 July 2018].
- ⁸¹ Jasen, *Low End Theory*, p. 35.
- ⁸² For a nuanced account of the differences between 'shock' and 'trauma', terms often used interchangeably, see Tim Armstrong, 'Two Types of Shock in Modernity', *Critical Quarterly* 42.1 (2000), 60–73.

⁸³ For the critic Jill Matus, in 'Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection', 'The Signalman' dramatizes the mental effects of traumatic experience: 'the emphatic gap between knowledge and cognition, signing and meaning, the shocking external occurrence and its internal assimilation and representation', *Victorian Studies* 43.3 (2001), 413–36, 428.

⁸⁴ Dickens, 'The Signalman', eBook.

⁸⁵ Discussed by Jasen in *Low End Theory*, for example, and also Geoff Leventhall, 'A Review of Published Research on Low Frequency Noise and its Effects' (London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2003).

*Feminism and Sound**Ella Finer*

2018

This is a significant time to think about the way feminism sounds, or more critically how feminisms sound. The year of Vote 100 has hosted huge celebration for the centenary of equality in voting rights. Yet, even in the wake of both silent and loud protest at inequality in cultural industries *and* while calls to critique ‘the identitarian work of intersectionality’ are amplified, the most critical questions of privilege, power and difference in Women’s Rights (and how these make the project of feminism ever more complex) have been relatively quieter than the broad and general successes of women’s suffrage.¹ While an extraordinary achievement, the story of the Suffragettes is not ‘a single story’ as women’s suffrage scholar Sarah Jackson vitally reminds in her writing on working-class women’s roles in the movement.² Not all women got the vote in 1918: those over the age of 30, with property and education could vote after following Emmeline Pankhurst’s well-known call to ‘make more noise than anybody else.’ And yet, the many working-class women who supported the suffrage campaigns (who made noise quite literally as public speakers and lobbyists as well as symbolically) remain as ‘women quite unknown.’³ ‘Having a voice’ – the familiar sonic metaphor for having agency to act and represent oneself – was reserved for only some, not all, women. As such, I offer 2018 as context for thinking about ‘feminism and sound’ *now* – through literature, experimental music and sound art installation – towards the future in which you are reading, as an unfixed and ever-evolving partnership, where the terms and categories of *feminism* and *women* are always shifting. Significantly so in relation to issues of representation: 2018 also marks the year in which an explorative consultation for the reform of the Gender Recognition Act (2004) has taken place: a government consultation seeking to transform the intrusive and bureaucratic process – of trans people legally registering an acquired gender – into one of ‘dignity and respect.’⁴ I think of Sara

Ahmed's question in *Living a Feminist Life*: 'How to dismantle the world that is built to accommodate only some bodies?'.⁵ I think of this in relation to the consultation, but also specifically as Ahmed positions her question, in the wake of critical feminist voices rendering 'trans women into "not women," or "not born women," or into men.'⁶ This is a brief reminder of feminisms' multiple and distinct agendas through at least three historical waves and the ongoing ideological debates around biological and social/cultural experiences of living as a woman. Such debates are reignited as transgender rights are amplified and studies of gender and the voice draw critical attention to the 'many unchecked assumptions ... woven into the accepted wisdom about how and why women's and men's voices differ.'⁷ Crucially, studies of transgender voices foreground that the *sound* of the body, through the voice, complicates such assumptions and any notion of a singular or coherent identity, especially as they focus 'on a site in which the body and cultural processes of socialization and identity construction come into contact with one another.'⁸

One of the key arguments for reform of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) is that transgender people be legally permitted to self-identify, to self-declare their gender rather than present a case before a panel or as a medical diagnosis. And so, I underscore what follows with recognition for the ethics of representation, for the complex relation between the heard and the under-heard: who speaks on behalf of whom and with what permissions, with what assumptions?⁹

Echo

Attending to feminism *with* sound is to practice trans-historical listening, with ears simultaneously to the past and to the future. Many sounds characterised as female overlap and repeat again through time: for example, the keening women in Celtic Irish folklore resounding again in the bodies of the Greenham Common women, who walked and wailed in protest through Parliament Square in 1984. Their conscious reclaiming of sonic tradition in the form of mythologized 'feminized' sound for feminist action is useful to consider in relation to the complexity of constructing feminist identity as formed through/by history. This complexity would seem to be especially emphasised when – as Anna Feigenbaum writes of Greenham Common's adoption of the Celtic Goddess Bridget as 'song, spirit, icon' – 'a feminist project of historical recovery takes place.'¹⁰ This 'historical recovery' is both particular to the activist agenda of the Greenham women and also speaks more broadly of a methodology for

becoming audible as social agents. Feigenbaum cites Joan Scott's compelling work on the Fantasy Echo, the characterisation of 'retrospective identification', an identification with historical women and their agendas, to draw this out further:

Groups with suppressed histories, in this case women, often direct themselves toward the creation of historical lineages or genealogies that pick up on moments and figures across time and place in order to write their group into history. These patchworked narratives, Scott says, 'have the quality of echoes, resonating incompletely and sporadically, though discernibly, in the appeal to women to identify as feminists.'¹¹

The imperfect, delayed return of the sonic echo, methodologically underpinning and focusing this chapter, physically takes place in the space between surfaces: an echo happens when a sound is reflected back towards its source after hitting a hard surface. What we hear is the originating sound altered in acoustic character – largely dependent on the environmental characteristics it sounds within, for example what the sound is reflecting off and how far away it is. The physical echo will always return a sound distinct from the original, bearing the traces of its travel through time and space. Mark M. Smith, describing the echo as 'a faded facsimile of an original sound, a reflection of time passed', emphasises listening for echo's differences from 'origin' as critical historical method, as does Scott: echo 'invites a habit of listening that not only allows us to locate origin (temporally and spatially), but more important, test authenticity: how illustrative the sound was of the historical moment in which it was produced.'¹²

The echo, giving back only ever 'incomplete reproductions' of sound material is crucial in my consideration of feminism and sound within this one take on the intersection, most particularly as Scott emphasises: the effect of echo 'undermines the notion of enduring sameness that often attaches to identity.'¹³

Because the echo deals in difference, in the richness and complexity of sonic difference that might well be unintelligible, it provides a sonic method for *how* to listen to the complex subjects of Feminist study:

women refers to so many subjects, different and the same, that the word becomes a series of fragmented sounds, rendered intelligible only by the listener, who (in specifying her object) is predisposed to listen in a certain way.¹⁴

Making intelligible, though, is not without its own ethics of interpretation and attribution on the part of the listener. Scott continues that '*Women* acquires intelligibility when the historian or the activist looking for inspiration from the past attributes significance to (identifies with) what she

has been able to hear.¹⁵ Through feminism's kaleidoscopic lens – through subjects and what they hold dear, strive to change and transform – sonic culture produces its own kind of politics and history, which like a feedback loop folds back into how we attend to feminisms by ear. We are guided by those who 'pick up' something vital, or apparently so, in the air – those who compose history. But to echo again the very first lines of this chapter, we have to look critically at who is composing, who is attributing significance to what they hear and why. More diverse compositions of feminist history are called for: to listen for and to amplify the key historical notes of the under-heard, or more chillingly the 'never to be heard' in Zora Neale Hurston's words, as cited in Daphne Brook's essay on Hurston, in which she so powerfully situates Hurston's singing as 'embodied cultural documentation.'¹⁶ Brooks writes that Hurston, as with Civil Rights era activist and musician Odetta, 'pounded out the beat of overlooked histories through their bodies.'¹⁷ These women made history *and* theory in the practice of sounding, *though their bodies*, and their beat is amplified in Brook's listening and writing of it, as she effectively puts a hearing tube through the fabric of time, to playback louder than traditional expectations/assumptions of black women making sound.

Of course, historical expectations of Western women play a significant role in the intersection of feminism and sound. Feminism, in all its complexity, is already inbuilt into the way we hear (or think we hear) each other. Consider 'the haunting garrulity of the nymph Echo', who as Ann Carson reminds in *The Gender of Sound* is 'described by Sophokles as "the girl with no door on her mouth."¹⁸ Carson's subsequent reminder that 'putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day' casts the girl with doors flung wide as continual vocal disturbance to the dominant social acoustics of history: social acoustics which have so often sought to restrain and dominate women who speak out, who are deemed to talk excessively, too much, too loudly or out of turn.¹⁹ Mary Beard demonstrates the silencing of female speech as historical 'practice' in *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, showing through ancient history to present day 'just how deeply embedded in Western culture are the mechanisms that silence women, that refuse to take them seriously and that sever them ... from the centres of power.'²⁰

I have written on voices that resist such mechanisms elsewhere and most recently (with Emma Bennett) about Glenda Jackson's subversive speech acts in Parliament, especially at the Margaret Thatcher Tribute Debate in April 2013 during which (mostly male) voices can be heard

shouting 'shame on you!' and 'sit down!' as she speaks forcefully against the legacy of Thatcher's record in Government. In the recording of the debate, underneath Jackson's voice the clamour of disapproval is audible; if heckling cannot silence Jackson by stopping her speech, the voices will at least attempt to drown out her voice in the din.²¹ There are echoes of this silencing, even more forcefully so, in US Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren's reading of Coretta Scott King's 1986 letter criticising attorney general nominee Jeff Sessions' record on civil rights in February 2017. Warren's reading was cut short and the rationale for her silencing – 'she was warned ... nevertheless, she persisted' – was immediately adopted by feminist movements in the US. Refusing to stop – *persisting* – is as I outlined above a method of the sonic echo which will continue to sound, as long as there are surfaces from which to bounce, as a 'reflection of time passed.'²²

Considering the legacy of Echo as disturbance to the acoustic norm: a subversive, rather than subjugated, sonic character can offer ways of 1) listening to and 2) making sound that effects some change, however subtle, in the way women take up – command and occupy – space *and* time.

Echo cast as an ancient sound artist, formed and reformed both in the physical world and in literature, provides some of the most integral methods I have recently observed in sonic practices with feminised sound now: methods of motion and return – to confuse repetition, to refuse fixity, to take up space and time, to overlay, overlap, feedback. And it is most often the voice used as material to practice with – evidenced in such recent work as Ain Bailey's *The Pitch Sisters*, an installation of speakers from which a chorus of voices all sing the pitch hypothetically found to be the 'preferred' pitch of ciswomen, or Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*, in which a collective of women from Morocco and London physicalize a wall of sound so intense as to baffle all senses, or Deborah Pearson and Anna Snaith's *The Filibuster*: a performance spanning twelve hours with as many women taking up space and time by speaking successively, continuously, wherever the time takes them.²³

In what follows I briefly make the case for echoic sound as feminist method alongside considering Echo, the Greek mythological character whose reappearances through literature confer upon her a cumulative agency, evidenced in her sonic invention/intervention. From my reading of Echo as complicating any idea of a coherent female identity, I then consider echo's legacy through two recent examples of sonic art works: Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* and Sonya Boyce's *Devotional Series*, both of which insistently demand to take up space through sounding out

multiple times, and multiple women in and through history. Rather than constructing identities of the artist and/or audience, these works form collectives in and of those who witness. They are organised, following Jennifer Nash in her writing on black feminist love politics, 'around the vibrancy and complexity of difference.'²⁴

Echoes after Echo

The mythical character Echo is punished in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book III, by the goddess Hera for distracting her with conversation. Hera silences Echo, depriving her of all speech but for the ability to repeat the last lines of others' words. As with the myths of Philomela, her tongue cut out for fear she would speak the truth of her rape, and Cassandra, cursed to foresee and tell of prophecies that no one would believe, Echo's is a punishment transforming vocal agency into an enduring vocal captivity. This action, visited upon Echo as her eternal punishment, personifies the echo and the way it performs. That the acoustic echo bears the name of the classical female character is important to expand upon here in a discussion of feminism and sound because 1) Echo's disembodied voice cannot help but haunt the airwaves in any discussion of acoustical echo; 2) because Echo is a female character who practices with sound and animates a specific vocal practice in which she is both speaker and listener; and 3) because literary interpretations of the Echoes after Echo provide her character with new methods of vocal and sonic invention, methods which as I have suggested above, and go on to illustrate, are implicit in women's work with sound today.

'Echoes after Echo' suggests that there is an original character from which to depart, but as John Hollander comprehensively illustrates in his study on *The Figure of Echo*, before her appearance in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as the nymph Echo, 'we first hear echoes in Homer as reverberations and amplifications of battle noise or falling trees.'²⁵ Echo could not have come into being without identifying characteristics of the acoustic world, and now the acoustic world cannot forget her. The repercussion of this origin story born out of the mutual relation of sound-effect and character ensures the reappearance of the mythic persona of Echo through association, as in Hollander's example of Lucretius hearing the 'effect of a six or seven-fold echo' in his first century BC *De Rerum Natura*, when he perceives that 'echoes such as these cause imagined nymphs and satyrs to come into being.'²⁶ Through listening to the sonic effects of repeatedly overlayed sound – through hearing physical echoes in action – mythical

Echo's narrative is perceived and remembered among the bodily forms of nymphs and satyrs taking shape in the sonic landscape. Lucretius *hears* narrative in the sounding of space, and not just any space as his descriptions not only 'seem to evoke a quite favourable condition for hearing echoes: in a lonely, mountainous region at nighttime', but also in the space of the 'in-between', as Mieke Koenen considers in her writing on the 'echo-passage in Lucretius' "DRN" [De Rerum Natura].²⁷ Lucretius presents the echo as an "in-between phenomenon" ... precisely between a voice directly heard and a voice that completely fades away.²⁸ And in this in-between space Echo's character is only ever fleetingly forged, before another's interpretation sounds out the story again, differently.²⁹

Let me give a short review of the interpretations of Echo in literature to chart subtle adjustments in her character, adjustments that I then use to offer methods for interpreting Echo and echo in some recent examples of artists working with sound.

Can Echo disturb gendered power relations if she is doomed to repeat the trailing remnants of others' words? Echo as mythic character is, as P.A. Skantze rightly describes, 'a female voice who through perpetual motion sacrifices invention of ideas for elegiac repetition.'³⁰ Echo eulogises her own disappearance until she is a voice alone, but her disappearance is never complete. As a character, too, Echo endures, and through her literary afterlife as a character returned to and translated, she begins to find her own methods of invention and intervention as a 'disembodied and uncontrollable voice.'³¹

In Gina Bloom's analysis of 'seventeenth century poet, traveller and mythographer' George Sandys's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, she details the 'eerie possibility' that Echo's might be a 'volitional voice.'³² Even though Sandys's translation ultimately casts Echo's power of self-expression as 'immoral,' Bloom identifies 'how compelling Echo's legacy can be for contemporary feminist theories of agency.'³³ A significant part of that legacy is evident in Echo's vocal practice, as Bloom writes:

Whereas Ovid's Latin poem merely *suggests* that echoic sound can constitute voice, Sandys's translation more clearly represents aural reverberation as Echo's self-expression. Perhaps most tellingly, Echo's first word in Sandy's translation is the pronoun 'I.'³⁴

In a literal act of translation, Echo is granted her own subjectivity to speak her own words. In a new author's hands, she is reinvented, and however slight the interventional 'I' might appear, Echo's character begins to claim agency in speaking for herself. As a character whose destiny (and trait) is

to return only the last words or syllables of another's speech, significantly she begins to construct the emphatic *beginnings* of her own. Douglas Kahn clarifies how the acoustics of a physical echo can return the beginnings as well as ends of speech depending on the 'duration of speech and where a speaker is standing.'³⁵

The differently positioned speaker, who causes an echo to reflect the beginning of her speech, can be compared to the differently positioned author, who causes Echo to claim her own assertive first word. Speaking from different locations in space and in time composes the character of voice anew using the materials of the past: whether the materials are the altered sounds of an echo in different landscapes, or those literary materials altered in a new generation's approach and application, through an author's or translator's conscious attention to syntax and word order.

More early modern moves in Echo's evolution can be seen through Bloom's analysis of the Duchess's echo in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and her reminder that Echo's character in Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, 'speaks about forty independent lines' as a monologue.³⁶ Although not the character of mythical Echo per se, these Echoes after Echo cannot help but become attached to her legacy, cannot help but resemble and haunt her in character. The successive representations of Echo as literary character after Echo as myth will always make her a complex character, returning variously in different texts, different stagings, different bodies. And what appears in these instances is a type of citational echo, a spectre of past Echoes. In analysing a dramatic character as a form of phenomenal return, Rebecca Schneider makes evident the multiple returns implicit in a staging that reverberates. Drawing attention to how the staged spectre (the actor playing the disembodied persona of Hamlet's father) might make shifting temporalities appear from the sight of one body, she identifies a community of correlating 'characters' attending to the live actor who is already 'behind the spectre's visor':

For if behind the spectre's visor may be a live actor, certainly behind (or to the side) of the actor may be a spectre – of other actors, other spectres, other faux fathers, other scripts.³⁷

Carson's image of 'the girl with no door on her mouth' is all the more provocative when considering the many versions of Echo in literature and how they differ from Echo's first incarnation as a doomed repeater. Her new-found agency to speak differently, to compose differently communicates more forcefully because of her (non) narrative past. Rather than repeating history, the Echoes after Echo make new interventions

using language to identify their own subjectivity in subtle, but significant ways. In Bloom's configuration of how Echo, 'constitutes her personhood through the words which are available to her', Bloom describes the practice of the auditor-composer, an idea I have developed elsewhere in an article on Ophelia as an expert listener, who like Echo recomposes what she hears and as a practiced listener is 'ready to await the sounds.'³⁸ Gradually though, through time, Echo appears as a character who not only listens to other's voices, but more importantly composes the sounds of her own. Giving Echo the autonomy to speak her own lines decentres the symbolic trait of her character, because she finds her own vocabulary and/or she artfully discerns what words to repeat. The autonomy granted Echo's character in *The Duchess of Malfi* is significant, because her responses are formed as knowing answers. On hearing the Echo near the Duchess's tomb in Act V, Scene III, Delio encourages Antonio to make of it what character he will, but ultimately the Echo determines her own character:

DELIO: I told you t'was a pretty one. You
may make it
A huntsman, or a falconer a musician,
Or a thing of sorrow.
ECHO: *A thing of Sorrow.*³⁹

Bloom observes how 'the echo throws sounds back to their producer, creating what appears to be an independent vocal act' and I would suggest this is as much a mark of the physical character of Echo as it is of the dramatic character. Echo is both listening subject and speaking subject:

The echo's capacity to 'speak' is precipitated by its capacity to 'hear,' as hearing and speaking become two sides of the same disembodied vocal process, virtually indistinguishable from each another.⁴⁰

Kahn identifies the acoustic phenomena of the echo as 'the only prephonographic method to hear one's own voice,'⁴¹ but in relying on a reproduction of one's voice, bounced back from a reflective surface, the sound will always return altered. This important practice of speaking in order to listen again differently to that speaking is part of Echo's compelling legacy *and* how she can participate in a feminist project such as Elin Diamond's 'feminist mimesis,' which 'would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not producing the same.'⁴²

Echo and echo offer a way of *unmaking mimesis*, to use Diamond's title, but not only through practicing with recomposing the physical properties of sounds heard. While Echo can and has been used simply as

the vessel and carrier of other people's words, the Echoes after Echo demonstrate that re-writing, re-staging, re-interpreting characters through time recomposes the character in each 'new' appearance. Furthermore, the further away the legacy of the distant and impossible 'original' Echo (or any legendary or popular character), the more of her versions attend the character we witness now. Echo's 'compelling legacy' for feminism is present in her vocalicity 'geared to change', charted through literature where she is variously composer, editor and sound experimentalist, and as I will now propose is also evident in the reverberations of women working with/in sound today.

Compelling Legacies

What are sonic legacies? Who creates them, or feels entitled to participate in their making? The absence of women in the history books of the new/ancient discipline of Sound Studies has been significant, with renowned author Douglas Kahn even offering an introductory apology for the representational imbalance in his 'history of voice, sound and aurality in the Arts' owing to 'lack of time and resources' while other historical surveys unapologetically reaffirm the white, male canon of experimental sound practices.⁴³ These again shed the starkest light on who exactly is composing history, who is attributing significance to what they hear and why. A recent and curious case of the treatment of women in relation to sonic histories takes place in composer and writer Eldritch Priest's book on experimental music in which he spins a seemingly scholarly yarn so great that he fabricates a whole generation of avant-garde sound experimentalists, *but* even dreaming up a fictional line up excludes women from the story. This may be because the fictional composers whose work he discusses are versions of himself, but, whatever the reason, this storytelling only serves to bolster the boundary lines between those who can play or are invited to play with sound most audibly/visibly and those who are not. This exposes another boundary line: between those who can 'play' in Priest's own words those 'whose agency is always (already) secure ... those who have always already succeeded as social agents' and those whose agency is more precarious.⁴⁴ Something Priest does as one of those 'who have always already succeeded' (by his own admission) is allow himself to play with who get to be the main players in one historical line-up of sound makers. Priest's whole book is constructed around the conceit of game-playing, but he exposes in play what has been all too common in authoring histories of sound – the exclusion of women's sonic practices.

As another way in to thinking about how women's experimental practices with sound now take place and/or make places, the context of experimental music is useful for three reasons: 1) because in recent years experimental music has gained increased critical attention as a feminist subject (by writers such as Marie Thompson, Annie Goh and Frances Morgan and through important projects such as *Pink Noise* by Tara Rodgers and *Her Noise* initiated by Lina Džuverović and Anne Hilde Neset in 2001), 2) because some of the most widely recognised and celebrated female innovators/inventors of sound art practices worked in this field: Elaine Radigue (1932), Pauline Oliveros (1932–2016), Daphne Oram (1925–2003), Delia Derbyshire (1937–2001), Bebe Barron (1925–2008) and 3) because these women and others worked with sound making equipment and materials which needed space – a 'workshop' – a working place – a room, a shed, a studio, a corridor . . .

There is a wonderful description of sound taking up space, or the promise of sound taking up space most materially in the recollections of Delia Derbyshire, probably best known for her work in the BBC Radiophonic Workshop realising the theme tune of *Doctor Who* in 1963.⁴⁵ As is well known, making such sounds with feedback and tape was initially a very physical, hand-made process. Until the synthesiser largely took over this practice, the work of making sound necessitated *making space*. In Derbyshire's recollection, she not only describes the spatiality of a sound making scene, but also seems to give the sound material (in this case tape) intent and direction through naming the places it passes – as if it (the tape) had taken a walk: 'it went out through the double doors and then through the next pair, just opposite the ladies toilet and reception' . . . 'the longest corridor in London with the longest tape loop!'⁴⁶ Derbyshire's tape stretching through the building is a striking image of a sound material not only taking up space but demarcating place, mapping a corridor and its landmarks.

Derbyshire, who had studied Maths and Music, was a sonic inventor whose oft-cited anecdotes – such as her cutting up her own taped voice to make the sound of camel hooves crossing a dessert – figure her relationship with sound as one of imaginative pragmatism, especially considering her role in, as she names it 'a service department.' As Jo Hutton emphasises in her writing on *Radiophonic Ladies*, Derbyshire, as with Daphne Oram and Maddalena Fagadini, 'worked under enormous pressure to meet deadlines, in an environment where the only rule was to satisfy the drama producer.'⁴⁷ And as Derbyshire recounts herself in an interview with Hutton from 2000, the 'workshop was purely a service department for drama. The BBC made it quite clear that they didn't employ composers and we weren't supposed to be doing music.'

JH: What were you doing?

DD: It was music, it was abstract electronic sound, organised.⁴⁸

The ‘abstract [...] organised’ is composition even if not allowed to be named so. Even while Derbyshire was doing her job, *a* job, for those more senior, there is a particular kind of agency attached to these early scenes of experimental sound making led by women in the Radiophonic Workshop: the transgressive tape loop, the vocal fragments hidden in Foley, and even the double doors (‘out through the double doors’) as alternative metaphor for the glass ceiling – a lateral move, to broach boundaries traditionally demarcated/coded as male in the workplace.

But of course, sound off-the-record and in-the-live is an altogether stranger material to ‘map.’ This is especially so with voice: its ‘sonic substance’ (as philosopher Adriana Cavarero describes the physical material of speech) never forgetting the body it came from.⁴⁹ As Bloom writes: ‘as a consequence of its mobility, and spatial indeterminacy, the voice has the capacity for even greater “flux” than the body.’⁵⁰ The voice is unfixed. In an early modern context, she argues that this peculiar motility of voice can ‘effect surprising forms of subversion’ of gender ideologies.⁵¹ The voice can confuse where bodies are located, but crucially this confusion is also always dependent on the space in which voice is sounded. For the listener of the voice it can seemingly belong in multiple places: in others’ bodies, in objects, in the air – all depending on the atmosphere, environment and architecture it is sounded in. We are, as Bruce Smith writes ‘surrounded – and filled – by a continuous field of sound.’⁵² When we voice into this humming, drumming sonic world we can only do so much to direct how it will sound from our own bodies – the rest is up to the surrounding space, the place in which we speak, which is not always predictable.

As R. Murray Schafer reminds us: ‘sound, being more mysterious than scientists would like to believe, inhabits space rather erratically and enigmatically.’⁵³ I have noticed an increased interest in women sounding out the spaces they inhabit as artists through building or rebuilding (or is this re-pitching?) their sonic environments through voice and the sound of their bodies: both choosing particular methods for vocalising, and (most importantly given the practice of echo to occupy space with sound) particular *spaces* for performing these voice artworks within (*and* without).

Bouchra Ouizguen’s *Corbeaux* took place in the Serpentine Pavilion in summer 2017. A group of twenty women (ten from Morocco and ten from London) took a place in turn in the centre of the crowded and very small space and once gathered started. They started. There are no words for the

sound that exploded relative silence in an instant, pushed me against the wall and simultaneously made me want to laugh and sob. My responses were a mess – I was in the wake of an incredible sonic onslaught made by women standing still, only heads rocking back and forward – necks like bending rubber. I realised I wanted to compose myself, I wanted to have a coherent reaction (whatever that might have meant), but the collective wailing (was it wailing?) was stripping me of all sense making. I was already against a wall, everyone was – we had lined the Pavilion wall as we walked in and now everyone was pinned to it. In his writing ‘against soundscape’, Tim Ingold reminds us that ‘the sweep of sound continually endeavours to tear listeners away, causing them to surrender to its movement. It requires an effort to stay in place.’³⁴ He is talking about the sound around us in the environment ‘out in the open’, sound as wind, sound like the wind, sound which never stays put – we have all experienced I am sure, following sounds and shifting attention, moving our bodies in relation, in order to apprehend. In artist Nic Green’s performance *Turn*, for example, at Glasgow’s graving docks last winter, her choir’s voices hovered in the distance then filtered through torrential rain to reach an audience lining the great sunken amphitheatre of Govan’s dry dock. Green’s voices out in the open, in the weather, could only go roving in the immense site. But *Corbeaux*, provisionally sheltered in the Serpentine Pavilion, had walls, however temporary and minimal. And in collaboration with the container of the Pavilion, *Corbeaux*’s vocal force held its audience captive – the focus of the sound so powerfully concentrated in the centre of the space and exploding outward that, at least in my experience as auditor to this work, I was being asked to surrender not so much to sound’s movement, but to its volume, its huge and booming scale effecting this pushing outwards. A scale not containable in the too small Pavilion, but having to be contained nonetheless. Women’s voices with no amplification technology – *loud*, so loud a microphone would distort the sound. I made no effort to ‘stay in place’ because I was already in place, held there by the voices and the architecture – in a room like a shell.

Bouchra Ouizguen has said of *Corbeaux* that ‘everything remains to be done’: even ‘though it has been created, each time there are things beyond my control.’³⁵ To work with sound, to work with the voice, is to work with something beyond control. This is part of Bloom’s project in *Voice in Motion*, where her development of subtle strategies for women gaining vocal agency articulates the woman’s understanding of vocal control and, crucially, her ability to let go of it. Bloom argues, ‘the breath – ephemeral, mobile, unpredictable, indeed invisible – defies supervision and resists

choreography.³⁶ But when space is demarcated as place, boundaried and contained by physical elements like walls, the sound of the voice must submit to some conditioning/some choreography. There are alternative ways to practice subversively with voice even within walls, and this simple but startling performance demonstrated one of these. The version of *Corbeaux* I saw and heard took place within walls, but in practice the voices effected something that challenged those walls to hold, and in turn challenged those present 'to hold', because lining the walls of the Pavilion our spectating bodies became the wall – the point of contact and reflection for the women's voices to bounce from and to. We were the sounding board with no choice but to resonate with and for the women gathered in the centre of our strangely shaped circle.

But the particular place these women voiced within also lends dimension to the voices', social and political, if not physical dimension. The Pavilion walls were made of blue painted wood, with small gaps between the triangular 'bricks', like a textile. The building was light while enclosed. It was designed by architect Francis Kéré who grew up in Burkino Faso and imposes its own history (and the history of its architect), its concept and materials on the voices of *Corbeaux*. One compelling detail that struck me in reading a news article on the Pavilion's opening is how 'Kéré spoke of a way of making floors in Burkina Faso, whereby women dance on the earth until it is compacted and hard.'³⁷ Ouizguen's troupe of women from Morocco and London, whose bodies are still-in-place while 'crowing' sound out differently again, as this detail adds to my own 'building' of the performance space and my listening to the voices in and out of time. I can now perceive stamping, dancing feet where the troupe's feet are grounded, even if not hearing them. An impression in the air for an impression in the ground. Women define the space of the Pavilion through the echo, as acoustic and as metaphor: I hear the repeated and dissonant vocal punch of *heh-yeh. heh-yeh. heh-yeh.* of the gathered women as much as I hear the pounding of the ground by a group of imagined women.

2018

On one of the first days of the new year, January 2018, I am standing in the opening gallery of *Sounds Like Her* on its closing day: an exhibition on gender, sound and sonic cultures developed and curated by Christene Eyene with Melanie Kidd. The exhibition aims, they write in the introduction, not only to challenge 'the patrilineal trajectory that has defined the history of sound art', but equally 'the Eurocentric frameworks that

continue to dominate the scene today.³⁸ And it is in this first room – an installation of Sonya Boyce's *Devotional Series* (1999–present), her ongoing and expanding archival project spanning nearly 20 years – that another history, an other framework and trajectory for critical, close attention to women making/working with sound is offered. The names of two hundred black British females in the music industry fill the gallery walls: emboldened names within patterns of fluid lines making up Boyce's *Devotional Wallpaper*. Stacked against the walls are placards detailing images of these women from print material including posters and magazines collected together in groups, in solidarity.

Boyce's installation is devotion as active, political force: a method of making audible those who 'like background noise ... had been erased from popular consciousness.'³⁹ What, for me, is most striking about Boyce's graphic foregrounding of these musicians is the insistence of the multiple rings hand-drawn close around each name – a repetitive and expanding affirmation for each individual artist. While these provide visual stimulation, as the names (... Sade, Sinitta, Sista Culture, Shirley Thompson ...) buzz in the optical trickery of their surrounding lines, *Devotional Wallpaper* draws on the most classical depiction of the movement of sound waves: the stone dropping in water and concentric circles radiating outwards in rings on the surface. On this familiar 'visual analog' for sound, Douglas Kahn reminds of the 'long-standing association of water and sound in observational acoustics from antiquity through Chaucer to Helmholtz and beyond' by illustrating how 'the sound of a stone hitting water' produced 'a visual counter-part, which was then mapped back onto the invisible movement of sound waves.'⁴⁰

Boyce appears to have made her own visual counter-part to the sounds of those not so easily known or fixed. Her concentric circles are abstracted – they are no uniform shape around an originary sound source as the stone in the water example depicts. The typed names at the centre of each brick-like space on the wall create concentric *shapes*, modelled on the names they surround. These concentric shapes are lines repeated until the limits of their rectangular border and no two are the same. A sonic work on paper, the names leave their mark as well as their reverberations, their vibrations through space. Boyce's line drawings *look like noise*.

Boyce's archival project uses the materials of protest in still life – the placards are arranged against the noisy wallpaper, names of sonic women popping from the surface. But this is an installation for being in and with, for discovery, for study and for action in the continuous – so while at first a room of objects, the room vibrates with the promise

and possibility of hearing society differently, of opening up a far greater sonic field and calling attention to it, quietly but forcefully. In Jennifer Nash's work on black feminist love-politics she writes how it 'has long been invested in the "open end," in radical possibility, orienting itself toward a yet-unknown future.'⁶¹ *Devotional Series* makes such an investment in the continuous, exploring over time how the social acoustics of the work changes, as the world changes, following the ethos of a black feminist love-politics which

constantly evokes what 'has yet to be known, seen, or heard' (Puar 2007, 216) or what Kelley calls the labor of 'talk[ing] openly of revolution and dream[ing] of a new society, sometimes creating cultural works that enable communities to envision what's possible with collective action, personal self transformation, and will' (Kelley 2002, 7).⁶²

With this evocation of *dreaming towards*, and most vitally as collective project rather than individual pursuit, I want to close by returning to the practice of trans-historical listening I began with, in relation to listening ahead. Because feminism is not only composed by those who have listened back, but crucially and critically by those who listen ahead – those who gauge the direction of wind blowing from elsewhere. Nash's project can inform those who work with sound and historically under-represented subjects in radical ways – to speak to the histories of feminism yet to be made, to gather together and act as sound does. For in practice sound reflects, echoes, resonates, reverberates – moves in its own continuum – not simply to play-back what has come before, but to vibrate on.

Notes

¹ Jennifer Nash, 'Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality', *Meridians* 11.2 (2011), 1–24 (p. 13).

² See Sarah Jackson's articles for the *Guardian* and the British Library, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/12/suffragettes-white-middle-class-women-pankhursts; www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/women-quite-unknown-working-class-women-in-the-suffrage-movement.

³ In her article for the British Library, Sarah Jackson cites WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) member Mary Gawthorpe's exclamation to Lady Constance Lytton in relation to the rough treatment received by working class women arrested for political action: 'Oh, and these are women quite unknown – nobody knows or cares about them except their own friends. They go to prison again and again to be treated like this, until it kills them!'

- ⁴ From LGBT Policy Team, Government Equalities Office document: *Reform of the Gender Recognition Act – Government Consultation*, July 2018, p. 20, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721725/GRA-Consultation-document.pdf.
- ⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 14.
- ⁶ Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 14.
- ⁷ Lal Zimman, 'Transgender Voices: Insights on Identity, Embodiment, and the Gender of the Voice', *Lang Linguist Compass*, 12 (2018), p. 11.
- ⁸ Zimman, 'Transgender Voices', p. 2.
- ⁹ I gratefully acknowledge the generosity of Marcia Farquhar, Flora Pitrolo, P.A. Skantze and Jacqueline Springer, who have each informed so much of the work in this chapter.
- ¹⁰ Anna Feigenbaum, "'Now I'm a Happy Dyke!': Creating Collective Identity and Queer Community in Greenham Women's Songs", *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 22.4 (2010), 367–88 (p. 374).
- ¹¹ Feigenbaum, "'Now I'm a Happy Dyke!'."
- ¹² Mark M. Smith, 'Echo', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 55–64 (p. 55).
- ¹³ Joan W. Scott, 'Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 27.2 (2001), 284–304 (p. 291).
- ¹⁴ Scott, 'Fantasy Echo', p. 285.
- ¹⁵ Scott, 'Fantasy Echo', p. 292.
- ¹⁶ Daphne A. Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?': Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood", *Amerikastudien* 55.4 (2010), 617–27 (p. 618).
- ¹⁷ Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?'" , pp. 625–6.
- ¹⁸ Ann Carson, 'The Gender of Sound', in *Glass, Irony and God* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1995), 119–42 (p. 121).
- ¹⁹ Carson, 'The Gender of Sound.'
- ²⁰ Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2018). Beard's manifesto is in part a response to her own experiences of these mechanisms, especially abuse she has suffered online. Significantly, for this chapter thinking through echoic methods as feminist, Beard has found agency in re-posting offensive tweets targeting her, effectively throwing the comments back out as echo into the twittersphere.
- ²¹ Emma Bennett and Ella Finer, 'Mending Speech: Glenda Jackson's Verbal "Caring-for"', in *Amending Speech: Women's Voices in Parliament, 1918–2018*, ed. by Maggie Inchley and John Vice (London: Hansard, 2018), pp. 230–5.
- ²² Smith, 'Echo', p. 55.
- ²³ For more information on these artworks visit: Ain Bailey, https://soundcloud.com/ain_bailey/the-pitch-sisters-edit; Bouchra Ouizguen, www.bouchraouizguen.com/corbeaux and Deborah Pearson and Anna Snaith, www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/-/projects/the-filibuster.
- ²⁴ Nash, 'Practicing Love', p. 11.

- ²⁵ John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 6.
- ²⁶ Hollander, *The Figure of Echo*, p. 12.
- ²⁷ Mieke Koenen, "Loca Loquuntur." Lucretius' Explanation of the Echo and Other Acoustic Phenomena in "DRN", *Mnemosyne* 57.6 (2004), 698–724 (p. 710).
- ²⁸ Koenen, 'Loca Loquuntur', p. 719.
- ²⁹ For more on echo in the 'in-between' space, see pp. 185–6 of my essay 'Strange Objects/Strange Properties: Female Audibility and the Acoustic Stage Prop', in *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*, ed. by Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 177–87.
- ³⁰ P.A. Skantze, *Stillness in Motion in the Seventeenth Century Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 69.
- ³¹ Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 161.
- ³² Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 164.
- ³³ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 185.
- ³⁴ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 164.
- ³⁵ Douglas Kahn, 'Acoustic Sculpture, Deboned Voices', *New Music Articles* 8 (1990), 3–7 (p. 6).
- ³⁶ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 242.
- ³⁷ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 110.
- ³⁸ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 171.
- ³⁹ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus (London: Methuen Drama, 2009), p. 325.
- ⁴⁰ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 161.
- ⁴¹ Kahn, 'Acoustic Sculpture, Deboned Voices', p. 6.
- ⁴² Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. xvi.
- ⁴³ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 13–14.
- ⁴⁴ Eldritch Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 27.
- ⁴⁵ Although Ron Grainer who had scored the work gained the credit and 100 per cent of royalties. Despite offering Derbyshire half the royalties the BBC would not allow this.

- ⁴⁶ Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 88–9.
- ⁴⁷ Jo Hutton, 'Radiophonic Ladies', interview with Delia Derbyshire, 24 February 2000, <http://delia-derbyshire.net/sites/ARTICLE2000JoHutton.html> [accessed 27 February 2019].
- ⁴⁸ Hutton, 'Radiophonic Ladies.'
- ⁴⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 220.
- ⁵⁰ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 16.
- ⁵¹ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 16.
- ⁵² Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 9.
- ⁵³ R. Murray Schafer, 'Acoustic Space', *Circuit* 17.3 (2007), 83–6 (p. 84).
- ⁵⁴ Tim Ingold, 'Against Soundscape', in *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, ed. by A. Carlyle (Paris: CRISAP and Double Entendre, 2007), p. 12.
- ⁵⁵ Leila Tayeb, 'Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*: A Horde of Crows, Disparate and Together', *Walker Art Centre Magazine*, 18 September 2017, Performing Arts section, <https://walkerart.org/magazine/bouchra-ouizguen-crows-corbeaux> [accessed 28 October 2017].
- ⁵⁶ Bloom, *Voice in Motion Shaping Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, p. 109.
- ⁵⁷ Rowan Moore, 'Serpentine Pavilion 2017: Francis Kéré's Cool Shades of Africa', *The Observer*, 25 June 2017, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jun/25/francis-kere-serpentine-pavilion-2017-review-burkina-faso [accessed 27 February 2019].
- ⁵⁸ Christene Eyene and NAE, *Sounds Like Her* Exhibition Guide (Nottingham: New Art Exchange, 2018), p. 8.
- ⁵⁹ Eyene and NAE, *Sounds Like Her*, p. 3.
- ⁶⁰ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, p. 75. Kahn points out however that this is a particularly popularised antiquated visualisation of the motion of sound. Regarding the development of inscriptive practices in the late eighteenth century loosening 'the reliance of acoustics on music,' Kahn writes 'There had of course been numerous means in the past to visualise sound, but the ability to make the invisible visible and to hold the time of sound still entered a new phase. The concentric rings on the surface of water that had since antiquity provided a visual analog in time for advancing spheres of sound within the air gave way in 1785 to the inscriptive stasis and intricacy of Chladni's sound figures of sand on the surface of plates and subsequently to other instrumental means for tracking and trapping time' (1999, 75).
- ⁶¹ Nash, 'Practicing Love', p. 16.
- ⁶² Nash, 'Practicing Love', pp. 16–17.

*Wireless Imaginations**Debra Rae Cohen*

What is the object of 'literary' radio studies? At first blush, this seems a peculiar question; the last twenty years have seen a proliferation of work on the radio broadcasts of modernist writers, on radio as a pervasive metaphor in modernist cultural production, on radio broadcasts as literary texts, on the distinctively modernist qualities of the medium, on the cultural influence of radio within different national media systems, on the use of radio for education, for citizenship, for revolution and in wartime.¹ And yet this very proliferation of radio-oriented work raises the question with which I have begun, and raises it in two ways: 1) What is the *object* of literary radio studies, in the sense of its purpose – what does it provide, and what will it continue to provide, that media studies has not already given us? and 2) What is its *object* of study?²

If the second question seems easier to answer, it is also more deeply revealing of a methodological fracturing (and an unacknowledged schism) within this burgeoning subfield that in turn makes it harder to answer the first. The very inclusion of this chapter within *Sound and Literature* gestures at these issues: the chapter sits athwart the others, which largely engage particular methodologies, many of which are essential to, and jostle, coexist, or compete within, recent radio-oriented scholarship; 'radio' is, singularly, pruned out of the broader soundscape, rendering media ecology as monoculture (in the agricultural, rather than Arnoldian, sense); the umbrella designation of 'wireless imaginations' references yet fails to contain a subfield as diffuse as a dissipating echo. Both 'literature' and (somewhat counterintuitively) 'sound' in fact prove thorny, it turns out, as we shall see, for literary radio studies.

Sound and Archive

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given its emergence from English departments (a side effect of the expansion of the remit of the 'new modernist studies'

into the realm of cultural studies), the recent movement to recuperate radio as a 'forgotten' yet deeply significant element of the context for modernist cultural production (or what we now term the modernist-period media ecology) has privileged the radio *text* – or rather, its para-texts.³ If this is, in part, a disciplinary bias, it is one that in this case tries to make a virtue of necessity.⁴ As Michael Coyle, Jane A. Lewty and I put it in the introduction to *Broadcasting Modernism* (2009), 'Radio was, at the outset, and by definition, an especially ephemeral medium, incapable of inscription. [...] The very lack of an archive, the dissipation of waves in space, makes it almost impossible to reconstitute that very radio *presence* that so fundamentally marked the decades of the 1920s and 1930s.'⁵ As we noted there, if it is the very unrecoverability of the radio event that resulted in the medium's long neglect in retrospective accounts of modernist cultural production, it may be, paradoxically, the same uncanny transience that accounted for its hold on the imaginary of the period.⁶ The acousmatic delocalization that, according to John Mowitt, poses the 'problem' of radio for philosophy and critical theory – makes it so central to twentieth-century thought – is reproduced in the conditions of its study.⁷

As Emily Bloom pithily recapitulates the problem, 'radio's history is not, in essence, a material history.'⁸ How scholars position themselves in relation to this dilemma – whether in fact they acknowledge it as a dilemma at all – and how they conceptualize the radio 'archive' reveals a significant methodological fissure. Several important, even vital, early works of the recent radio boom respond to the difficulty of hearing works – let alone hearing them in context, or accessing the conditions of their performance and reception – by paradoxically flattening broadcast into script, eliding the formal demands of the medium even as they argue for its centrality.⁹ Sound, for instance, appears (for all intents and purposes) nowhere in Todd Avery's foundational volume *Radio Modernism* (2006), which, though framed by a sensitive acknowledgment of the cultural importance of the new medium, largely treats that medium as transparent, a new and challenging 'vehicle for ethical engagement.'¹⁰ Similarly, as I've argued elsewhere, many scholars who have usefully explored the BBC's importance as a venue for modernist literature fail to distinguish between broadcasts, scripts, and the versions that appeared in BBC periodicals like the *Listener*, heedless of the remediations that distinguish them.¹¹

In some sense this slippage can be explained away as merely a choice of focus (a focus on the political, the institutional, the 'strictly' literary);

given the impossibility of recapturing the *ne plus ultra* of the 'audible experience', the embodied act of listening, why dwell on the unrecoverable?¹² Indeed, Jeffrey Sconce, who has done more than anyone to investigate the historical resonances of the medium's perceived uncanniness, warns from within media studies of the dangers of fetishizing the action of media in shaping subjectivities:

By conflating subjectivity and discourse, experience with representation, and ideology with imagination, the new apparatus theory's promotion of [media] as historical emblems of consciousness confuses discourses *on* subjectivity with the ultimately unknowable historical phenomenology *of* media and subjectivity. It is always tempting and seemingly self-evident, for example, to interpret period speculation over the marvels of a new medium's 'powers' or premature diagnoses of a self-identified zeitgeist as evidence of actual transformations in the lived experience of time, space, and subjectivity. Thus has [Walter] Benjamin transformed from a figure writing *within* modernity to a direct eyewitness or transcendental oracle of modernity.¹³

Sconce's point is well-taken; the confusion he cites is often evidenced, in particular, in work by literary scholars whose self-schooling in media studies proceeds by way of Friedrich Kittler. Certainly, too, not all radio work need be structured around the attempt to eff the ineffable. Yet in attempting to render moot the unrecoverability of the radio event, some have gone to the extreme of assuming the parity of that event and its trace. Most notably, Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning and Henry Mead, in their introduction to the useful collection *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (2014), seem to preemptively void the difference in their contention that the BBC Written Archives Centre and similar repositories contain 'precisely the archives' that we asserted, in *Broadcasting Modernism*, cannot exist.¹⁴ But this is like yelling 'Sarge, the perpetrator escaped. But we've got the window he broke.' While Lisa Gitelman has amply reminded us that the historiography of inscriptive media is almost inextricable from their historical operations *of* inscription (in a caution that resonates with Sconce's), the historiography of broadcast radio lacks both that complication and that advantage.¹⁵ While the radio archive may be a site of multiple and overlapping media forms, *radio* is not one of them.

What's at stake here is not just (to use Diana Taylor's terms) the confusion of archive and repertoire; the editors' repeated recourse to the descriptor 'empirical' to characterize and valorize the posture of their volume threatens to cast the archive itself as transparent, occluding

the very processes of mediation and classification that determine its form and content.¹⁶ At the BBC Written Archive Centre in particular – tremendously valuable resource that it is – the preservation and organization of information was set up from the outset less as a repository of broadcasts (or, rather, their paratexts) than as a mechanism of institutional self-justification, a paper trail on which to draw for the repeated and necessary defence of the Corporation's mandate. The bland inscrutability and imperviousness of the Corporation's outward image during Sir John Reith's tenure as its first Director-General belied the level of anxious calculation with which the members of the hierarchy scrutinized that image, and planned against both the scheduled review of its charter in 1935 and the repeated attacks by hostile press interests. It's striking, in reading through the archived institutional exchanges, both the amount of internal rehearsal that was constantly going on – not just for retrospective reconstruction (something we can still see in the BBC's highly managed strategy of digitization), but for reconstruction in the moment – and the extent to which archived minutes of the upper-level meetings elide this process with euphemism. At the same time, the archive is, in terms of its classificatory logics, what can only be described as jerry-built, not a system founded on a clear ontology, but one in which the institution's internal adjustments to protocols of the emerging medium constantly overwrite its archival organization. To present the archive simply as 'treasure trove' for a 'source-based methodology', then, rather than as itself a site of remediation, and of the very institutional processes it records, demonstrates the continued relevance of Gitelman's observation that media sit at 'the intersection of authority and amnesia.'¹⁷

Although Taylor figures repertoire and archive not as sequential or static binaries but as mutually imbricated and evolving processes of knowledge production, storage and transmission, she also underscores the real historical consequences of the 'impossibility of archiving the live.'¹⁸ You don't have to be Foucault to understand an archive as a knowledge machine, and the 'implications of what is saved and what is forgotten.'¹⁹ Thus occluding these mediatory and classificatory processes – occluding the absence of *radio* – may in fact also occlude the political in unanticipated ways. More recent work in fact recognizes radio archives as dynamic sites of remediation and reconfiguration: Daniel Gomes, for instance, has recently discussed post-World War II sound archives as 'primary components' of broadcasting, active sites of preservation and propagation and the construction of the category of the 'authentic.'²⁰ And many of

the essays in Feldman, Tønning, and Mead's volume do in fact achieve a more nuanced balance than the introduction, rendering the salience of the broadcast event by reading formal elements not simply of script but of radio back into their archivally derived arguments. Alex Goody's article on the controversies surrounding Dorothy Sayers's 1941–42 dramatic BBC series, *The Man Born to Be King*, for instance, hinges on the radical notion of an “‘impersonation’ of divinity’ dependent on voice, tracing Sayers's deployment of the intimacy and oracularity of the medium in the face of public objection.²¹ Goody, writing about the wartime period, was able to hear recordings of most of the original broadcasts, but this is not the key element here, although it does allow her to make some trenchant observations about accent; rather, it is her methodological marriage of the formal and the historical. Goody's piece invites us to think about the ontologies of voice in relation to institutional processes – something not dependent on accessing recordings. Josephine Dolan has pointed out that ‘research with written archives is as likely as sound archives of recorded texts to produce knowledge about radio/broadcasting and “voice”’, warning of the dangers of fetishizing available sonic traces.²² In an archival economy of sonic scarcity, in fact, its piecemeal presence can paradoxically take us further from the broadcast event.

‘Craftsmanship’

Take the case, for instance, of the widely circulated ‘unique example’ of the ‘surviving’ voice of Virginia Woolf.²³ This recorded excerpt of ‘Craftsmanship’, her last of only three broadcasts, long known to be available for auditing in the British Library, has been made digitally available in recent years by the BBC as part of its own controlled repurposing of its own history. While its public availability has triggered some amending of previous allusions to Woolf's broadcasting career, it is the recording itself that has been widely fawned over, augmented, repackaged, and further remediated – a process of recirculation that, significantly, further marks the original ‘survival’ – booty from the archive's ‘trove’ – as transparent, and further occludes the broadcast event.²⁴ While the ‘full’ text of ‘Craftsmanship’ – or rather, the text of the script that was in turn subtly edited for broadcast, in, to use the suggestive terms of Stuart N. Clarke, ‘Woolf's and another's hand’ – has been the basis for most analyses of Woolf's views in the piece, the distracting existence of the recording, I would argue, unbalances even those readings that do treat it as radiogenic.²⁵

Woolf delivered the broadcast as one entry in a series called *Words Fail Me*, her title, as the opening of the talk suggests, a placeholder that she uses less as her subject than (as in the lecture title 'Women and Fiction' that serves to provoke the narrative spirals of *A Room of One's Own*) as a straw man to replace with her own rendering of language and subjectivity – one that stresses the associative, individualized, and promiscuous nature of words as 'irreclaimable vagabonds.' The talk has been convincingly explicated as riposte to the linguistic precision advocated by both Bertrand Russell and the first speaker in the series, phoneticist and BBC advisor Arthur Lloyd James, who spoke, in large part, about the value of dictionaries. Woolf, as Emily Kopley has described, borrows and recombines James's own words in order to explode his claims for language's exhaustiveness and literality, implicitly mocking him with the repetition of the line 'words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind.'²⁶

While Kopley's analysis does much to reintroduce, at least by implication, the protocols of broadcast serialities into the analysis of the text of her talk, the terms of her analysis still privilege the language of literary influence – a continuing problem within all literary sound studies, where terminology itself often precludes the sonic.²⁷ In Kopley's piece, 'allusion' predominates over 'echo', although the notion of 'echo' pervades the talk itself: indeed, the first line of the circulated recording of the talk is 'Words, English words, are full of echoes, memories, associations.' Kopley opens her close reading of the essay with a close listening of this 'opening' line, which becomes a singular diagnostic:

Near the beginning of this recording this voice declares 'Words', flattening the 'o' to "eh" and thickly rolling the 'r.' Dramatic pauses and quickened syllables punctuate the rest of the sentence: 'Words... English words... are full of *echoes*, *memories*, *associations*.' But if Woolf's accent suggests privilege and control, the content of her speech suggests the opposite.²⁸

Compare the related piece Kopley wrote later for the *Times Literary Supplement*, which opens with an even more marked and plastic remediation of the recorded line: '*Wehrrds*, English *wehrrds*, are full of *echoes*, *memories*, *associations*.' So declares Virginia Woolf near the start of the unique recording of her voice.²⁹

Here, in both pieces, with the word 'near', Kopley implicitly registers what few writings on the recording acknowledge: that the 'surviving' recording in fact begins a few sentences before the circulated one, trimmed by the BBC for free-standing sense.³⁰ Yet the allure of the recording – its sonorities, its uniqueness, its posited identity to Woolf's 'self' – continues

nevertheless to privilege the 'opening' sentence: 'If the meanings of words may change, Woolf's words here, are, fortunately, fixed. We press "play" and Woolf again reminds us of the "*echoes, memories, associations*" of words, as though this were all we need her to tell us, and she cannot tell us too often.'³¹ The intimacy of the broadcast talk has here become the intimacy of the fetish-object.³²

Construing Woolf's voice as speaking to 'us', in fact, takes us further from the broadcast event, as well as from the specifics of her composition for that event. The voice 'we' hear is variably described: Jane Lewty describes it as 'surly and sulky', Koppen mentions its 'unsettling foreignness'; most commentators record the judgment of Woolf's nephew, Quentin Bell, that the record is 'a poor one. Her voice is deprived of depth and resonance; it seems altogether too fast and too flat; it is barely recognisable.'³³ Thus Woolf is self-identical – or not: this is the ahistorical discourse of fidelity. For Kopley the existence of the voice is a miracle; for Bell it insufficiently documents a beloved original. Bell's biography was published in 1972; at what point did he listen to the 1937 recording of a voice he could have last heard in 1941? How might expectations for 'clear' and 'poor' sound reproduction have shifted in the intervening period? And how might have Woolf's accent, which speaks to Kopley of not only class privilege but 'control', have registered differently over the BBC of 1937 – surrounded by announcers uniformly steeped in cultivated tones and Received Pronunciation?

Because of the fact of the recording, then, its available 'echoes' seem to drown out, in Kopley's analysis, those of the *unrecorded* paragraphs, in which Woolf's engagement with the actual broadcast occasion, and its relevance for her argument, is most clear. Woolf begins not merely by disputing the title she was handed for the talk, but by emphasizing the term *talk* – or, in BBC parlance, *Talk* – six times in the first sentences, to lead into her 'starting point', the statement that words are not useful, which she illustrates with an example about how the words 'Passing Russell Square' read at a Tube station can become a repeating chorus: 'We say over and over as we pace, "Passing Russell Square, passing Russell Square"; the words 'shuffle and change' in the mind, transmuting into 'Passing away saith the world, passing away...' Eye to ear to mind: Woolf *enacts* this transformation through repetition, performing the echoes, extending the range of those echoes through broadcast till they transform again in the minds of her auditors. At the end of her talk – also not on the recording – Woolf ventriloquizes the very words that she is hoping will 'come together in one of those swift marriages which are perfect images and create everlasting beauty. But no – nothing of that sort is going to happen to-night.

The little wretches are out of temper; disobliging; dumb. What is it they are muttering? "Time's up! Silence!" Oscillating between voice and image, unsettling her own 'speaking' status, gibing at the time constraints, Woolf inhabits and calls attention to the conditions of broadcast.

Though, as Randi Koppen points out, Woolf griped tremendously in her diary while writing 'Craftsmanship', referring to it severally as 'essay', 'article', and 'talk' ('It could have been a good article. It's the talk element that upsets it') and bemoaning the time restrictions, she was keenly aware of – and found a 'certain thrill' in – 'writing to read aloud.'³⁴ There seems no reason, in the service of foregrounding the reasonable claim that 'her take on broadcasting is always primarily political', to understate the extent to which she plays with the occasion of aurality. For Koppen to claim that because Woolf's talks do not themselves demonstrate the overt experimentation of her novels, or embrace the sonic impressionism lauded at the time by Rudolf Arnheim, 'one would be hard put to point to any radiophonic experimentation, or even much radiophonic awareness' in her radio work, is to compare apples and oranges: Woolf's 'play' here is not only with Russell and James, but also with the established protocols of the broadcast Talk.³⁵ Indeed, it's exactly for this reason that her evocation of words as 'highly democratic', deeming 'uncultivated words as good as cultivated words', works as a critique of 'the essence of the Reithian project.'³⁶ The radiogenic comprises more than the overtly avant-garde; to advance a literary radio studies is thus of necessity to push back against the category of the 'literary.'

The very use of the word 'radiogenic' provides a case in point: it is a slippery and contested term, derived from usage at the BBC itself (where Louis MacNeice dubbed it 'a handy word, though jargon') to denote works and material 'particularly suited to the radio medium.'³⁷ It was thus from the outset, as Emily Bloom points out, applied across media forms: work could be radiogenic because (as the term implies) born radio, or radiogenic in potential. In literary radio studies, the term often moves the other way, signifying those aspects of print forms most clearly shaped in the presence of radio.³⁸ Yet even this multidirectional and intermedial usage largely references the homologies between broadcast forms and those of literary modernism; the term, like 'modernism' itself, or 'literary', often functions as a term of value, distinguishing 'radiogenic' works from those considered, by implication, transparent or unmarked.³⁹ Yet, as Hugh Chignell points out, within the broader field of radio studies, scholars such as Tim Wall have argued for a more capacious notion of radiogenesis that would leave room for actual, changing radio practice – for what Gitelman would call the evolving protocols of the medium.⁴⁰

Radio Exceptionalism

Perhaps the most intriguing detail we have about Woolf's broadcast of 'Craftsmanship' is that she ran long. Grumbling in her diaries that her talk, commissioned for seventeen minutes, ran 'alternately 25 & then 15', she in fact ran over by one minute, until 9:01; '[p]resumably the Greenwich Time Signal was omitted', muses Clarke. This analytical aside is one of the few times that scholars focused on the broadcasts of authors – literary scholars – have acknowledged the broader sonic ocean in which those broadcasts swam. The sound of the radio encompassed not only the parade of programming, but the attendant noises, planned and unplanned, that issued from the receiver. Damien Keane, whose *Ireland and the Problem of Information* brilliantly propounds an expanded notion of remediation (one that reintroduces the shaping labor of transcript and archive), has recently turned his attention to the regulatory and phenomenological pertinence of 'time made audible' – the pips that Woolf's last sentences would have replaced – pointing to their naturalized status as noticed-yet-discounted ancillary of the "'true" purpose of broadcasting' as a marker of the evolving mediation of 'now-ness'.⁴¹ The collision of Woolf and pips, a conjunction that can only be posited, rather than heard, underscores, again, the dislocation and re-siting of the archival radio trace.

Most scholars of literary radio studies probably began as I did, requesting from an archivist the files for a particular author-broadcaster. The archive facilitates a critical literary exceptionalism; one reads the files of an 'artist' disconnected from the other programmes that would have surrounded their broadcasts. (This would have been fine with the BBC, which up until after World War II made what would today seem like counterintuitive use of 'dead air' as well as sound tones to keep successive programmes determinedly separate – in an attempt to deter what was disparagingly known as 'tap' listening.) Reading this way, it would be easy to imagine the airwaves as a sea of talk and drama, distinguished primarily by the level of its 'brow.'

And indeed, literary radio studies entered the academy at the deep end, the highest of modernisms, as if to justify its inclusion by way of irreproachable canonicity: Pound, Woolf, Stein, Eliot, drama, drama, drama.⁴² Many of its proof-texts bore the intangible imprint of radio rather than being written for it (*The Waves*, *Finnegans Wake*).⁴³ Radio ('new technology'-radio, modernist-period radio) was wrestled from the retrospective death grip of the Frankfurt school and restored to the metaphoric custody of the miraculous – to a condition of experimental possibility. Or so it appeared.

The volume from which this chapter takes its assigned title, Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead's foundational *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (1992) treats a range of sound art defined by its subtitle – not all of it written for radio and much of that never broadcast. The editors of that volume took their title in turn from F. T. Marinetti's 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature' (1912) and its call for *l'immaginazione senza fili* – or 'imagination without strings' or 'wireless imagination.'

That that formulation, as Timothy Campbell has detailed, attached metaphorically not to broadcast radio but to its predecessor technologies, and that it remained, as Margaret Fisher has enlightened us, mostly aspirational in terms of Futurist involvement in Italian radio, has not kept it from it from being read back onto a range of modernist-era materials.⁴⁴ We can *make* the phrase 'words-in-freedom' 'echo', for instance, Woolf's idea of unruly, vagabond, words: but this is a forced rhyme. Marinetti's is first and foremost a claim about artistic license and liberation, potentiated by a mystical fusion with the machine; it finds its real echo in the criticism, in the continuing author-centricity of most literary radio scholarship. To Emily Bloom's question, 'does radio allow for literary studies ... as we know it?', I would answer, so far, all too much.⁴⁵ There is still an implicit positioning of the 'literary' as a term of value, which can distort analysis; there is still a tendency to valorize radio 'authorship' in terms imported from literary study – either by a medium-validating concentration on those already recognized as artists, or by a systematic anointing of a few experimental 'creatives', usually producers.⁴⁶ Interestingly, this kind of highlighting of individuals, in the context of a more industry-oriented media studies, can (as David Hendy has recently argued) correct for media histories that overemphasize the imperviousness and self-policing of media institutions like the BBC.⁴⁷ But in the context of the literary it reinscribes a Romantic (and old-modernist) notion of artistic autonomy that can skew even the most layered and careful radio scholarship by writing onto particular 'creatives' an inordinate and inherently anti-conventional influencing power. Though no one could dispute the importance of innovators such as Orson Welles and Norman Corwin, for example, literary treatments of the 'innovative radiophony' of such 'prestige radio' producers often give very little idea of the practices from which those innovations emerged.⁴⁸ Correcting for the assumptions of the 'literary' might involve taking cues, then, from the recent work of media historian Shawn VanCour, and his model of a production-oriented approach to early radio history – an approach that privileges the collective development of production practices and aesthetic norms without simply romanticizing the idea of the collaborative in turn.⁴⁹

Jeremy Lakoff has recently cleverly identified in the work of British playwright and producer Dennis Johnston a dramatic subgenre he terms a 'broadcastastrophe': a metadrama in which the logic of radio transparency gives way to the exposure of studio operations.⁵⁰ I would argue that this is only the most overt manifestation of a self-referentiality that distinguishes radio production – a medial self-consciousness that renders even the most routine broadcast both a locus of the political and a site of the radio-genic. How are, and were, such moments heard, and how do we read them now? Reading for *process* rather than *author* might be the first step towards opening out a 'close listening' methodology that would make room for the radio event; locating the avant-garde as congruent with, emergent in, rather than in opposition to, broadcasting norms could perhaps do for literary radio studies what a more inclusive approach has done for modernist studies itself: enable it to recognize its field as dynamic, multiple, in constant intermedial conversation.⁵¹

To move beyond the invaluable spadework of the recent literary-radio-studies boom, then, requires a more capacious methodology for tracing the resonances of radio, and a critical vocabulary not grounded exclusively in inscription. A vigorous 'literary' radio studies would be both necessarily intermedial, and necessarily political: attentive to industry specificities, cultural dynamics, the protocols of broadcast and reception *and* the resonant metaphors of wireless derived from the phenomenological particularities of listening practice. These are, I admit, a lot of plates to keep in the air. But there are adept jugglers among us.

Notes

- ¹ On wartime, see for example Ian Whittington, *Writing the Radio War: Literature, Politics, and the BBC, 1939–1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) and Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); on radio as a nexus for political mobilization see for instance Tom McEnaney, *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017); Michael Allen, 'Old Media/New Futures: Revolutionary Reverberations of Fanon's Radio', *PMLA*, 134.1 (2019), 188–93, and Alban Webb, 'The Sound of Revolution: BBC Monitoring and the Hungarian Revolution', *Media History*, doi: 10.1080/13688804.2019.1608170 (2019). A great deal of recent important work centers on radio, empire, and decolonialization: see for instance Jessica Berman, 'Re-routing Community: Colonial Broadcasting and the Aesthetics of Relation', in *Modernist*

Communities across Cultures and Media, ed. by Caroline Pollentier and Sarah Wilson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019), pp. 251–69; Julie Cyzewski, ‘Broadcasting Nature Poetry: Una Marson and the BBC’s Overseas Service’, *PMLA*, 133.3 (2018), 575–93; Peter Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniel Ryan Morse, ‘An “Impatient Modernist”: Mulk Raj Anand at the BBC’, *Modernist Cultures* 10.1 (2015), 83–98; Simon Potter, *The BBC and the British World, 1922–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). James Procter’s ‘Scripting Empire’ project has produced a great many publications that will culminate in *Scripting Empire: Broadcasting, the BBC and the Black Atlantic, 1932–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). For an important treatment of race in relation to sound media including radio, see Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

- ² I echo here the opening terms of John Mowitt’s fascinating, dense, and cranky study, *Radio: Essays in Bad Reception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), which traces the ‘problem posed by radio’ as a ‘persistent and fraught’ thread in twentieth-century philosophy and critical theory, repressed in the disciplinary formation of ‘radio studies’ itself.
- ³ See Mowitt, too, for a challenge to the language of forgetting in the construction of radio studies: ‘My point here is not that radio studies is actually residual rather than emergent but that fundamental to its emergence is the way its partisans deploy the concept of the residual, applying it at once to radio, and through the history of the device, to its study’ (*Radio*, p. 11).
- ⁴ Daniel Gomes, whose own work, as noted below, belies the special pleading of his argument here, claims that ‘a necessarily oblique textual approach to radio broadcasting [. . .] has the benefit of guarding against an assumed immediacy to the aural environments through which programming was transmitted and the varying listening practices by which it was received.’ Daniel Gomes, ‘Archival Airwaves: Recording Ireland for the BBC’, *Modernism/modernity* Print Plus, 3.4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.2657/mod.0084>.
- ⁵ *Broadcasting Modernism*, ed. by Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane A. Lewty (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), p. 2.
- ⁶ Few recordings were made in the first decades of radio broadcasting – due in part to the limitations and expense of the available technology before the advent of magnetic tape. It’s central to my argument here, though, that sound recordings are no more ‘radio’ than are scripts: both are inscriptive versions, remediations of a non-inscriptive medium.
- ⁷ See Mowitt, *Radio*, pp. 15–16.
- ⁸ Emily Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 22.
- ⁹ Listener research reports, instituted in the late 1930s in the UK and (driven by commercial interests) somewhat earlier in the United States, represent

extremely blunt instruments in this regard. Hilda Matheson, the former BBC Director of Talks, complained as early as 1935 about the gap between ‘the transmitting and the listening ends of the broadcasting process’; see ‘Listener Research in Broadcasting’, *Sociological Review*, 27.4 (1935), 408–22 (p. 408). Responses initially depended entirely on self-reporting in response to questions issued by the BBC. Nevertheless, such reports have often yielded useful information on specific topics: see Whittington, *Writing the Radio War*, for example, and also Alexandra Lawrie, ‘Who’s Listening to Modernism? BBC Features and Audience Response’, *Media History*, 24.2 (2018), 239–51.

¹⁰ Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922–1938* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 31.

¹¹ See Debra Rae Cohen, ‘Intermediality and the Problem of the *Listener*’, *Modernism/modernity* 19 (2012), 569–92. One example is the otherwise useful work on the *Listener* as a venue for modernist poetry by Jane Dowson (‘Poetry and The *Listener*: The Myth of the “Middlebrow”’, *Working Papers on the Web*, 6 [2003], <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/wpw/thirties/thirties%20dowson.html>). The phrase ‘published radio broadcast’, in particular, is a shorthand term that works to elide the very mediation it describes; see Feldman, Tonning and Mead, p. 12.

¹² Ian Whittington, ‘Archaeologies of Sound: Reconstructing Louis MacNeice’s Wartime Radio Publics’, *Modernist Cultures*, 10.1 (2015), 44–61 (p. 45).

¹³ Jeffrey Sconce, ‘The Talking Weasel of Doarlish Cashen’, in *Electronic Elsewheres: Media, Technology, and the Experience of Social Space*, ed. by Chris Berry, Soyoung Kim, and Lynn Spiegel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 33–53 (p. 51). On the radio uncanny see especially Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning and Henry Mead, eds., *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 3.

¹⁵ See especially Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Taylor introduced these vital terms for performance studies in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), and further refined them in ‘Save As . . . Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies’, in *Imagining America* 7 (2010), <https://surface.syr.edu/ia/7>.

¹⁷ Feldman, Tønning and Mead, *Broadcasting*, p. 10; Gitelman, *Always Already New*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Taylor, ‘Save As’, p. 5.

¹⁹ Taylor, ‘Save As’, p. 4.

²⁰ Daniel Gomes, ‘Archival Airwaves: Recording Ireland for the BBC’, *Modernism/modernity* Print Plus, 3.4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.2657/mod.0084>.

²¹ Alex Goody, ‘Dorothy L. Sayers’s *The Man Born to Be King*: The “Impersonation” of Divinity: Language, Authenticity and Embodiment’, in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (see Feldman, Tønning, and Mead, above), pp. 79–96.

- ²² Josephine Dolan, 'The Voice That Cannot Be Heard: Radio/Broadcasting and "The Archive"', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 1.1 (2003), 63–72 (p. 69).
- ²³ See www.bbc.com/news/av/entertainment-arts-28231055/rare-recording-of-virginia-woolf.
- ²⁴ Among the many sites on which the piece is celebrated are those of the *Paris Review* (posted 21 May 2013), Open Culture (which erroneously claims that in it 'she reads the opening paragraphs of her essay') and the core curriculum site for Columbia College of Columbia University. There are several YouTube versions, some of which involve added music and/or subtitles; the ebooks site at adelaide.edu has embedded the recording in its open access text of the published version of the essay, which adds a further layer of inter-medial tension. The BBC itself, 'to mark the 75th anniversary of Woolf's death', commissioned a cartoon that animates a 2:21 snippet of the recording; it is a remarkable product in that it not only opens with the sound of a pen scratching and virtually overwhelms Woolf's voice with accompanying sound effects, but also incorporates in its visual animation words in fact neither singled out by Woolf nor used in her broadcast. Juxtaposed on the BBC site with the *published*, not the broadcast, text of the talk, the whole adds up to a quite complex node of remediation, adaptation, and appropriation that bears extended parsing. See www.bbc.com/culture/story/20160324-the-only-surviving-recording-of-virginia-woolf.
- ²⁵ S. N. Clarke, 'Virginia Woolf's Broadcasts and Her Recorded Voice', *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, 4 (2000); reprinted and updated www.virginiawoolf-society.org.uk/resources/virginia-woolf-s-broadcasts-and-her-recorded-voice. Though it does not speak to the processes of preparing a Talk for broadcast, or why such editing in 'another hand' might have occurred, Clarke's brief piece is notable for including a listing of the broadcasts that led up to and followed Woolf's on the evening in question (29 April 1937) – a context that discussions of the 'literary' usually omit. For textual analyses of 'Craftsmanship' see also Avery, *Radio Modernism*, pp. 53–6; Leila Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 163–72.
- ²⁶ For Russell, see Megan M. Quigley, 'Modern Novels and Vagueness', *Modernism/modernity*, 15.1 (2008), 101–29. For James, see Emily Kopley, 'Virginia Woolf's Conversations with George Rylands: Context for *A Room of One's Own* and "Craftsmanship"', *Review of English Studies*, 67.282 (2016), 949–69. I quote here from the version of Woolf's essay at <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/Virginia/w91d/chapter24.html>, reprinted from *The Death of the Moth*.
- ²⁷ Melba Cuddy-Keane has offered a set of terms helpful for listening to writing, for tracing aural resonances through narrative, though they have not been widely adopted; see 'Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative through Auditory Perception', in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz

(Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 382–98. These terms, however, do not offer a vocabulary for broadcast, or for listenership: as Pamela Caughie recalls, ‘Nowhere was the need for a metalanguage of sound more apparent to me than at the BBC Sound Archive.’ See Pamela L. Caughie, ‘Virginia Woolf: Radio, Gramophone, Broadcasting’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. by Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 332–47 (p. 343). Neil Verma’s important *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), offers an extremely useful beginning: a new medium-specific formal vocabulary of ‘audioposition’ with which to stylistically parse radio drama.

- ²⁸ Kopley, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Conversations’, p. 962.
- ²⁹ Emily Kopley, ‘At the Service of Words: Hearing the “Echoes, Memories, Associations” in Virginia Woolf’s “Craftsmanship”’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 April 2017, www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/virginia-woolf-craftsmanship. This later, public-facing piece extends the radio-series contextualization of Woolf’s talk, but does not enlarge on its auralities.
- ³⁰ The eight-minute recording is itself an oddly-delineated item: is it ‘suspended in the incompleteness of a fragmentary recording’, as Leila Brosnan has it, or is the partial recording by design, in line with ‘common practice’, as Clarke explains (Brosnan, *Reading*, p. 168; Clarke, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Broadcasts’)? The archive does not tell us.
- ³¹ Kopley, ‘At the Service.’
- ³² Compare Randi Koppen: ‘an aural trace that hardly lends itself to fetishization.’ Randi Koppen, ‘Rambling Round Words: Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Broadcasting’, in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (see Feldman, Tønning and Mead, above), pp. 137–53 (p. 138).
- ³³ Jane Lewty, ‘Virginia Woolf and the Synapses of Radio’, in *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*, ed. by Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 148–66 (p. 159); Koppen, ‘Rambling’, p. 138; Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, 1972), p. 436.
- ³⁴ See Koppen, ‘Rambling’, p. 144; Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 5, 1936–1941*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harvest, 1984), pp. 79, 81.
- ³⁵ See Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936; repr. Salem: Ayer, 1986); Koppen, ‘Virginia Woolf’, p. 140.
- ³⁶ Woolf, ‘Craftsmanship’; Koppen, ‘Virginia Woolf’, p. 145.
- ³⁷ Louis MacNeice, *The Dark Tower and Other Radio Scripts* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 12; Hugh Chignell, *Key Concepts in Radio Studies* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), p. 93.
- ³⁸ Bloom idiosyncratically adapts the term to refer to the *processes* of intermedial adaptation, what she terms ‘radiogenic aesthetics’ (*The Wireless Past*, pp. 5, 4). I argued in *Broadcasting Modernism* for an alternative mode of radiogenesis that modeled ‘what we might call the carrier wave, the oracular power of the medium’ (‘Annexing the Oracular Voice’, p. 154).

- ³⁹ As David Hendy warns: 'In equating modernist techniques and styles with radio being its "true self", we are in effect suggesting, are we not, that while all art aspires to the condition of music, all radio aspires to the condition of modernism? The danger with this position, one might suppose, is not just that it apparently condemns the vast majority of output as not "really" radio as it should be, but that the definition of "modernist radio" becomes so all-encompassing that meaning starts to evaporate.' See 'Afterword: Radio Modernisms', *Media History* 24.2 (2018), 283–7 (p. 286).
- ⁴⁰ Chignell, *Key Concepts*, p. 93. Chignell's own definition winds up becoming so capacious as to be virtually tautological: if it's on radio, or seems as if it should be, it's radiogenic.
- ⁴¹ Damien Keane, 'Time Made Audible: Irish Stations and Radio Modernism', in *A History of Irish Modernism*, ed. by Gregory Castle and Patrick Bixby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 330–45 (pp. 333, 337); see also Damien Keane, *Ireland and the Problem of Information, Irish Writing, Radio, Late Modernist Communication* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014).
- ⁴² See for example, Avery, *Radio Modernism*; Jane A. Lewty, "'What They Had Heard Said Written': Joyce, Pound, and the Cross-Correspondence of Radio' in *Broadcasting Modernism* (see Cohen, Coyle, and Lewty above), pp. 199–220; Sarah Wilson, 'Gertrude Stein and the Radio', *Modernism/modernity*, 11.2 (2004), 261–78; Michael Coyle, "'This rather Elusory Broadcast Technique': T. S. Eliot and the Genre of the Radio Talk', *ANQ*, 11.4 (1998), 32–42; Michael Coyle, 'The European Radio Broadcasts of T. S. Eliot', *Miscelánea*, 20 (1999), 341–53; Michael Coyle, "'We Speak to India": T. S. Eliot's Wartime Broadcasts and the Frontiers of Culture', in *Broadcasting Modernism* (see Cohen, Coyle, and Lewty, above), pp. 176–95. John Drakakis's *British Radio Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) remains an extremely useful introduction to the genre largely because of its openness to radio-specific models of authorship.
- ⁴³ See for example Melba Cuddy-Keane, 'Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality', in *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. by Pamela L. Caughie (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 69–96, and, more recently, Todd Avery, 'Waves: Aestheticism, Radio Drama and Virginia Woolf', *Media History*, 24.2 (2018), 180–93; James A. Connor, 'Radio Free Joyce: "Wake" Language and the Experience of Radio', *James Joyce Quarterly* 30/31 (Summer-Fall, 1993), 825–43.
- ⁴⁴ Virtually any image related to words-in-the-air can and has been interpreted as a reference to radio; see for instance Dinsman, *Modernism*, p. 32. For Marinetti, see Timothy C. Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Margaret Fisher, 'Futurism and Radio', in *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*, ed. by Günter Berghaus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 229–62. *La radia*, the 1933 Futurist 'radio manifesto', was in fact written *against* broadcast radio as it was instantiated through existing institutions; see Pino Masnata, *Radia: A Gloss of the 1933 Futurist Radio Manifesto*, trans. by Margaret Fisher (Emeryville: Second Evening Art, 2012). It's probably not coincidental that the emergence

of literary radio studies coincided with a resurgence of interest in Futurism leading up to the movement's centenary.

⁴⁵ Bloom, *The Wireless Past*, p. 165.

⁴⁶ By contrast see Kate Lacey's recent stunningly innovative reading of one of radio's key paratexts, the BBC's schedule in the *Radio Times*, as a paradigmatic work of multiply-authored 'vernacular modernism.' Kate Lacey, 'Radio's Vernacular Modernism: The Schedule as Modernist Text', *Media History*, 24.2 (2018), 166–79. This is part of an excellent special issue of *Media History* edited by Aasiya Lodhi and Amanda Wrigley.

⁴⁷ See especially David Hendy, 'Biography and the Emotions as a Missing Narrative in Media History: A Case Study of Lance Sieveking and the Early BBC', *Journal of Media History* 18.3–4 (2012), 351–78.

⁴⁸ See Jeff Porter, *Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 33. Verma's *Theater of the Mind* includes excellent work on Welles and especially Corwin. See also *Anatomy of Sound: Norman Corwin and Media Authorship*, ed. by Jacob Smith and Neil Verma (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

⁴⁹ Shawn VanCour, *Making Radio: Early Radio Production and the Rise of Modern Sound Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Jeremy Lakoff, 'Broadcatastrophe!: Denis Johnston's Radio Drama and the Aesthetics of Working It Out', in *Science, Technology, and Irish Modernism*, ed. by Kathryn Conrad, Cólín Parsons, and Julie McCormick Weng (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019), pp. 160–79.

⁵¹ Bloom similarly argues for a method of 'close listening' to 'partially available' radiogenic works that both acknowledges its experiential incompleteness and amplifies the sonic resonances of the text (*The Wireless Past*, p. 164).

*Attending to Theatre Sound Studies and Complicité's The Encounter**

Adrian Curtin

Theatre almost always involves sound-making of some sort. Even in the absence of designed, intentional sound, the ambient environment may still produce audible elements that can affect one's perception. Formerly, it was idiomatic in English to refer to 'hearing' a play. Today, it is more common to talk about 'seeing' one, yet contained within that 'seeing' are complex sensorial and phenomenological activities. Seeing, hearing, feeling and smelling (and sometimes touching and tasting) are potentially interrelated in the act of experiencing performance. This is important to note, especially when focusing on a single sensorial aspect of theatre attendance. However, in the academic study of theatre, the *visual* dimension of performance has historically been privileged over the other senses.

Happily, this is no longer the case, and in the last decade the role of the senses – especially the auditory sense – in theatre has been given increased scholarly attention, as have the aesthetics and historicity of theatre sound.¹ Theatre scholars, drawing on the interdisciplinary field of sound studies, have investigated how sounds operate in performance, what they can mean and what their significance is. Scripts have sounds written into them, but these are notional until they are realised in performance. Consequently, the sounds inscribed on the page and those made in performance may be quite different, depending on production circumstances. Further complicating this is the fact that aural interpretation is always potentially discrepant: audience members may make sense of the sounds they hear differently, depending, for example, on one's location, disposition, knowledge, comprehension, hearing ability and cultural background. Interpretation of sound is personal; it is also historically informed. What we hear, how we hear and how we make sense of what we hear are subject

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to change; this should be taken into consideration when analysing theatre sound past and present.

This chapter will introduce some key topics in the academic study of theatre sound, referring to a variety of scholarly texts in this area of specialisation. The conceptual overview will be supplemented by a short case study analysis: a recent example of sonically inventive theatre by Complicité/Simon McBurney called *The Encounter*, which resonates with many elements of theatre sound studies discussed herein.

Scripted Sound

Dramatic texts are typically composed with performance in mind; hence, they are written to be sounded. On a basic level, plays provide directions for actors to deliver lines of text and make non-linguistic sounds with their bodies or with objects in performance. Dramatic texts also provide directions for sounds and music to be made by other members of the production team, usually offstage. Plays in textual form may be considered performance scores that can be collectively *sounded out*, and not just spoken aloud to oneself or ‘heard’ in the reader’s imagination.² Poetry and prose may also be read out loud, of course, and may have additional sonic elements when performed or recorded, but, in the case of drama, sound-making is overtly and elaborately inscribed as a future potential. Bruce R. Smith notes that early modern play-texts ‘were printed and read with an *episteme* that gave primacy to speech’ and therefore may be thought to have ‘physiological’ punctuation that indicates ‘the corporeality of speech-making.’³ Punctuation in these texts may have provided actors with guiding information about pace, emphasis and breathing. Contemporary dramatists and directors have also highlighted the importance of attending to the sonic components of a dramatic text, focusing on how the text is punctuated and the language is composed. Howard Barker has repeatedly mentioned the importance of actors being attuned to the rhythms of his dense, spikey, poetic language.⁴ The director Sacha Wares has described the punctuation in debbie tucker green’s plays as ‘a code [...] a bit like musical notation – instructions on the page that tell the performer when to pause, when to slow down, when to speed up, what to give an accent and so on.’⁵

Analysing how a play-text encodes sound (and silence) is the work of the actor, director, sound designer and scholar alike, though these parties may conduct this analysis for different purposes. Scholars are typically interested in a text’s ‘dramaturgy of sound.’⁶ Like other literary works,

dramatic texts propose fictional sound-worlds as part of their aesthetic construction. References to sound and hearing made in the characters' speech and in stage directions indicate sonic environments and attitudes towards aurality – often (but not necessarily) linked to the lived experience of the dramatist. These references provide information about the characters' identities, their relationships, their ways of being-in-the-world, the society in which they live, and so forth. Dramatists may intentionally or incidentally use sonic references in this manner; in either case, such references may be revealing. Dramatic texts can provide a record of specific sonic environments and 'acoustemologies' (acoustic ways-of-knowing) that may have passed into history.⁷

Theatre scholars have analysed play-texts with a specific focus on references to sound and hearing in order to parse their sociohistorical meanings, as literary scholars have done with fiction. For example, Allison K. Deutermann has examined how aurality shaped the genres of revenge tragedy and city comedy in early modern England at a formal level. She shows how these genres offered 'competing conceptualisations of sound', principally the sound of dramatic speech – vehement speech in revenge plays, linguistic savvy in city comedies.⁸ Deutermann argues that sound and dramatic form were linked both practically and materially in early modern plays, and that audiences learned to 'listen for theatrical form.' 'By listening well', Deutermann writes, referring to city comedies, 'theatre-goers could demonstrate their membership in an elite social and critical collective of well-informed, tasteful playgoers; failing to do so, by contrast, would mark listeners out as social imposters.'⁹ On the levels of form and content, then, dramatic texts may be replete with sonic significance.

To take another example, in my study of avant-garde theatre sound of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I outline how acoustically inspired psychological interiority, manifested as sound heard only in one's own head, became more pronounced during this period because of the increased noise of urban modernity. I show how this correlates with the use of abstract sound as a conveyor of private feeling and indeterminate meaning in modernist plays.¹⁰ Analysing the famous sound of the 'breaking string' in Anton Chekhov's play *Vishniovy Sad* (*The Cherry Orchard*, 1903), I make the following proposition:

The breaking string, which has a musical quality, is an exemplar of an aesthetic phenomenon in modern drama in which an acoustic imaginary, informed by the mental and spiritual lives of its characters, is made manifest. Sound does not simply function as an index of the phenomenal

world: it is not just something that happens *out there*, on or beyond the visible world of the stage as a product of everyday actions and environments. It is also a mental construct that can express internal states of being. It can tell us what characters are feeling, even if they are unable to articulate these feelings.¹¹

This is just one of the aspects of sonic modernity that drama of this period engaged. Dramatists are invariably attuned to the world in which they live; their art can therefore communicate sonically-informed ideas and impressions.

Elements of Theatre Sound

Theatre sound studies is not confined to formalist analysis of drama. Instead, the total sonic domain of theatrical performance is considered, inclusive of both designed (intentional) and incidental (circumstantial) elements, as these inevitably and idiosyncratically combine to create an audience member's aural experience.

Designed sonic elements of theatre that may only be indicated in a dramatic text, if at all, include music used in a production, which may be specially composed or consist of a pre-existing source. Scholars have analysed how music functions in theatre in accordance with dramaturgy and staging to affect audiences emotionally and stimulate them intellectually, deepening their experience by drawing on and possibly challenging their musical knowledge. For example, Simon Smith, investigating the role of music in the plays of Shakespeare and his early seventeenth-century contemporaries, has shown how music was used to 'cue' audience members into having 'culturally familiar responses', encouraging them to become emotionally and imaginatively involved in the performance as active, playful participants.¹² Music can serve to unite a theatre audience, or to alienate and unsettle them, depending on the type of music and how it is used.¹³ Theatre sound design works similarly. Although it only emerged as a named, professional design specialism in the mid-to-late-twentieth century, sound-making for theatre has a long history.¹⁴ In contemporary theatre, sound designers increasingly do more than just produce sounds called for in a script. Rather, in the case of dramatic theatre (i.e., the staging of a play) sound designers can create a unique sound world for a production that draws inspiration from the dramatic text. A production's sound design may therefore be analysed discretely as a composition (like a piece of music), as part of a production's scenography, and in relation to its reception in performance. Examining the history of theatre sound design

and the ways in which sound design operates in contemporary theatre are important parts of theatre sound studies.

Scholars who work on theatre sound and aurality, or sound studies more generally, have also attended to the acoustical design of theatre buildings, explicating how 'aural architecture' creates specialised auditory experiences. Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter use the latter term to refer to 'the composite of numerous surfaces, objects, and geometries in a complicated environment.'¹⁵ They explain: 'As we hear how sounds from multiple sources interact with the various spatial elements, we assign a unique personality to the aural architecture, in much the same way we interpret an echo as the aural personality of a wall.'¹⁶ Theatres are designed with their acoustical properties in mind, to a greater or lesser extent. Blesser and Salter observe how ancient, open-air Greek amphitheatres were designed and harnessed in such a way as to maintain sonic intelligibility for a large audience, despite the size of the building and the acoustical disadvantage of not having the reflective surfaces of an enclosed space.¹⁷ Moreover, they speculate that Greek democracy 'might not have flourished without the frequent, publicly shared experience these theatres made possible.'¹⁸ A theatre building's aural architecture informs us about the society that built it, specifically how they valued aurality and what they considered to be 'good' sound, which is historically contingent and ideologically informed.¹⁹ Emily Thompson has shown how modern architectural acoustics, as developed in the early twentieth century, aimed to control the effect of sound in space and to eliminate sounds deemed to be unnecessary and/or unwelcome (i.e., noise). Modern architects and acousticians, interested in creating 'neutral' sonic environments, worked to block ambient noise and cancel the natural acoustics of buildings, thereby breaking the connection between sound and place. Radio City Music Hall, built in New York City in 1932, epitomises this acoustical ideal.²⁰ Scholars who work in theatre sound studies may draw on archaeology and architectural design to understand how theatres (may) have sounded in the past, and what this might mean.²¹

Voice is another fundamental signifying and constitutive element of theatre sound, which has also traditionally been under-examined and under-theorised. Voice may be described and discussed in a dramatic text, and can function as a metaphor for personal agency and representation (as in 'having a voice'), but voice is also – crucially – an embodied phenomenon (see [Chapter 2](#)). It is sonically made (known) in an aural environment and can communicate a range of culturally prescribed, non-linguistic meanings. *How* voices sound is not incidental, even if we are

not always consciously aware of how we are interpreting them (or indeed the fact that we *are* interpreting them). Konstantinos Thomaidis observes:

Audiences' sensorial experiences of voice and habits of listening shape what voice is and does in performance, much in the same way that everyday identity-making and performance training or rehearsal shape how voice is produced. The many and proliferative possibilities of listening reveal how active the listener of voices is in defining and deciding how these voices are heard. Not only is voice multiple, it is also heard plurally.²²

Speech is made and received in a similarly plural manner. Accents, for example, are associated with cultural stereotypes that may shape individual reception of a theatre production. When analysing a theatre performance, an actor's voice and manner of speaking may be taken into consideration as potentially significant aspects of communication (aural semiotics) that may provide different information about the character than is presented in the play-text.²³

Theatre scholars have attended to the material significance of voice in performance history – *how* it has sounded and how this relates to phenomena such as gender performativity. Gina Bloom, examining manifestations of voice on the early modern stage in England, has shown how male characters were threatened by the prospect of vocal lack of control, whereas female characters could potentially make a virtue of vocal instability. She contends that 'female characters who embrace, instead of attempting to overcome, their unpredictable vocal flows are able to elude patriarchal regulation and exercise less obvious forms of vocal agency.'²⁴ Given that women did not perform on the early modern stage, the issue of how characters' sex and gender were vocally signified and differentiated was a matter of theatrical convention, which lent itself to play and subversion.

Voice is often freighted with meaning despite its potential ephemerality and apparently fugitive nature. Scholars attempt to 'pin it down' and account for the attraction it holds for audiences, while acknowledging the difficulty, if not impossibility, of this task. Judith Pascoe's quest to recapture the voice of the eighteenth-century tragedienne Sarah Siddens – a voice that was hugely celebrated and admired – is a case in point. Pascoe uses archival research, visual, literary and theatrical analyses, and cultural and performance theory to try to account for Siddens' vocal appeal by reconstituting 'the surviving traces' of Siddens' voice.²⁵ As she notes, the Romantics were the last generation to go unrecorded, as sound-recording technology had not yet been invented. This lends

poignancy to the elusiveness of Siddens' voice and to Pascoe's attempt to make it sound again.

Theatrical performance often features aleatoric sound that has not been designed or preplanned, but nevertheless factors into an audience member's aural experience. This can be sound that one of the performers or someone from the production team has made accidentally; it can be sound from elsewhere in the locality, from other audience members (a regular source of annoyance, for many people), or from one's own body! We live in an incredibly rich world of sounds, after all, and despite technological advances in sound-proofing and in altering the acoustics of an architectural space, noise of some sort is virtually inescapable. Silence still features in theatrical performance – indeed, it is often used powerfully – but it is never absolute, though it may seem so for moments at a time. One may still hear one's own breathing and possibly one's heartbeat even in the most pregnant of pauses (unless one has 'croaked').²⁶ Ambient sound in performance can sometimes be ignored, but performers or audience members can also slyly acknowledge it, especially when it ostensibly 'jars' with the play being performed (for instance, when a passing airplane is heard during a performance of an early modern play at the open-air Shakespeare's Globe in London). Ambient sound in theatrical performance can be considered significant and may be blended (perhaps ironically) with the performance and its sound design.

Notably, the idea of silent, attentive listening in theatre is a relatively recent convention, linked to twentieth-century, bourgeois efforts to 'improve' audience behaviour and to earlier, parallel, changes in the listening habits of audiences of 'classical' music performances.²⁷ Members of the historical theatrical avant-garde, such as the Italian Futurists, for example, or the Dadaists at the Cabaret Voltaire, opposed conventional decorum and sought to provoke audiences into dynamic, full-bodied response.²⁸ The tradition of British pantomime, with its call-and-response routines, retains a model of vocally empowered, interactive audience engagement. ('Oh yes it does!')

Aural Experiences in Theatre

Theatre's liveness and spatiality multiply the ways in which sound and hearing can come into effect. This can be difficult to account for fully. Audience reception is not necessarily uniform, so it is problematic to make individual audience experience stand for the whole. Audience members

can have shared experiences in theatre, of course, and frequently respond to sounds in a similar manner, but this should not be taken as a standard, default assumption. Individual audience members may detect, and respond to, different aspects of the sonic environment, especially given that hearing capacity is variable (and alters with age, too).

Scholars writing about sonic aspects of contemporary performance they have attended or have performed in themselves have offered detailed, first-person ‘earwitness’ accounts.²⁹ In his phenomenologically informed study of ‘aural attention’ in contemporary theatre, George Home-Cook theorises how listening functions in concert with the other senses, and provides highly detailed aural analyses of theatre performances he has personally attended on multiple occasions (thus allowing him to have a richer set of perceptions). Home-Cook empowers the theatre attendant as a co-creator of, and contributor to, the dynamics of theatrical performance by being figuratively stretched through the act of paying attention to sounds and silences. He hypothesises that ‘to listen is to pay attention to sound(s), and “to attend” is to *stretch*.’³⁰ Home-Cook highlights the complexity of making sense of theatre sound, especially in productions that challenge audiences sonically and make them listen differently. For example, Sound&Fury’s 2009 production of Bryony Lavery’s play *Kursk* ‘situated the audience *within* the close confines of a simulated nuclear submarine’, thereby, in Home-Cook’s words, ‘[creating] an aural space that invited the audience to re-embody the lived experience of being a submariner and, in so doing, to sound sound(s).’³¹ In his study, Home-Cook articulates thought processes, bodily experiences, and ways of making meaning about acoustic phenomena in theatre that often go unnoticed, are misidentified, or are intuited but not fully comprehended.

Scholars attuned to the dynamics of D/deafness and theatre have highlighted the multimodal ways in which sound and auditory information can be accessed in performance. People who have a hearing impairment can still be sensitive to sound but may perceive it in different parts of their bodies as vibration. Scholars have considered how D/deaf people experience sound, and have analysed theatre made by D/deaf practitioners, but there is still much work to be done in this area (including further consideration of the role of interpreters and sign language in performance). Furthermore, theatre sound design is venturing into acoustic territories that go beyond the range of human auditory perception – into the domain of infrasonic tones, for instance, so consideration of sound-as-vibration and sound-induced affect is warranted for this reason, too (see [Chapters 13 and 14](#)).³²

Scholars writing about sound/aurality in performances at which they were not present cannot provide first-person, situated analysis, but can still attempt to reconstruct the sounds of past performances and theorise reception. In doing so, scholars must be mindful of their own historicity in terms of how *they* hear and interpret sound, and should be alert to altered signification and differences of response from the past to the present. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the familiar sounds of horse and wagon (the rattle of wheels, the cracking of whips) were perceived, by some, as sources of immense irritation (Arthur Schopenhauer especially disdained the cracking sound).³³ Today, these types of sound might be considered rustic and charming to hear (if not encountered too frequently). Relatedly, present-day scholars accustomed to the noise of urban modernity might not appreciate the noise that plagues the character of Morose in Ben Jonson's 1609 play *Epicene*, given the change in urban noise levels, and the altered composition of urban noise, wrought by modernity.

Scholars have sounded out performance events that date from both before and after the mechanical reproduction of sound, endeavouring to ascertain what audience members would have heard when attending theatre and how they might have interpreted it. Pamela M. King has researched sound and aurality in medieval English outdoor performances, examining 'not only what the festive world sounded like, but what sounds both incidental and deliberative, meant to the civic community.'³⁴ She surveys 'the mellifluous sounds of the heavenly as opposed to the discordant and/or frightening noises emanating from Hell and the devils'; moreover, she considers the sonic effect of the intonation pattern of speech on audiences in different locations, postulating that 'the audience at one station, hearing Herod raging at the next, [was] affected without having to be able to make out the words.'³⁵ Such audiences would have made physical sense – as well as, or instead of – semantic sense of sound in performance. (The affective, physical power of sound in general and language in particular also interested the historical theatrical avant-garde – as in the performances of Dadaist sound poetry at the Cabaret Voltaire.)³⁶ King accounts for a range of sonic inputs at medieval outdoor performances: instrumental music; singing; 'laughs, meaningful coughs, and farts'; the incidental sounds of machinery; the 'sound of waggon-wheels rumbling to the starting point'; bells; and sounds made by all manner of animals in the environs.³⁷ Bruce R. Smith likewise provides a compelling account of the acoustic world of early modern England in his landmark study on this topic, demonstrating the importance and diversity of sound-making

and aural reception in this period, especially as it pertains to theatre.³⁸ Smith's book is a foundational text in theatre sound studies, which, as the preceding whistle-stop tour has hopefully indicated, is pleasingly diverse, operates in multiple areas of interest, and intersects with other fields, such as musicology, archaeology, sociology, and cultural studies.

The Encounter

In this section I offer a sonically minded analysis of *Complicité*/McBurney's *The Encounter*, which was first performed at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2015, and has since toured the world and been made available online for limited time periods as a live video broadcast and as a recording.³⁹ My aim is to use this case study to revisit some of the topics previously discussed, demonstrating how sonic analysis of contemporary theatre may be conducted and what can be learned from it.

The main source-text of *The Encounter* is Petru Popescu's nonfiction book *Amazon Beaming*, first published in 1991. Popescu's book tells the story of an American photojournalist, Loren McIntyre, who spent two months in 1969 lost in the Javari valley in the Amazon rainforest in the company of an indigenous tribe of Mayoruna. McIntyre participated in the tribe's ritual practice and geographical relocation as they sought to return to 'the beginning': the source of the Amazon river and a time prior to the intrusion of outsiders. *The Encounter* intermixes McIntyre's tale (as related by Popescu) with the voices of people Simon McBurney interviewed as research for the production (including Popescu), along with recordings he made of conversations he had with his young daughter in their home during the period when the show was being devised. The resulting performance text is densely layered, criss-crossing locations and temporalities, blending 'here' and 'there', 'then' and 'now', 'self' and 'other.' *Complicité* thus recontextualised the narrative presented in Popescu's book and made it available as a novel theatrical experience.

Indeed, one can encounter *The Encounter* in multiple ways.⁴⁰ One can *read* a version of *The Encounter*, as the performance text (credited to *Complicité*/Simon McBurney) has been published. However, a reader's individual 'sounding out' of the text yields a vastly different experience than attending it in performance, either as a co-present audience member in the theatre or as a remote, online attendant. Note the numerous aspects of sound and aurality one could consider: references to sound and hearing contained in Popescu's book; the sonic references in the published text of *The Encounter*; the production sound design as experienced by a co-present

audience member; and the production sound design as experienced by someone accessing a streamed version of the performance. Analysing theatre sound often involves thinking about how sound operates in different spheres. These spheres have multiplied with the advent of new technologies and digital platforms, which have advanced the possibilities of what we hear, how we hear, and how we make sense of what we hear in performance.

The Encounter makes special use of sound to tell McIntyre's story. It features one onstage performer – a role McBurney, who was also the director, principally undertook in *Complicité's* production. The solo actor plays several characters (including the role of 'the actor') and helps to create the production's sonic effects in collaboration with unseen, offstage operators. The actor has various microphones at his disposal, some of which are linked to pitch-modulation software that lowers the sound of the actor's voice while playing the character of McIntyre (who has an American accent, unlike McBurney, whose accent is British). The actor's voice is therefore digitally masked (i.e., altered), differentiating it from the actor's normal speaking voice. One might ponder whether electronic vocal-lowering lends the character a sense of gravitas, authority, and 'rugged' masculinity, and then query these culturally constructed associations. Additionally, the actor makes sound effects onstage; deploys loop pedals to sustain these sounds as well as fragments of speech that are made to resound 'mentally' (as though he were hearing voices echoing in his head); and uses his phone to play audio recordings made prior to the performance into a microphone. One of the onstage microphones is a 'binaural head' that captures sound three-dimensionally; it is placed centre-stage, where it catches the eye and feeds into the ears – quite literally. Sounds created or played onstage are relayed to the audience via individual pairs of headphones, which the audience is asked to put on near the beginning of the performance (online attendants are similarly instructed).

The Encounter foregrounds its use of sonic technology; the actor demonstrates and explains it to the audience at the outset. Once they have their headphones on, the actor (aided by offstage technicians) uses a microphone to lend the impression that he is whispering into the audience's ears, moving from one side of their head to the other: '[You] may have the feeling that my voice has "walked across" your brain', he says. 'I have not, but you "feel" that I have.'⁴¹ He then demonstrates the pitch modifier for his voice and the 3D-effect of the binaural microphone, creating the sensation that he is physically approaching the listener and breathing into one of their ears, possibly warming it. It is a most peculiar sensation,

drawing on the connection between hearing and touch, and may trigger thermoception (perception of temperature), too. It has prompted audience laughter.⁴² He proceeds to snip a pair of scissors around the binaural head, which creates an auditory impression, for the listeners-with-headphones, of having a haircut. Next, a recording of the actor's voice is used to create an artificial dialogue between the actor-in-the-present and the actor-in-the-past, highlighting how an audio recording of a voice can destabilise ontological security, especially when heard (again) with the passage of time (as in Samuel Beckett's 1958 play *Krapp's Last Tape*). In this part of *The Encounter*, the actor is split into 'live' and 'recorded' versions of himself:

LIVE: My voice over there is a recording, he doesn't exist.

RECORDING: *What do you mean I don't exist?*

LIVE: You're not real.

RECORDING: *Well, of course I'm real.*

LIVE: He's a recording from the past.

RECORDING: *No, I'm in the present and you're in the future!*

LIVE: No you're in the past and I'm in the present.⁴³

For online attendants of *The Encounter* experiencing Complicité's performance after the fact, both versions of the actor were recorded and existed in the past, though one was present(ed) as an audio recording in a video recording – a Russian-doll-type construction – and was thus notionally further removed, yet this was not sonically apparent.

The Encounter encourages the audience to question the evidence of their senses and what they take to be real, even as it works to captivate them with its storytelling and technological marvels. In Complicité's production, the Tony-award-winning sound design by Gareth Fry with Pete Malkin (as billed), incorporated purpose-made field recordings made using a binaural microphone in several locations: the Brazilian rainforest; Marajá (a village in the Amazon); mosquito colonies at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Epping Forest (near London); and in Surrey, where Cessna aircraft (referenced in Popescu's book) were recorded.⁴⁴ These recordings, coupled with Foley sounds made by the actor onstage and then digitally looped, created the impression of realistic sounds and 'authentic' sonic environments, into which audience members were individually placed, courtesy of the headphones. Technically, the sound design for the Amazon was not entirely authentic, given that it was supplemented by recordings made in England, but it still sounded convincing. Gareth Fry remarks: 'The effect of [the headphone set-up] is magical as it transposes the audience to where the [binaural] head is, or

has been, so they feel like they are on stage next to Simon [McBurney].⁴⁵ At the beginning of the performance, the actor says he wishes to get closer to the audience as he does with his children when telling them a story, musing that 'empathy and proximity are connected.'⁴⁶ Being able to speak directly into individual audience members' ears forges unique connections, making it seem as though the story being told is for each individual alone, despite the audience in the theatre sharing the experience – a curious arrangement, and one that merits further consideration.

Enclosing the audience members in headphones isolates them from one another to a certain extent. This helps to conjure McIntyre's isolation when lost in the Amazon and cut off from the outside world. It also helps to connote his alleged experience (narrated in *Amazon Beaming*) of communicating telepathically with the headman of the tribe, whom he calls 'Barnacle.' The headman supposedly spoke to McIntyre in an ancient, non-verbal language, 'beaming' thought-words directly into his brain. Audience members likewise received sound picked up by the onstage microphones along with recordings of speech, environmental sounds, and music piped into their headphones. This process was not magical, but it was (in my experience, at least) captivating. The evocation of sonically dense environments, such as the Brazilian rainforest, in virtual 'surround' sound in one's own head, in tandem with the actor's performance, facilitated unique attendance and imaginative engagement. This was apropos. After all, this company champions the notion of *complicity* between the production and the audience.

Nevertheless, one might object to the use of headphone sound design on the basis that it militates against the distinctiveness of aural experience in theatre, which, as previously noted, has historically involved idiosyncratic perception of a sonic environment that invariably includes aleatoric, ambient elements.⁴⁷ One can watch a film using headphones and feel like one is hearing the soundtrack optimally, but surely a signature element of theatre sound – for good or ill – is its mixture of designed and incidental elements, which can lead to a potentially unpredictable, haphazard arrangement of sounds and aural impressions. If an audience has a direct link to the sound design with no 'interference', then presumably the acoustics of the theatre building become irrelevant (or much less relevant), ambient sounds are diminished, and audience members all mostly hear the same thing. Is it disadvantageous for theatre to replicate the way audiovisual media are experienced via headphones?

Chris Wenn observes that headphone-listening in theatre positions each audience member at 'the psychoacoustic centre of their own personal

sound system', and notes the unique listening and ontological experience this provides.⁴⁸ Notably, he theorises that headphone-listening in theatre still allows for the possibility of individual engagement with the production:

Even with the unity of sonic presence offered by headphone listening, audience is still comprised of singular experiences within a group – the transcendence of the individual subject is not in the presentation itself but in the complex hierarchies of attention that form our openness and willingness to experience that which is shown to us. [...] [Attention] is still directed outwards, it is still open and expectant, still gathered in place for a thing to occur. If anything, the use of headphones proves the universality of human audiences: that enclosed-amongst-others, it is not the 'enclosed' aspect that is significant but rather the co-directed intentionality of 'amongst-others'.⁴⁹

This is applicable to the audience of *The Encounter* present in the theatre during the performance, who could choose *not* to put their headphones on, for instance, or to half-put them on, or to put them on and take them off as they wished.⁵⁰ One would not then hear the production sound design as intended: instead, one might hear audio 'leakage' from other headphone sets and possibly the actor's voice (not fully projected) from the stage. However, even with the headphones on, audience members could still potentially hear trace elements of the sonic environment of the auditorium, such as audience laughter.⁵¹ Additionally, some elements of the sound design were transmitted through speakers in the auditorium. Fry explains: 'We used sub-bass speakers to add impact to certain sounds, and so there was more of a physical relationship to the sound. ... [We] used other speakers to layer up sounds.'⁵² Consequently, some elements of the sound design in Complicité's production of *The Encounter* were 'heard as much *through* the headphones as ... *over* the headphones', and could have been felt in one's body as vibration.⁵³ Furthermore, headphones with volume controls were provided for audience members with hearing difficulties so they could adjust the volume of each headphone to suit their needs.⁵⁴

All online attendants could adjust their headphone volume, of course, which differentiated their experience from that of most of the in-house theatre audience. Online attendants could not have experienced the layering and physical force of the sound in the same way as the co-present audience. Nevertheless, recalling Wenn's remarks, it is possible that remote audience members attending to a live broadcast of the performance could have felt part of a 'co-directed intentionality' of meaning-making, even if listeners

were only notionally 'amongst-others' (i.e., the audience in the theatre and the online attendants). Regardless, all attendants of *Complicité's* production had to individually experience and make sense of its dense layering of sounds, music, voices, characters, locations, temporalities, and states of consciousness. They had to 'stretch themselves', to use Home-Cook's key phrase, in relation to the perceptual experience on offer. This was especially charged when McIntyre participates in the Mayorunan ritual of 'the beginning', in which he experiences a drug-enhanced, heightened perception of 'the space/time/mind continuum'.⁵⁵ Audience members vicariously joining McIntyre on his ritualistic trip could theoretically have had an approximate 'out-of-body' experience while sitting in the theatre or attending remotely, listening to their headphones.

Despite the effectiveness of *The Encounter* at communicating McIntyre's experiences, there was a clear disjunction between the production aesthetic and the story being told. The production was very high-tech; McIntyre's experience in the Amazon was very low-tech. In the story, he is stripped of his devices (notably his camera) and his connection to urban civilisation. He encounters a way of life rooted in tribal practice, a mysterious, seemingly implausible, method of communication, and conceptions of time and reality that ostensibly rely on magical thinking. The visual scenography, though minimalist, differentiated the stage (the world of the actor, and, by association, the audience) from the acoustic world of McIntyre's narrative, with its luscious rainforest sounds and hypnotic tribal rhythms. The stage contained multiple plastic water-bottles and pieces of equipment, and was backed by a wall of the type used in an anechoic chamber, which deadens sound.⁵⁶ Visually, the stage suggested sterility; sonically, the production proffered profusion.⁵⁷ McBurney explains:

I wanted to alert people to the most biodiverse place on the planet by putting up almost a wall in which there is nothing organic whatsoever. Everything is technological ... the water itself is in plastic bottles, the back wall is an anechoic wall which doesn't have any echo. I wanted to make it the most sterile condition possible to highlight the journey that you go on, so that your imagination takes you to a completely new place. The key thing that happens to you in the show is not in your ears, but between your ears.⁵⁸

For McBurney, what each audience member mentally creates as a response to the 'input' provided by the performance is paramount.

The fact that audience members were (largely) acoustically isolated from one another in this production is aesthetically, thematically, and sociologically significant. Sonically cocooning oneself in public by listening to

headphones (or an equivalent technology) is now so commonplace that it can seem perfectly natural. This practice erects a boundary between oneself and one's environment, including other people (which is partially why headphone-listening in public is so popular: it protects against the noise of the other). *The Encounter* uses this technology to mimic McIntyre's isolation and immersion in his environment, yet the encounter he has with the Mayorunans opens him up to the possibility of a less bounded, more inter-subjective mode of being. McBurney highlights this as an important 'message' of Popescu's book. He writes:

It is both salutary and necessary to have our assumptions challenged in the self-centred times we live in. To really consider the idea that we are deeply interconnected, inseparable from one another, just as we are inseparable from nature even when we do not think of ourselves as 'living in nature.' To truly accept that we are part of the ecosystem wherever we are and that we cannot escape it, just as we cannot escape the planet. And also to accept that our ability to hear, to listen to each other, is perhaps essential for our collective survival. These thoughts are urgent because, in order to survive, we need to acknowledge that there is another way of seeing the world and our place in it.⁵⁹

It is ironic that *The Encounter* should relay the importance of human/ecological interconnection, and of listening to one another, by conducting a theatrical performance in which audience members are mostly acoustically isolated. The production communicates the seemingly unaffected, organically 'connected', unmediated way in which the Mayoruna inhabit and interpret the world around them through *hypermediated* dramaturgy and scenography (including a visual aesthetic that foregrounds 'sterile', non-organic materials). The Mayoruna and the audience are, therefore, from one perspective, worlds apart. The headman of the Mayoruna is apparently able to communicate telepathically with McIntyre. The audience, by contrast, are largely closed off from one another, even if the individual headphone sets make possible a shared, unique acoustic (theatrical) event. Perhaps the experience of (acoustic) isolation amongst others in this piece makes the idea of interconnection differently apparent – as something one must reach for ('stretching oneself'), even when circumstances are not conducive to the task. This would seem to be part of the 'message' of Popescu's book that McBurney wished to communicate; moreover, it has newfound resonance in the context of contemporary (social) media echo chambers and anomie.

Nevertheless, McIntyre's narrative raises the spectre of romantic primitivism, and the scenographic design of *The Encounter*, which starkly

contrasts visual, technological sterility (linked to modernity) and aural profusion of captivating rainforest sounds and 'ancient', non-verbal telepathic language, might be thought to exacerbate this problem. (The association of visuality with modernity and aurality with pre-modernity is commonplace, but reductive.)⁶⁰ Yet, the sound design of this piece is all technologically mediated, so the 'natural' is only ever known through the artificial, and, importantly, the piece exposes, from the outset, the ways in which the sound effects are created. As an audience member, one can become absorbed in McIntyre's fantastical adventure, but one is also continually reminded of the palimpsestic, (re)constructed nature of the performance text, with its strategic overlapping of space, time, characters, and subjectivities. As such, the piece destabilises binary conceptions of self and Other, modern and 'primitive.' Furthermore, McBurney would end the performance by telling the audience that the Mayoruna are not (simply) fantastical (even if McIntyre's narrative might be thought to cast them in this light), but are real, politically engaged people. Quelling the applause, McBurney stated that the headman of an enculturated Mayorunan community whom he had met while researching the piece had asked him to communicate to the audience that his people exist: 'You tell the world that we have survived. Many have perished. We have survived. But whether we will all survive ... that is another matter.'⁶¹

Theatre's Vibrancy

Much more could be said about the sonic elements of *The Encounter*, and indeed other aspects of it could also be interrogated (including the accuracy of McIntyre's account of the Mayoruna and their mysterious methods of communication).⁶² Hopefully, the analysis provided here has helped to clarify critical components of theatre sound studies, such as the relationship between textually inscribed sound and sound in theatrical performance; theatre sound design; audience reception of theatre sound; use of audiophonic technology; and the way in which sound operates as part of scenography. The use of headphone-listening in *The Encounter* makes this production somewhat unique, in that the production challenges (but does not altogether negate) the variable nature of what there is to hear in theatre, as well as the subjective nature of aural reception. However, it illustrates how contemporary theatre is continuing to respond to changing modes of sonic engagement. Theatre provides a 'sounding board' for our evolving habits of listening and aural cultures; it stages our sonic negotiation of the world. As theatre borrows from other media and

art forms such as cinema, performance art, installation art, audiobooks, and soundwalks (all of which may borrow, in kind, from theatre), possibilities for how sound and aurality are put into play are multiplied, just as the conceptual framework of theatre is simultaneously challenged and expanded. This makes it theoretically more difficult to distinguish sound/aurality in theatre from other types of artistic performance, but this may be a boon. Theatre, which fuses artistic disciplines (e.g., writing, design, acting), may also appropriate new methods and practices of sonic engagement and interaction, keeping the art form vibrant. With any luck, theatre sound studies will keep an ear to the ground of artistic practice and continue to make sense of the latest rumblings.

Notes

- ¹ See, for example, Sally Banes and André Lepecki, eds., *The Senses in Performance* (London: Routledge, 2007); Stephen Di Benedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
- ² Closet drama is an exception.
- ³ Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 242, p. 238. Smith draws the term 'physiological punctuation' from Walter J. Ong, 'The Historical Backgrounds of Elizabethan and Jacobean Punctuation Theory', *PLMA* 80.3 (1944), 349–60.
- ⁴ Mark Brown, ed., *Howard Barker Interviews 1980–2010: Conversations in Catastrophe* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), p. 112, p. 169, p. 183.
- ⁵ Quoted in Lynette Goddard, 'debbie tucker green', in *Fifty Modern and Contemporary Dramatists*, ed. by Maggie B. Gale and John F. Deeney (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 221.
- ⁶ I borrow the phrase 'dramaturgy of sound' from Mladen Ovadija, *Dramaturgy of Sound in Avant-Garde and Postdramatic Theatre* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2013).
- ⁷ The term 'acoustemology' derives from Steven Feld, 'Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea', in *Senses of Place*, ed. by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), pp. 91–135.
- ⁸ Allison K. Deutermann, *Listening for Theatrical Form in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 9.
- ⁹ Deutermann, *Listening for Theatrical Form in Early Modern England*, p. 13.
- ¹⁰ See Adrian Curtin, *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound: Staging Sonic Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 21–62.
- ¹¹ Curtin, *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound*, pp. 50–1.
- ¹² See Simon Smith, *Musical Response in the Early Modern Playhouse, 1603–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 1.

- ¹³ For a discussion of music used in theatre to unsettle an audience, see Adrian Curtin, 'The Art Music of Theatre: Howard Barker as Sound Designer', *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 33.3 (2012), 269–84.
- ¹⁴ See Ross Brown, *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2010).
- ¹⁵ Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?: Experiencing Aural Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 2.
- ¹⁶ Blesser and Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?*, p. 2.
- ¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is possible that bronze vases (*êcheia*) were used in Greek amphitheatres to 'create artificial "surround sound" resonance.' Brown, *Sound*, p. 5.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ¹⁹ See the special issue of *Theatre and Performance Design* (volume 2, issues 3–4, 2016) on the subject of 'good sound', which David Roesner and I co-edited.
- ²⁰ Emily Ann Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
- ²¹ Bruce R. Smith's (1999) study of the architectural and acoustical design of outdoor and indoor theatres in early modern England is exemplary in this regard. See also Viktoria Tkaczyk, 'Listening in Circles: Spoken Drama and the Architects of Sound, 1750–1830', *Annals of Science* 71.3 (2014), 299–334.
- ²² Konstantinos Thomaidis, *Theatre and Voice* (London: Palgrave, 2017), p. 73.
- ²³ See, for example, Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 131–47.
- ²⁴ Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 11.
- ²⁵ Judith Pascoe, *The Sarah Siddens Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. xi.
- ²⁶ Relatedly, John Cage detected the sound of his nervous system in operation and his blood in circulation while inside an anechoic chamber at Harvard University in 1951. Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 162.
- ²⁷ See James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- ²⁸ See Curtin, *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound*, pp. 147–65.
- ²⁹ The term 'earwitness' derives from R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 8.
- ³⁰ George Home-Cook, *Theatre and Aural Attention: Stretching Ourselves* (London: Palgrave, 2015), p. 2.
- ³¹ Home-Cook, *Theatre and Aural Attention*, p. 18.
- ³² See, for example, Lynne Kendrick, 'Applied Aurality: Noise and the Aesthetics of Access in Graeae's *Reasons to be Cheerful*' in *Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance*, ed. by Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 174–88; Jess Kaufman et al., 'Infrasonic Tones in Theatrical Design: Transgressive Vibration Towards an Aural Dramaturgy for All', *Theatre and Performance Design* 2 (2016), 279–92.
- ³³ Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 62.

- ³⁴ Pamela M. King, 'Poetics and Beyond: Noisy Bodies and Aural Variations in Medieval English Outdoor Performance', *Medieval Theatre* 38 (2016), 129–44, p. 130.
- ³⁵ King, 'Poetics and Beyond', pp. 131, 132.
- ³⁶ See Curtin, *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound*, pp. 115–31, 143–98.
- ³⁷ King, 'Poetics and Beyond', pp. 137, 140.
- ³⁸ Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*.
- ³⁹ When discussing *The Encounter* in textual form I use the present tense; when discussing Complicité's production I use the past tense.
- ⁴⁰ As of the time of this writing, I have principally experienced this piece through online attendance.
- ⁴¹ Complicité/Simon McBurney, *The Encounter* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 8.
- ⁴² This observation is based on a recording of a performance of *The Encounter* at the Barbican Theatre in London on 1 March 2016.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, n.p.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ⁴⁷ Modern theatre sound design may achieve more uniformity and control of sound in theatre, as in the case of the Cirque du Soleil's show *Kà* at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, which incorporates speakers into every audience seat. Thanks to Jon Primrose for this point.
- ⁴⁸ Chris Wenn, 'Headphone Listening in Live Performance: A Phenomenology of Sound Design', *Theatre and Performance Design* 1.3 (2015), 236–55, p. 240.
- ⁴⁹ Wenn, 'Headphone Listening in Live Performance', pp. 250, 253.
- ⁵⁰ 'We had one audience member in New York who complained that Simon was miming to the whole show – he'd kept taking his headphones off and couldn't really hear Simon speaking in those moments, so he assumed the whole thing was recorded. We couldn't persuade him that he was wrong!' (Gareth Fry, email to the author, 30 May 2017).
- ⁵¹ Fry comments: 'I [chose] "open" headphones, as opposed to the more common "closed" headphones. Closed headphones isolate the listener and prevent sound from coming in to the headphones. Open headphones don't prevent sound from entering the headphones so the audience can hear the responses from other audience members around them' (*ibid.*).
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ Complicité/McBurney, *The Encounter*, p. 61.
- ⁵⁶ The anechoic wall did not provide the function of an anechoic chamber, though it did work to 'establish a degree of acoustic continuity between all the venues we toured to' (Gareth Fry, email to the author, 30 May 2017).
- ⁵⁷ This is not to say that the visual design of the production did not have features of note, such as the anechoic wall, onto which was projected

scene-specific lighting. Designer Michael Levine remarks: 'The anechoic wall ... aids the audio telling of the story, but it also has something of the jungle about it. It's deep and impenetrable and it has an effect of leaves and foliage and the shifting canopy. And then on top of that you have [projection designer] Will Duke who is projecting on to the anechoic wedges to give the sense of being deep in the forest.' 'Making The Encounter: Designer Michael Levine', www.complicite.org/encounterresource/map/designer-michael-levine.html [accessed 31 May 2017].

⁵⁸ Quoted in Patrick McDonald, 'The Encounter – An Immersive 3D Audio Experience', *The Advertiser*, 10 February 2017, www.adelaidenow.com.au/entertainment/adelaide-festival/the-encounter-an-immersive-3d-audio-experience/news-story/9f52f55058coa019601a3e7085d8dc3f [accessed 28 May 2017].

⁵⁹ From McBurney's 'Foreword', in Petru Popescu, *The Encounter: Amazon Beaming* (London: Pushkin Press, 2016), p. 13.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

⁶¹ Complicité/McBurney, *The Encounter*, n.p.

⁶² For example, one could analyse the production's use of musical excerpts from works by John Adams, Arvo Pärt, Stephen Micus, David Darling, and Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan.

*Bob Dylan and Sound: A Tale of the
Recording Era*

Barry J. Faulk

It's mathematical. ... I use words like most people use numbers.
That's the best I can do.'

Bob Dylan, 1966.

I

We may come to view the last twenty years as the golden age of what has been called the 'music novel': fictions that feature protagonists whose engagement with popular music is part of the fabric of their lives. A very abbreviated list of the subgenre would include Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1987), Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1995) and Hanif Kuriishi's *The Black Album* (1996). Protagonists with an insider, connoisseur's knowledge of 'alternative' pop music play leading roles in gritty, neo-realist novels like Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (1995). In all these cases, the writers presume a readership with the same encyclopedic knowledge of pop music possessed by their central characters. Extensive musical intertexts also play a significant role in more recent work by Jonathan Lethem (*Fortress of Solitude*, 2003), Colson Whitehead (*Sag Harbor*, 2009), Jennine Capó Crucet (*How to Leave Hialeah*, 2009) and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010). In these fictions, music and literature engage in a dialogue that illuminates both art forms.

Scholarship on the relation between music and fiction has recently become a growth industry as well, including Gerry Smyth's treatment of the contemporary British music novel, as well as important essay anthologies such as Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen's *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music* and Erich Hertz and Jeffrey Roessner's *Write in Tune*

(both published in 2014). If scholars are following the lead of the novelists, music fiction itself is the product of a far-reaching social transformation long in the making. As Ronald Schleifer observes, most of the foundations of music culture, including the preconceptions we bring to listening, were invented in the eighteenth century: the practice of musical notation, 'tempered' musical tuning, the notion of the composer as autonomous artist, and perhaps most important of all, what Schleifer describes as 'the modern shape of leisure in which listening to music can be understood as a focused leisure activity *separate* from other activities.'¹ Indeed, Nick Hornby's popular music fiction *High Fidelity* seems to offer a cautionary lesson on the emotional upheaval that comes from the separation of listening from other social practices.

Likewise, the idea of literature has a distinct historical provenance as well, which can be traced back to the same period. As Raymond Williams observes, the notion that literature was a special kind of writing that laid bare the essence of national culture originates in Germany in the 1770s.² The increasingly intimate relation between literature and popular music can be seen as the result of technological advances that occurred in the second Industrial Revolution that took place in the early twentieth century. With the birth of the recording industry at this time, popular music became synonymous with commercial music, a product bought and sold in a variety of surrogate forms including sheet music and recordings and disseminated to a mass audience through radio broadcasts. It is easy to see our current state, where music saturates our environment whether we wish it to or not, as a culmination of these earlier developments. Walter Benjamin's landmark essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', while mainly focusing on the relation between painting and the new technologies of film and photography, also sheds light on the enhanced role music will come to play in the twentieth century. Benjamin's famous argument that technologies of mass reproduction detach 'the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition' and undermine its authority are also relevant to popular music.³ However, as Hertz and Roessner remark, this epochal transformation had a dual aspect: 'if something was lost in not experiencing the "original" artwork, something was gained by democratizing art so that its reception was not limited by one's social class.'⁴ Benjamin himself reads the death of what he calls the 'aura' of the artwork as the fulfilment of the deepest wish of the collective, the 'desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction.'⁵ For Benjamin, the

new technologies of art provide a means to radically democratize cultural production for the first time in human history.

Similarly, Ronald Schleifer observes that the wider circulation of popular music in society 'opened up a social space for many people who did not have access to either leisure or the arts before the abundance of the Second Industrial Revolution.'⁶ This is especially true, he notes, for the groups 'traditionally excluded from the space of public life' and featured in Schleifer's study of popular music artists in the age of 'high' modernism: 'Jews, like the Gershwin brothers, homosexuals, like Cole Porter, Africans and African-Americans, like Thomas Waller and Billie Holiday, and women, again like Billie Holiday – all of whom were able to achieve quotidian emotional and intellectual pleasures in the popular arts that came, in the modernist era, to surround us all.'⁷ The commonplace status of popular music gave it a wide reach and allowed it to take a very deep hold on listeners. Popular audiences had intense affective relations with the music that they heard on new devices such as radio and television, or purchased to play at home on their privately acquired turntables, reel to reel devices, and, beginning in the 1960s, cassette tape recorders.

These new technological devices allowed audiences to personalize their own relation to popular music to an unprecedented extent. In the 1960s, when rock became more or less synonymous with pop music, the relation between private listening and personal identity became even stronger. What Hertz and Roessner describe as 'the profound ubiquity of pop music in the postwar era' had a decisive impact on our inner lives, shaping how we remember the past.⁸ It would become commonplace to mark the passage of time, or characterize decades, by referencing the pop music of the past.

The postwar era also witnessed a significant reversal of cultural categories. In the wake of the mid-1960s rock revolution, popular music was imagined to exist in an alternative world outside traditional society. Pop music partisanship was often a vehicle for individual or group dissent. With the end of the notion of a unified rock 'counterculture', new musical subcultures – punk, disco, metal – emerged, distinct from and proudly independent of each other. Music became perhaps the crucial index of personal and group identity. As Hertz and Roessner remark, 'a wrong choice within a particular subculture could make the difference between social acceptance and ostracism.'⁹

The literary genre of the 'music novel' that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s expressed the growing interdependence between popular music and interiority. Characters who self-identify as pop music savants

are a major feature of the music novel. Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, one of the first and most popular of these fictions, reinforced, as Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen observe, the 'widespread assumption that the consumption and expert appreciation of rock and pop music is a white, male, middle-class prerogative.'¹⁰ However, as Carroll and Hansen also note, the publication of music fiction by British writers including Hanif Kureishi (*The Buddha of Suburbia*), Roddy Doyle (*The Commitments*), and Gordon Legge (*The Shoe*) all precede Hornby's novel, and explore issues of class, race, and sexuality in relation to popular music. More recently, Jennine Capo-Crucet, Jonathan Lethem and Colson Whitehead have written novels featuring protagonists whose continual meditation on popular songs play a vital role in their ongoing negotiation of racial and ethnic identity. All these fictions underscore the crucial role popular music currently plays in shaping the contours of our interior lives.

The new cultural position of popular music also elevated the status of the popular songwriter, now treated as an author figure on par with the fiction writer or filmmaker. Songwriters of this rank remain a fairly exclusive – and primarily white and male – group. Regardless, Bob Dylan remains the preeminent figure of the auteur in rock music. Dylan's transformation from folk singer to rock star signalled the evolution of rock and roll music into 'rock', and consolidated the preeminent role of rock within popular music itself. From the beginning, Dylan has always stood at the crossroads of literature and the popular. Regardless of where one stands on the matter of whether his song lyrics are poetry or something entirely different, the recent decision of the Nobel Prize committee to recognize Dylan for his contributions to literature at the very least reinforces the convictions shared both by Dylan's audience and a growing number of scholars that the work of the musician somehow bridges the gap that separates songwriting from literary endeavour.

This essay reexamines singer-songwriter Bob Dylan's account of making his twenty-sixth studio album, *Oh Mercy*, in his 2004 memoir, *Chronicles*. The account details what Dylan considers to be a prolonged creative dry-spell in the mid to late 1980s and ends with a detailed narrative of the recording of *Oh Mercy*. I argue that Dylan's account also stands as a 'discourse on method' in regard to sound recording, a serious statement from an artist widely believed to be indifferent about the record making process. Dylan presents his struggle with Daniel Lanois, noted for his collaborative production work with the English avant-garde luminary Brian Eno for the Irish rock band U2, as a clash of ideas about sound and the aesthetics of sound recording.

By elaborating on the allegorical character of Dylan's narrative, I hope to shed light on the broader history of pop music and sound recording, and better understand Dylan's own dynamic relation to studio work. Of course, emphasizing the singer-songwriter's relation to sound goes against the grain of Dylan studies, which has mainly been preoccupied with evaluating and interpreting Dylan's achievements as a wordsmith. It is something of a given in 'Dylanology' that language is where the artist lavished his attention, and what requires and rewards critical scrutiny. Scholars like Christopher Ricks and Greil Marcus have in very different ways contributed to our understanding of the specific language of Dylan's lyrics, demonstrating its historical lineage in traditions of anonymous folk song or canonical poetry including Tennyson and T. S. Eliot. Primarily as a consequence of these word-centred studies, Dylan's recording aesthetic is often summarized, and quickly dismissed, as being 'spontaneous.' The singer-songwriter's deep knowledge and experience of studio recording has therefore received little in the way of commentary, let alone careful study.

Of course, the basic presupposition of Dylanology, the consensus that his lyrics mark a turning point in pop music, is hard to argue with. The work of the singer-songwriter was a major trigger for the 'pop lyric-as-poetry' debates that emerged in intellectual circles in the mid-1960s and after. Dylan amazed and delighted listeners with folk songs like 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' (1963) and 'With God on Our Side' (1964), songs that, in Simon Warner's eloquent description, 'spilled words, told tales and cast opinions with glorious facility.'¹¹ Dylan's innovations as a lyricist are by no means exclusive to his early career as a folk singer. Arguably, language became even more central to his work – more oblique, elliptical, and more self-consciously poetic – in the songs that marked the transition to his rock music in 1965 such as 'Chimes of Freedom', 'Mr. Tambourine Man', and 'Maggie's Farm.' It is also true that Dylan's attitudes to the studio seem to reflect a core, Beat-inspired scepticism about technical artifice for its own sake. Given the singer's profound debts to the Beat aesthetic of Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac, it is of course not surprising that Dylan would cultivate a loose, improvisational approach to recording rather than treat the studio itself as an instrument as did the Beatles, the singer-songwriter's major, mid-60s peer and rivals.

There is evidence to support Simon Warner's claim that Dylan's aim in studio recording was 'to produce a sound that (communicates) authentic emotions' and that his albums rely 'more on his voice, simple instrumentation and basic arrangements than the new tricks of the recording engineer,

the swelling arsenal of studio devices and the gloss that technical breakthroughs would add to the process of record-making.¹² However, there is also ample evidence that an unwavering commitment to authenticity does not describe the entirety of the singer's philosophy of sound recording. Dylan is hardly a 'primitive'; the self-conscious cultivation of spontaneity in the hermetic space of the recording studio, with its highly regimented routines, is the mark of a cultural sophisticate. Moreover, Dylan's choice to include a lengthy account of the recording of *Oh Mercy* in his memoir to the exclusion of other topics also suggests the primary importance the singer gives to studio recording. It suggests that he regards the making of sound recordings to be inextricably tied to the process of songwriting, the principal theme of *Chronicles*. (Not surprisingly, most reviewers of the book seemed puzzled by Dylan's decision to relate the history of recording *Oh Mercy* in detail and largely ignored the chapter, preferring to focus on the admittedly highly evocative account of the folk music scene in Greenwich Village in the early 1960s that Dylan provides in the memoir.)

Arguably, Dylan's obsession with recorded sound begins as soon as he crosses over from folk into rock music, although this point receives short shrift even in some of the celebrated accounts of the singer and his career. Sean Wilentz devotes an entire chapter of his book *Bob Dylan in America* (2010) to the making of the record that arguably represents his greatest achievement, *Blonde on Blonde* (1966). Wilentz's account is based on original and painstaking research into the recording sessions for Dylan's double album set, one of the very first in rock music. One senses that the central point of the narrative for Wilentz is the close reading of the album's lyrical themes that concludes the chapter:

Blonde on Blonde also evokes William Blake's song cycle of innocence and experience, when it depicts how innocence and experience can mingle, as in 'Just Like a Woman,' but also when it depicts the gulf that lies between them. Many of the album's songs, for all of their self-involved temptations and frustrations, express a kind of solidarity in the struggle to live inside that gulf.

Blonde on Blonde as finally assembled, is a disillusioned but seriously hopeful work of art.¹³

There is nothing especially wrong with Wilentz's observation; it helps us consider a work of expansive length, at least in rock terms, as a totality. However, the reference to Blake also seems to close off further analysis by linking Dylan to a poet whose literary authority is not in dispute. One might wonder how this tranquil summary corresponds with the messy story

of recording the album that Wilentz recounts elsewhere in his narrative. The turbulent process of writing and recording *Blonde on Blonde* had little to do with lyric writing, and everything to do with Dylan's own dissatisfaction with the sound of the songs that he recorded. The sessions for the album began in New York soon after the recording of Dylan's previous rock record, *Highway 61 Revisited*. Keyboard player Al Kooper, who also appeared on the earlier album, was by now an associate member of Dylan's studio crew. He was now joined by guitarist Robbie Robertson of the Hawks, the young Canadian group who accompanied the singer during his 1965 tour and stayed with Dylan, even when audiences reacted in fury against the new 'plugged-in' songs. These musicians were not just familiar to Dylan, but road-tested on tours that were legendary on account of the negative reaction audiences expressed toward Dylan's new music. Yet nearly all of the initial sessions for *Blonde on Blonde* were scrapped by the singer and left unreleased for decades. What was the issue? It would seem that Dylan was on an obsessive quest to capture a sound that he heard in his head but that he was unable to capture in the studio, even with the aid of musicians that he had come to rely upon when his own audience turned confrontational. Convinced that he would never be able to capture the sound he was seeking in New York, Dylan acted on producer Bob Johnston's suggestion to record with Nashville studio musicians and agreed to a completely unexpected change in his work routine. That Dylan would seriously consider that the respectable world of the Nashville studio system, ensconced in the heart of the segregated South, could accommodate the world's ultimate hipster was counter-intuitive to say the least. That the singer was willing to take the plunge suggests the lengths he was willing to go, and how much he was prepared to risk, in order to attain a specific sound on his recordings. As Wilentz himself notes, Dylan wrote most of the lyrics for the album only after arriving in Nashville, after he had decided that he indeed found both the musicians and the setting that would provide him with the sounds that he was seeking.

2

Some prior knowledge of the history of studio recording is necessary before I can proceed to my central story, Dylan's account of recording the *Oh Mercy* album. Modern pop music is impossible to imagine without the prior invention of the recording studio. There is now a large body of scholarship on the vital role played by the recording studio in creating the pop music aesthetic. As Ed Comentale notes, the post-World

War II recording studio 'figures as ground zero for the pop revolution to come.'¹⁴ The studio albums of Bob Dylan are certainly no exception to Comentale's claim. Dylan relocated from Hibbing to New York City in search of a recording contract and a professional career. New York was of course, a major location for the state of the art recording studios that emerged across the United States beginning in the 1940s.

Recording studios in the post-World War II period were designed with the primary function of capturing clear, undistorted sound on tape. Clarity was both a value and a deliberate construct. It was defined in part by exclusion: the removal of sound from the context of live performance. As Ed Comentale remarks, 'the production of clean sound entailed not just better equipment, but a total lack of context.'¹⁵ The new technological means of production attempted to 'purify' recording sound, separating sound from ambient 'noise' and the physical activity of live group performance. The studio is designed to be a space set apart from the rest of the world. Its structure separates musicians from recording engineers, implying the greater importance of the latter in the process. The record producer sits alone in sound proof control booths where they record, but also manipulate and transform, sounds. In their hands, audio becomes a 'flexible material rather than a form of human expression.'¹⁶ As Louise Meintjes notes, studio design and decoration 'point to the existence of interiors within interiors in the physical enclosure that they make and mark' and generate 'an atmosphere of mystery and hidden potency, for they (only) can be revealed ... to those who know how to access them.'¹⁷ No wonder that in this context, the studio can appear to be a place of mystery to the musicians unfamiliar with the recording process, or that the technicians who grasp the hidden secrets of studio technology appear to wield extra-human powers.

In *Sweet Air*, Ed Comentale makes a persuasive case for the post-human character of Buddy Holly's recorded music. The Holly that Comentale re-imagines is a thoroughgoing musical abstractionist who fully comprehends the significance as well as the function of new technologies and seeks to further their work by actively striving to erase his own personality from his recordings, instead exploring the possibilities of sound for its own sake. The result is a pure distillation of pop music remarkably free of 'expressive forms of identity', in Comentale's words.¹⁸

Holly and his backing band the Crickets spent countless hours in the studio twiddling knobs on guitars and adjusting the settings on amplifiers in search of new sounds, regardless of whether these sounds could be reproduced in a concert setting. High-water marks of the Holly

songbook such as 'That'll Be the Day' (1958) are prime examples of the artist's deliberately impersonal aesthetic. The sounds of each individual instrument on the song are sealed off from each other in the final mix of the recording. The sound, tempo, and arrangement bear no obvious relation to the situation of the singer expressed in the lyrics. The chorus, a catch phrase that Holly took at random from the John Ford movie *The Searchers* (1956), has no apparent meaning within the context of the song. Comentale's reading of the hit single by the 60s girl-group the Jaynetts, 'Sally Go Round the Roses' (1963; Andy Warhol's favourite pop song) also perfectly describes 'That'll Be the Day', where 'inhuman voices' gesture toward emotions rather than express them.¹⁹ No context is provided in the song to explain these emotions, either. The sonic contradictions of pop music are present from the very start of the rock era and already formalized by the time Dylan makes his own rock recordings. 'Inhuman voices' reproduced in what Paul Theberge calls the 'non-space' of the studio are broadcast over car radios, a key element in the social circuit of music that emerges in the 1950s and comes to dominate the 1960s.²⁰

Dylan's own songwriting would seem to stand at the opposite pole of Buddy Holly's. Dylan gained legendary status for his 'meaningful' lyrics, whereas Holly largely relied on lyrical cliché and child-like catchphrases. However, Dylan shares a decided taste for musical abstraction with the Texas singer-songwriter and likewise rejects the notion that music is primarily a means of self-expression. Dylan's turn to rock music coincided with his move away from story songs, to song with more abstract and impressionistic lyrics, evidenced in countless songs of this period, from the acoustic 'Gates of Eden' (1965) and 'Desolation Row' (1965) to almost the entirety of *Blonde on Blonde* (1966). During the rock period, Dylan repeatedly used the language of mathematical abstraction to describe his new sound. For example, the singer lavished praise on his new guitarist Robbie Robertson for the 'numerical' quality of his playing: '[Robbie Robertson is] the only mathematical guitar genius I've ever run into who does not offend my intestinal nervousness with his rearguard sound.'²¹

3

Abstraction, understood as the process of separating song and sound from self-expression, is the central aesthetic problem Dylan explores in his account of recording *Oh Mercy* in *Chronicles*. The chapter takes up the story of Dylan's career in the mid-1980s, a period that he regards as his creative nadir. In its own dark-humored way, the chapter is a pleasure to read,

with the singer recounting with relish every embarrassing reminder about how far he has fallen. On tour with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Dylan recalls keyboardist Benmont Tench pleading with him to include more songs from his copious back catalogue in the show. The request terrifies the singer, who feels he is incapable of engaging with his musical past. He compares touring with his songbook to 'carrying a package of heavily rotting meat.'²² The same bleak scenario with Tench recurs when Dylan later agrees to play concerts with the Grateful Dead. Untrue to type, the Dead show up at the rehearsals for the tour eager for hard work, and anxious to 'run over all the songs, the songs they liked, the seldom seen ones.'²³ Dylan is paralyzed by this prospect: 'I could hear the brakes screech. If I had known this to begin with, I might not have taken the dates. I had no feelings for any of those songs and didn't know I could sing them with any intent.'

Abstraction in the form of a new musical technique seems to magically present itself to the singer-songwriter as the solution to his creative crisis. Dylan attends a concert by blues and jazz guitarist Lonnie Johnson. Backstage, Johnson takes time to show Dylan 'a style of playing based on an odd-instead of an even-number system.'²⁴ Dylan describes the technique as a 'highly controlled system of playing and relates to the notes of a scale, how they combine numerically, how they form melodies out of triplets and are axiomatic to the rhythm and the chord changes.' A zealous convert to Johnson's method, Dylan is confident that 'this way of playing would revitalize my world.'²⁵

Dylan goes into more detail about this mysterious mathematical mode of composition, noting that using odd numbers in the intervals constitutes a break with traditional song structure. He seizes on this method as a means to overcome his creative fatigue: 'I'm not that good at math, but I do know that the universe is formed with mathematical principles whether I understand them or not, and I was going to let them guide me.'²⁶ Yet the more Dylan tries to explain Johnson's technique, the more opaque it all becomes. One suspects that it is all a long shaggy dog story. Since Dylan never explicitly references this method again in his account of his return to songwriting. However, Dylan's tall tale of a magical songwriting technique is central to the account of the artistic process he provides in the chapter. It reinforces his central point that spontaneous creation is no longer an option for him. Dylan's alienation from his musical past must become the precondition for further creativity. The singer-songwriter also reveals that he blames his audience in part for his writing block. He claims his fans regard songwriting to be a mode of

self-expression, and little else. His audience 'still only concentrate(s) on the lyrics', and are unable to engage the artist in the creative process. This audience 'was past its prime and its reflexes were shot. They came to stare and not participate.'²⁷

Dylan's confessions of creative exhaustion frame the main event recounted in the chapter, the recording of 1989's *Oh Mercy* in New Orleans with producer Daniel Lanois at the helm. His various tales of creative bankruptcy prepare the reader for a series of role reversals that involve the singer. The chapter begins with Dylan's frank observation about his tour with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, that 'Tom was at the top of his game and I was at the bottom of mine,' and that '(e)verything was smashed. My own songs had become strangers to me.'²⁸ Finally ready to return to the studio, Dylan is persuaded by U2's frontman Bono to hire their producer to make his new record. Like Petty, Lanois is at the top of *his* game when he enters Dylan's tale. U2's *The Joshua Tree* (1987), released the year before the events Dylan relates in this chapter, would establish U2 as one of the most commercially successful rock and roll bands in the world.

Lanois is more than another colourful character in the roster of artists and outsiders featured in *Chronicles*; writing about his time with Lanois allows Dylan to fill out the history of pop music that is also a central part of his book. Like Tom Petty, Lanois represents someone in touch with pop music and its audience in a way that the singer-songwriter can no longer imagine. The only other account of recording Dylan provides in *Chronicles* underscores Lanois' representative status in the memoir. In a brief tale of the recording of Dylan's *New Morning* (1969), Dylan sketches his former producer Bob Johnston. Johnston recorded many of the landmark albums that the singer-songwriter made in the mid-1960s. The difference between these accounts suggests that Dylan regards the distinction between Johnston and Lanois as no small matter. In his mind, it amounts to a major sea change as well as indicates a new development in the record making process.

In his remarkable study of echo and reverb in classic blues and rock recordings, Peter Doyle remarks on how the layout of recording studios guaranteed that musical performers would be 'watched, monitored and directed by unseen engineers and producers.'²⁹ The spatial arrangement of the studio embodies a power dynamic, placing the record producer in control. In Dylan's case, Bob Johnston worked hard to reverse the usual studio hierarchy. Johnston went to great lengths to place the singer at the centre of the recording process. He made certain that Dylan's vocals

were at the centre of the mix on every song. When Dylan turned to rock and roll, Johnston took special care to surround the singer with backing musicians sympathetic to his new music and keep these key members on retainer for future sessions. Dylan was permitted to arrange his songs and had the final say on which take of a recording would be used. Limiting his duties to setting the volume levels for instruments on the track and running the tape recorder, Johnson likewise relinquished much of his authority as a producer.

One could argue, as does Colin Irwin, that 'the buccaneering sense of freedom and exploration encouraged by Johnson's acquiescence' was a necessary precondition of Dylan's groundbreaking creativity in his early career.³⁰ However, Johnston has also been criticized for his laissez-faire approach to recording, by Al Kooper for one, who characterizes the Texas-born producer as 'the kinda guy that just pats you on the back and says you're fantastic.'³¹ Although Dylan was the clear beneficiary of Johnson's more modest approach, the singer's frustration with Johnston's inability to get the results that Dylan desired colours his recollections about recording *New Morning*: 'Within a week I was in the New York Columbia studios with Johnston at the helm, and he's thinking that everything I'm recording is fantastic. He always does. He's thinking that something is gonna strike pay dirt, that everything is totally together. On the contrary. Nothing was ever together. Not even after a song had been finished and recorded was it ever together.'³²

As Mark Polizzotti notes, Dylan has a long history of 'complicated relationships' with his producers.³³ In the studio setting, 'any authority, even one on his side, (is) suspect.' However, the many carnivalesque reversals in Dylan's account of *Oh Mercy* prepare the reader for yet one more unexpected turn. Lanois takes charge over the recording sessions, and Dylan accepts a passive role in the process. In contrast with Johnston, Lanois is presented as an authoritative presence in the studio. Beside his expertise at working the board, Lanois is passionately involved in the entire creative process. Yet the contrast is not only with Johnston, but with Dylan himself. The singer-songwriter portrays Lanois as possessing all the drive and confidence that Dylan lacks in regard to writing and recording. In stark contrast, Lanois 'would have done anything to make a song happen – empty the pans, wash dishes, sweep the floors. It didn't matter. All that mattered to him was getting that certain something and I understood that.'³⁴ Dylan adds: 'One thing about Lanois that I liked is that he didn't want to float on the surface. He didn't even want to swim. He wanted to jump in and go deep. He wanted to marry a mermaid. All that was fine with me.'³⁵

Lanois not only takes a different approach to producing than Dylan is used to, he also represents a new ideology of studio recording. Lanois is part of a generation who reveres the rock and blues recordings made by artists signed to regional record labels like Sun and Chess, including Elvis Presley, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Carl Perkins. For this group of listeners, the recordings made in the low-rent studios owned by small independent labels no longer signify sonic artifice, as we saw with Buddy Holly. For the self-styled rock connoisseur, the recordings now represent raw, primitive artistry, and signify musical authenticity. The new mode of reception of blues and rock records by musician/producers like Lanois effectively rewrites the history of studio recording: recordings now represent individual expression rather than artifice. Lanois and the new breed of record producers also reject the original aim of the studio engineer to isolate sound from its human origins and the recording studio from the outside world. Instead, their ideal sonic artifact blurs the lines that separate the studio interior from spaces outside it.

Dylan characterizes Lanois as 'a Yankee man ... from north of Toronto – snowshoe country, abstract thinking. Lanois's thinking was fine with me. *I think abstract, too.*'³⁶ Beyond a tendency toward abstraction, the aesthetic philosophies of the two men eventually intersect on a mystical plane. The singer is eventually convinced that Lanois can open a channel between the recording studio and the magical atmosphere of the city that surrounds it and tap into its frequencies. Throughout the chapter, Dylan describes the ambience of the city with gusto and extensive detail. He often pays tribute to New Orleans, singling out the city's much beloved community radio station, WWOZ. The station provides the musical soundtrack for this section of *Chronicles*, with Dylan often interrupting his story to comment on the songs that he hears on the radio, by Eartha Kitt and other greats of American music. 'There are a lot of places I like,' Dylan states, 'but I like New Orleans better.' He explains why: '(the) past doesn't pass away so quickly here. You could be dead for a long time. The ghosts race towards the light, you can almost hear the heavy breathing – spirits, all determined to get somewhere.'³⁷

During the sessions for the song 'Man in the Long Black Coat,' Dylan suggests that the ghosts in the city have somehow entered the recording studio. He notes that 'a peculiar change crept over the appearance of things':

The production sounds deserted, like the intervals of the city have disappeared. It's cut out from the abyss of blackness – visions of a maddened brain, a feeling of unreality ... The song came nearer and nearer – crowding

itself into the smallest possible place. We didn't even rehearse the song, we began working it out with visual cues.³⁸

For one extraordinary moment, the struggle between the producer and the recording artist ceases, and the two bond over their shared belief that recording can somehow magically bridge the gap between the insular space of the studio and the outside world. 'I don't know how "Man in the Long Black Coat" could have been recorded without Lanois', Dylan finally, and somewhat reluctantly, acknowledges.³⁹

By the end of Dylan's account, his idea of musical abstraction broadens to include the open-ended process of recording. It's as if Dylan's decision to let go of his own preconceptions about recording is what ultimately allows Lanois to capture the ambience of the world outside the studio: or so Dylan would have us believe. However, although he makes peace with relinquishing his own authority in the studio, the competitive attitude that Mark Polizzotti argues characterizes the singer-songwriter's relation to his producers reemerges. Dylan closes his account by slyly insinuating a few improvements that Lanois could make, provided he could relinquish a few more of his own preconceptions and adopt a more 'abstract' approach to music.

For one, Dylan hints that Lanois needs to reckon with time, or time's passing, as much as sound and space. Looking back, Dylan observes, 'the voice on the record was never going to be the voice of the martyred man of constant sorrow, and I think in the beginning, Danny had to come to terms with that, and when he gave that notion up, that's when things started to work.'⁴⁰ Dylan also suggests that Lanois hasn't quite learned the crucial point that time moves on: 'I would have liked to been able to give him the kinds of songs that he wanted, like "Masters of War," "Hard Rain," "Gates of Eden," but those kinds of songs were written under different circumstances and never repeat themselves.'⁴¹

Unlike Lanois, Dylan believes he knows there is no going back. Compounding the question of whether or not he has resolved his artistic crisis, Dylan's apprehensions now extend to his own musical brand. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of Dylan's account is his remarks on rap music, and his firm conviction (in 2004) that he is working in a post-rock musical universe. Hip-hop has already decisively displaced rock and folk in his mind. From this perspective, Daniel Lanois's solemn quest for authentic sounds seems totally irrelevant. Dylan recalls that: 'Danny asked me who I'd been listening to recently, and I told him Ice-T. He was surprised, but he shouldn't have been ... Ice-T, Public Enemy, N.W.A.,

Run-D.M.C. These guys definitely weren't standing around bullshitting. They were beating drums, tearing it up, hurling horses over cliffs. They were all poets and knew what was going on.⁴² Compared to these Rappers, '(the) kind of music that Danny and I were making was archaic.'⁴³ Dylan goes further and anticipates a future where the hip-hop artist takes over pop music, which of course is what happened: 'Somebody different was bound to come along sooner or later who would know that world, been born and raised with it . . . He'd be able to balance himself on one leg on a tightrope that stretched across the universe and you'd know him when he came. The audience would go that way, and I couldn't blame them.'⁴⁴

Dylan's references to hip-hop are of a piece with the chapter-long exploration of his creative crisis, as well as with the conventions of the memoir, a genre that requires the writer to pivot between opinions that they held at the time of the event being related and more comprehensive, retrospective views. Bob Dylan became a star in the 1960s when, as Brian McHale details, experiment and cross pollination in the arts were at a peak. Dylan's relationship to Allen Ginsberg provides one example of the unique spirit of the times. By the mid-60s, the lines of influence between Dylan and the Beat poet extended both ways; Ginsberg himself looked to the singer-songwriter (and also to the Beatles) for clues on how to reach and sustain a mass audience for poetry. Similarly, European directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Jean-Luc Godard made movies in the 60s that featured rock bands and anxiously scrutinized the new youth culture for auguries of the future.⁴⁵ It is hardly an accident that the flourishing of 'LitPop' in the 1990s coincides with the increasing popularity of Cultural Studies in Humanities programs in Great Britain and the United States. Both cultural studies critics and novelists championed musical subcultures like punk and hip-hop for their unconventionality and contentious stance toward authority, qualities the newer pop music forms shared with the work of previous artistic avant-gardes.

From the beginning, Dylan sought a new and greater authenticity in his art. This quest carried with it a certain amount of suspicion toward the recording process. Too much time in the studio, too much 'polish' on a recording, could only alienate the artist from their work, and their audience. However, Dylan's transition to rock music also marked a new attitude to studio recording. For the first time, the 'right' take of a studio performance mattered, and Dylan accordingly showed a greater openness, and patience, with the recording making process more generally. Dylan's memoir *Chronicles* suggests yet another change in his relation to the studio, with the singer-songwriter adopting a quasi-mystical approach

to recording that sought to harness technology for magical purposes, in the hope of somehow capturing the sonic ambience of the city itself: in this case, New Orleans.

Dylan's final, sombre assessment of his return to recording indicates his awareness that solving a personal creative dilemma is merely that: a private victory, with little consequence for the outside world. The singer-songwriter's summary comments on recording *Oh Mercy* serve several purposes. They suggest his mature awareness that the art he made as a younger man was enabled by his cultural moment, as well as his firm conviction that this moment has passed (recall his initial complaint about the passive nature of his present-day concert audience). In this context, Dylan's remarks on hip-hop intimate the acceptance of his own obsolescence, of a future that does not include him.

It's possible that the next generation of writers who map out their (and our) relation to music will be less concerned with identifying music as an alternative culture, as was customary in the 1980s and 90s, than with imagining music as a way of *disconnecting* from an all-pervasive social network. Regardless, writers will doubtless continue to play a critical role in analyzing, and inventing, the meanings that we ascribe to music and sound.

Notes

- ¹ Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xii.
- ² Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 185.
- ³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' from *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2008), p. 22.
- ⁴ Erich Hertz and Jeffrey Roessner, 'Introduction', in *Write in Tune*, ed. by Hertz and Roessner (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 2.
- ⁵ Benjamin, 'Work of Art', p. 23.
- ⁶ Schleifer, *Popular*, p. xii.
- ⁷ Schleifer, *Popular*, p. xiii.
- ⁸ Hertz and Roessner, *Write in Tune*, p. 2.
- ⁹ Hertz and Roessner, *Write in Tune*, p. 4.
- ¹⁰ Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen, 'Introduction', in *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music*, ed. by Carroll and Hansen (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 20.
- ¹¹ Simon Warner, *Text and Drugs and Rock and Roll: The Beats and Rock Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 10.
- ¹² Warner, *Text and Drugs and Rock and Roll*, p. 10.

- ¹³ Sean Wilentz, 'Mystic Nights: The Making of *Blonde on Blonde*', *Oxford American Magazine*, Issue 58, 'The Ninth Annual Music Issue', 2007 (online source).
- ¹⁴ Edward P. Comentale, *Sweet Air: Modernism, Regionalism, and American Popular Song* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 209.
- ¹⁵ Comentale, *Sweet Air*, p. 209.
- ¹⁶ Comentale, *Sweet Air*, p. 209.
- ¹⁷ Louise Meintjes, 'The Recording Studio as Fetish', in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 268.
- ¹⁸ Comentale, *Sweet Air*, p. 216.
- ¹⁹ Comentale, *Sweet Air*, p. 229.
- ²⁰ Comentale, *Sweet Air*, p. 208.
- ²¹ Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Signet New American Library, 1973), p. 275.
- ²² Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume One* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 148.
- ²³ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 149.
- ²⁴ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 158.
- ²⁵ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 157.
- ²⁶ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 161.
- ²⁷ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 155.
- ²⁸ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 148.
- ²⁹ Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900–1960* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), p. 6.
- ³⁰ Colin Irwin, *Bob Dylan: Highway 61 Revisited* (New York: Billboard Books, 2008), p. 192.
- ³¹ Irwin, *Bob Dylan*, p. 192.
- ³² Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 137.
- ³³ Mark Polizzotti, *Highway 61 Revisited*, 33 1/3 Series (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), p. 78.
- ³⁴ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 194.
- ³⁵ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 195.
- ³⁶ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 194. (My italics)
- ³⁷ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 180.
- ³⁸ Dylan, *Chronicles*, pp. 215–16.
- ³⁹ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 217.
- ⁴⁰ Dylan, *Chronicles*, pp. 220–1.
- ⁴¹ Dylan, *Chronicles*, pp. 218–19.
- ⁴² Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 219.
- ⁴³ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 219.
- ⁴⁴ Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 219.
- ⁴⁵ Brian McHale treats these two examples of dialogue between the elite and popular arts, and many more besides, in the 'Big Bang, 1966' chapter in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

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