

Listening to Form: Modernism and the Resonant Subject

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## Abstract

*Listening to Form: Modernism and the Resonant Subject* argues that literary modernism's experimentalism renders form and subjectivity as listening experiences. The title of this dissertation hinges upon the grammatical difference that expresses the slippage of form itself: we listen *to* form as a resonant object that reaches out to us, but we also actively listen *to form* world, self, and others. Since modernist style demands an alteration of reading practices, engaging these texts cultivates a process of perceiving differently, which challenges readerly sensibilities and pushes against modernity's regimes of containment. Moreover, modernist style elaborates the polymorphic potential of listening as a dialectical process that moves between text and audience, language and thought, interior and exterior. This project emerges from a fusion of reader-response and formalist critical practices that traces the immersive qualities of modernist literature and the way its style can encourage critiques of ideologies that ossify experience and stymie interpretation. Literary studies have thoroughly charted modernity's auditory influence on modernist writers by correlating technological development with the textual replication and representation of sound. However, this approach often brackets or completely elides the role of the reader. Understanding literary form, then, instantiates an examination of perception while attending to how those perceptions lay the groundwork for cultural and ideological structures. Modernist literature, by amplifying the openness of listening, subsequently critiques the restraining aspects of modernity along with its ocular-centric modes of representation, or visualism, that permeate our intellectual vocabularies and methodologies. The project will not valorize aural over visual senses; rather, it will take listening as a process that elaborates on the senses' intermingling and de-coupling.

The dissertation begins with *Ulysses* to chart the polymorphic relations among dialogues, memories, and environs as a series of intersubjective openings through its free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, and wordplay. As part of its exploration of tensions between the bodily and conceptual, the novel features listening as a function that can potentially liberate the modern subject from atomistic conceptions of self and ideological restraints. In “Sounding Space and Subject,” I analyze *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Passage to India* and identify how figurations of space and the contortions of sound modulate subjectivity and compel characters to reckon with their finitude. The chapter will compare the effects of the Marabar Caves on Mrs. Moore and Ms. Quested along with Septimus Smith’s urban-centered hallucinations in *Mrs. Dalloway*. These hallucinatory elements will then be contrasted with Prof. Godbole and Mrs. Dalloway’s more focused listening practices. The third chapter, “Unsound Voices,” applies the analysis *synchresis* in *Apocalypse Now* to attend to how its characters listen to the voice as an ideological fantasy object. I then apply its conclusions to *Heart of Darkness* and theorize its cinematic figurations that express its characters’ colonial designs. Finally, I examine the postmodernist poet Charles Olson and his theory of projective verse and his poem “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You” along with John Cage’s essays to theorize how listening offers ways to engage in a socio-cultural resistance to regimes of commodification.

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## Introduction

*Listening to Form: Modernism and the Resonant Subject* argues that modernist representations of listening amplify the dialectical relation between the sensory and the conceptual, and that this relation has ramifications on how we model literary form and the formation of the subject. Modernism's experimental depictions of sensory experience afford readers a deeper phenomenology of the everyday processes that shape consciousness, and this project's focus on listening examines moments when audiovisual perception effectively becomes the form and content of these descriptions and narrations. Furthermore, in showing how the texts emerge through audiovisual differences, the project ties that formal, phenomenal emergence to the subject as it sustains, fades, and repeats through a play of signs. These textual renditions of listening thus reconceptualize form as a resonant, permeable structure through which we can appreciate the tensions of subjectivity itself. The title, *Listening to Form*, plays with the grammatical slippage between prepositional object and verbal infinitive, suggesting that form already manifests when it is approached through its material, sensory registers before it is relegated to judgment or category.<sup>1</sup> We listen *to* form when phenomena reach out and engage our senses, and we also listen *to form* world, self, and others. The first aspect attends to the sensory limits of form that position us within a moment of perception, while the second points toward the infinite work of interpretation. Engaging discourses of plasticity and form through the work of listening, this project ultimately adopts the mobile and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Lehman posits that this phenomenal or "mere form" refers to "the minimal fact of an object's spatial, temporal arrangement" (250).

undulating metaphors of resonance to conceptualize formation as it dialectically plays out for literary texts and readerly subjects. *Listening to Form* attunes to the relation between material substance and abstract concept, identifying listening as a tremulous staging to reimagine categories of literary form and subjectivity in more dynamic terms.

Literary studies have thoroughly charted modernity's auditory influence on modernist writers by correlating technological developments with the textual representations of sound. In the introduction to *Sounding Modernism*, the authors observe that "sonic transpositions and transferences across media affect the techniques with which human subjects respond to modern soundscapes" (Murphet et al. 4). From the late nineteenth century on through the twentieth, the proliferation of recording devices, radio, and telephone influenced modernist literature, which either directly featured these new auditory technologies or adopted these modes of transmission as a formal feature of style.<sup>2</sup> These correspondences continue to yield new insights into modernist literary style and human subjectivity; however, this thoroughgoing historicism sometimes emphasizes the functioning of the mechanical over the human processes of perception and interpretation. In other words, studying technology remains a crucial aspect of modernist literary studies, but it does not always suffice to explain how modernists represent listening. Indeed, modernist literature's experimentalism can represent listening without recourse to a machine: technology does not define sound in the texts of this era as much as provide another mechanistic metaphor for it. This dissertation acknowledges the crucial work that examines these ties between technology and literary style, but it

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<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of *The Waste Land*, for example, Juan A. Suarez comments that Eliot "was shaping an old medium in the image of a new one" (751).

proposes a shift in analysis toward the depictions of listening and how it relates to discourses about form. These depictions serve as markers for literary modernism's innovations and inward turn since, as Andrzej Gasiorek notes, "Literary modernism pivots around the twin crises of representation and subjectivity, the one implicating the other" (9). Just as representation and subjectivity are rendered as dialectical tensions within modernist literature, listening instantiates a dialectic between perception and interpretation, mediating the sensory and interpretive. Modernist style, then, represents subjectivity with more sensory intimacy, so the texts render these crises more vividly, pushing them to interrogate the ideological and philosophical premises that underlie their constructions. Listening reveals subjectivity's modulations, a resonance that is being formed as it travels, altering among various spaces and taking on new dimensions. More than just describing sensory experiences, modernist texts enfold the reader within a phenomenology of listening that challenges our presumptions about listening and the role of the auditory in imagining form.

Generally, literary modernism defines itself as a break from tradition, and these departures also apply to modes of representations that permeate philosophies and ideologies. This project adopts some of the philosophical lines of inquiry within sound studies to ask how modernist literature's representation of listening can complicate the longstanding visual metaphors that suture knowing and seeing. In Greek, *eidos* means "that which is seen, form, shape, figure," and in its verbal form sometimes captures "that which is known" (*εἶδος* 226).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, *morphe* often pertains to the observed shape

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<sup>3</sup> Some contend that "idea" is etymologically linked to this tie between vision and knowing and would partially explain how vision metaphors dominate references to the formation of concepts.

of an object within a visual field. Indeed, almost all references to form (as structure, space, body, etc.) rely upon and reinforce these metaphors. In *Listening and Voice*, Don Ihde identifies this tendency as a continuation of the Enlightenment's specializing and partitioning of knowledge, which subsequently split the senses into discrete units of study. He labels this sensory splitting a "Cartesian fallacy" and proposes that the auditory has been continually subordinated to vision (43). Idhe's focus on auditory phenomena distinguishes his philosophical inquiry as a "decentering of a dominant tradition" that relegates the auditory to a separate and less important field (13). Similarly, Adriana Cavarero claims that metaphysics, and western discourse more generally, relies upon a "fundamental gesture that locates the principle of the system of signification, of the signified, in the visual sphere" (35). In announcing a reexamination of auditory models pushing against age-old visual forms of knowledge, Idhe and Cavarero sustain a similarly polemical stance toward human experience and subjectivity as literary modernism does. This project's focus on listening in modernist texts seeks out those moments of auditory disruption and fragmentation as a way of rethinking the senses in altered and perhaps more holistic terms. its coordinating function among senses and interpretations finds in literary modernism an appropriate field.

While Idhe and Cavarero lay out an intellectual history that traces how vision has been elevated over and sometimes against the auditory, Jean-Luc Nancy identifies the dynamic movement of the sonorous as another way of conceptualizing form more broadly in his book *Listening*. Echoing Idhe and Cavarero, he asserts that there is "more isomorphism between the visual and the conceptual, even if only by virtue of the fact that the *morphe*, the 'form' implied in the idea of 'isomorphism,' is immediately thought or

grasped on the visual plane” (2). Nancy then argues that the sonorous “outweighs form. It does not dissolve it, but rather enlarges it; it gives it an amplitude, a density, and a vibration or an undulation whose outline never does anything but approach. The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence” (2). Nancy’s project asks if philosophy has yet understood what it is to listen, and his interrogation of how listening builds knowledge plays a keynote with which this project seeks to harmonize. Namely, Nancy’s language makes the metaphoric adjustments toward auditory imagery, a rather oxymoronic phrase that opens potential for rethinking form in its philosophical, cultural, and literary registers. By elaborating on the resonant activity of the world and subject, these texts portray sensory activity and their subsequent mental associations and amplify the literary nature of subjectivity. These texts’ focus on audiovisual coordination expresses a figural resonance between a text’s formal emergence and the subject’s dialectical composition.

Just as this dissertation argues about the coordination of the senses through listening, it will also attend to visualism as the argumentative opposition. Jonathan Sterne warns against simplifying this tension between visual and auditory, regarding the oversimplification of this contrast as the *audiovisual litany*, a series of binaries that emphasize the incompatibility of sight and hearing that eventually culminate in “a set of cultural prenotions about the senses (prejudices, really) to the level of theory” (9). Sterne correctly indicates that many theorize these oppositions to allegorize ideological conflict. This dissertation proposes to negotiate these sensory tensions, acknowledging places where visual formation sometimes moves toward ossification and where the auditory can express the liberatory, but (this project) ultimately moves toward finding a holistic

balancing of these metaphors. This project emerges from a fusion of reader-response and formalist critical practices that traces the immersive qualities of modernist literature and the way its style can encourage critiques of ideologies that foreclose interpretation.

*Listening to Form* examines a variety of textual types to survey how different forms of mediation alter representations of listening. This project imagines the stream of consciousness as a succession of auditory waves that resound between a character's sense perception and interpretation. The modernist novel occupies a major portion of this project because the volume of narrative affords more opportunities to analyze a variety of listening positions and movements. To push the auditory metaphor further, the volume of the modernist novel can refer both to its duration and its depiction of soundscapes. Sound in cinema offers a more explicit staging for the sensory tensions between auditory and visual signs. Even commonplace references to consuming cinema gesture toward the separate yet collaborative processes of visual sequencing and auditory bridging: an audience views a film, but it also listens to it. By analyzing modernist aesthetics in cinema, the audiovisual experience of film offers a way of thinking through the processes that engage the audience. The project then turns to poetics and poetry, which examines the ties between literary and musical expression and the broader, socio-political implications of form. While other literary forms and styles throughout history call up their own status as texts that sound out to the audience, modernist literature's intimate examination of perception itself marks it as a movement, or series of movements, that attends to the relations among text, body, and interpretation. Modernist literature seeks to identify and even replicate this sensory dynamism whose boundaries are in constant flux. Since modernist texts focus on subjective experience, their content and form

collaborate and demonstrate how the self is a similar alternating of sensory and interpretive experiences that confounds rigid definition.

The question of form as it relates to literary discourse remains perennially frustrating in its imprecision. Since this dissertation takes up a broadly formalist methodology to theorize how modernism reconceptualizes form through representations of listening, this introduction posits an answer to injunctions that have been raised for roughly the past twenty years to reassess what we mean by form and formalism. The responses register an ongoing dissatisfaction with how these calls tend to conclude with more promises or frustrations. In 2003, W.J.T. Mitchell's article, "The Commitment to Form: Or, Still Crazy after All These Years," queries the field's terms and methods, suggesting that a "new notion of form, and thus a new formalism, lies before us." Mitchell then posits, "This will also be a formalism we will have already been committed to for some time without knowing it" (324). Susan Wolfson conducts a wider survey of formalism in the introduction to 2006's *Reading for Form*. She argues that "reading for form will also improve our sense of how cultural forms are produced" (Wolfson 12), and that it "implies the activity as well as the object" (14). Both theorize a correspondence between form and social or historical concerns, and I posit that examining how text represents the sensory and the conceptual will offer a renewed practice of reading and its relation to ideology, emerging like a listening experience. Mitchell's theory that a formalism is latent yet before us suggests that our understanding of form does not consist in a new set of categories as much as an alteration of our methods. Wolfson's commentary that reading for form can "improve our sense" of other forms should be taken more literally so that, in attending to the senses, we cultivate those critical

apparatuses that have been before us yet latent. Attention to form may not result conclusively in new definitions of form itself. Instead, we might reorient our desire for definition toward thinking about it as a “mode of comportment” (Lehman 252). Along with Wolfson, this attendance to form will subsequently reveal the cultural and sensory bases from which the literary emerges and, in turn, conditions. More specifically, the literary turn (or return) to form can be rendered as a new regard for the phenomenal elements of the text, and I argue that modernism’s attention to sensory experience serves as an implicit theory of how bodily and cultural forms of articulation collaborate, differ, and sometimes mesh. Working within this nexus of phenomenology and formalism, Julie Beth Napolin addresses the connections between the acoustical aspects of text and its resonance with the reader in *The Fact of Resonance*. She opens her groundbreaking work with a reading of Beckett’s *Company* and claims, “we have yet to understand the acoustics underlying legibility, audibility, and visibility in the production and reception of narrative” (1). Napolin’s work attunes modernist narrative and offers a critical step toward analyzing how representations of listening might produce the dynamic formalism that is latent yet before us.

These formalisms of literary theory can move beyond intellectual categorization toward an engagement with the phenomenal. Caroline Levine’s broadly defines forms as “all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference” (3). Each listed item here balances between a material and abstract register, which Levine identifies as an affordance: “The term *affordance* crosses back and forth between materiality and design. It certainly helps us to understand the capacities and limitations of materials” (9). I contend that modernist literature affords audiences a shift



in how we approach the material and design of literary form. In a critical review of Levine's *Forms*, Marijeta Bozovic suggests, "A dynamic understanding of form in turn suggests that the central project of literary theory should be to trace a living history of form, inevitably intersecting with the social and political" (1182). In *Listening to Form*, I propose that this "dynamic understanding" can be developed in how we experience text and the metaphors we use to theorize sensory and intellectual dynamism. The relation between reading and listening afford a nuanced way to approach text and subjectivity as an embodied dynamic process: "Listening in this sense is a self-consciously critical process, requiring far more of the reader than the automatic internalisation of an aesthetic idea" (Murphet et. al 8). So, while form and material cannot be regarded as the same, listening and reading call up the ways these differences are constructed and experienced through the senses. Literary form, then, operates as a mode of access contoured by its phenomenal characteristics, and I argue that the audiovisuality of text affords a unique staging for how we read and how we model our own subjectivity.

As part of this reorientation of form, I refer to Catherine Malabou's *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* where she concludes that "form is plastic" (1). Malabou deploys the image of the articulated mask as a figure for her own reading of difference, calling it "an attempt to unfold all the layers of this syncopated connection" (4). "Syncope" literally refers to a contiguity found in cutting, and my project examines listening as a path among the text's riven connections that coordinate visual and auditory registers. Form is not a bound space but a mode through which one moves. This project assumes the plasticity of form and argues that it finds a sensory intermediary in listening. Modernism deliberately amplifies our awareness of this emergent process, attending to moments when a character

or poetic speaker examines their perceptions and reckons with the formation of their subjectivity as a fraught relation between material and thought. This relation is central to Roland Barthes's essay "Listening," wherein he distinguishes hearing and listening: "Hearing is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act" ("Listening" 245). He continues describing hearing as the coordinating function that humans share with animals, while listening "cannot be defined only by its object or, one might say, by its goal" (245). Listening performs the dialectic between body and mind, simultaneously situating and displacing the subject. For Barthes, listening exists within an "interspace" just as voice "is located at the articulation of body and discourse" (255). *Listening to Form* attends to this intermediacy of the listening as it is depicted in modernism and identifies its plasticity as the core of its formal innovations.

Literary discourse among modernists also conveys a desire to address form in concrete terms, and, in many cases, they turn to the auditory to amplify this shift within their literary practice. In "A Retrospect," Ezra Pound writes, "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (4). Here, one can detect a phenomenological approach to the literary that begins to shape a theory of form. Later in the same essay, Pound imagines, "I think there is a fluid as well as a solid content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of forms cannot be precisely, and therefore not properly rendered in symmetrical forms" (9). Here, Pound begins adopting metaphors of fluidity to explain concepts of form that seeks out a definition that, paradoxically, abides in a wavering imprecision, suggesting that form cannot be fully contained. Indeed, this fluid model of form offers an antecedent to

Nancy's discussion of the auditory as "undulation whose outline never does anything but approach" (2). The literary advances another way of imagining the sensorium as part of how we conceive of the subject and a host of other relations as a horizontal approach that limns the boundaries of definition. Later, T.S. Eliot would comment more explicitly on how the auditory dimensions of modernist literature dramatize meaning as both communicable construct and ineffable horizon. In his "Matthew Arnold" essay, he lays out a broad definition for the "auditory imagination" as something "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" (111). Eliot's auditory imagination opens toward nonrational meaning, and later in "The Music of Poetry," Eliot claims, "the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning" (21). Eliot establishes the paradoxical function of aurality in that it both confirms communicability while also demarcating its limitations. By considering Pound's formalism and Eliot's auditory imagination, we can discern the dialectical strain between material experience and philosophizing that shapes modernist aesthetics. On one hand, there is an orienting of the modernist poet toward an auditory model of production, and on the other, there is a call to imagine more broadly how one listens for meaning beyond semantic content.

*Listening to Form* imagines its chapters as a series of dialogues. The dialogic is expanded to encompass both spoken exchanges as well as the characters' interior reckoning with their environment and their own subjectivity. The first chapter, "Ulysses, Youlisten, Youbloom," conceives of the novel's episodes as different modes of listening, moving between individual and interpersonal forms of engagement with the self and

world. *Ulysses* draws the reader into a level of unparalleled sympathy with characters' subjectivities as they listen. The styling of the novel moves fluidly along auditory pathways that are filtered through Stephen and Bloom's perspective. The novel's wordplay, onomatopoeia and stream of consciousness approximate the fluxing nature of listening as both characters alternately listen and reveal their interpretations through narration. In *Ulysses*, listening unfolds as a phenomenon that situates the subject within the world while simultaneously expressing that subject's difference from it, especially when world and subject are defined in terms of nationalist or racist ideologies. Moreover, just as listening encourages a more open regard for the world, listening also elaborates those articulations and differences that divide the subject within itself. The novel's portrayal of listening verbally manifests in its narration of sonic activity and linguistic play, amplifying this distinct and divided form of the subject. The chapter analyzes scenes of listening featuring Stephen and Bloom separately and then culminating in the *Ithaca* episode. This chapter emphasizes how the novel's stylistic experimentation moves toward an auditory experience for the reader.

While the first chapter focuses on how *Ulysses* emphasizes an internalizing mode of listening, the next chapter, "Sounding Space and Subject," examines the spatial dimensions of listening in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Passage to India* by attending to moments in these novels where the interiority of the characters emerges from their responses to sound's modulations and contortions in space. The dialectical shaping of sound and space extends into the body, ultimately looping the stimuli, impressions, and interpretations that constitute a character's subjectivity. Space is more than an assemblage of objects in a plane; it also relies upon acculturated notions of how one

perceives and moves through the world. These novels generate their narrative movement through their soundscapes, instantiating moments where characters engage the auditory as part of an existential searching. These subjective openings to the auditory are narrated through spatial movements, perhaps most evident in *A Passage to India*'s three-part divisions (i.e., Mosque, Caves, Temple), but *Mrs. Dalloway* also progresses through its urban setting by way of the ear as much as along the footpaths of its characters. In both cases, listening shapes the novels as much as it signals crucial aspects of the plots' action. These sounding exteriors—be they temples, caves, or London itself—intimate a wider regard of the world as an auditory formation. Furthermore, sound and space operate as metonymies for the subject's formation, so their auditory relations play out as the vital and mortal pulses that signify their own beginning, duration, and cessation. Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the *khora* undergirds this chapter's exploration of sound and subjectivity by situating the characters' attention to this primal yet liminal site to trace how literary modernism represents the resonant subject.

While the opening chapters address how listening can open the subject to dialogic modes of being, in "Unsound Voices" I analyze *Apocalypse Now* to theorize how the film's audiovisual form manifests the splits and false ligatures entailed by listening practices that have succumbed to militaristic and imperialistic ideologies. This chapter deploys Michel Chion's concept of *synchresis*, which refers to the perceived simultaneity of auditory and visual stimuli, as the cinematic technique that dramatizes this process of phantasmatic subjectivization. In other words, the film's experimental presentation of auditory and visual cues calls the audience to seek coherence just as the characters reckon with unconscious, ideological attachments that compel them to subsist in fantasies of

coherence. The chapter approaches *synchresis* as having ideological and critical modes: one that allows for audiovisual illusion to express necessary or actual links, and the other an acknowledgement of the dynamic difference between audio and visual senses that entails critical liberation. Additionally, attention to acousmatic sounds, which emerge from unknown sources and confound the listener, will undergird the film's portrayal of fetishizing the voice. With this analytical framework in place, I turn from *Apocalypse Now* back to its inspiration in *Heart of Darkness* to examine how the film's literary predecessor generates similar tensions between the auditory and visual, elaborating how the colonial imagination listens to the other as a confined entity rather than a dialogical counterpart. Since the novella depicts similar ideological fantasies of visual containment and the fetishized voice, *synchresis* plays out in the literary imagination as a modified technical ligature between the film and novella.

The dissertation concludes with “‘By ear he sd.’: Open Listening with Charles Olson and John Cage” where I examine the poetry and poetics of late modernism/postmodernism by comparing poet Charles Olson and composer John Cage. Examining Olson's famous “Projective Verse” and excerpts from the poem “I, Maximus of Gloucester” along with Cage's theoretical essays, the chapter counterintuitively aligns the poet and the composer and discovers that their theories about sound and listening manifest a closer association than even Olson, who despised Cage's experimentalism, would admit. Indeed, both artists are motivated to move beyond the mere perception of art toward *how* audiences understand their perceptions. When one turns to their prose, both Olson and Cage situate listening as a physical operation intrinsic to the composition and expression of art and intimately tied to socio-political relations. Olson and Cage

understand listening as active engagement, a function that verges on collaboration with a composition—be it musical or poetic. Cage attends to sound's ipseity as a reverential opportunity for a listening subject to relax anticipations and appreciate the unfolding of sound as meditative experience. For him, a composition should avoid formulae or the display of virtuosity, opting to produce communal yet differentiated listening experiences. On the other hand, Olson theorizes that poetry projects the voice of the poet, but this projection is less concerned with the efforts of a singular artist as much as it elevates listening into a means of understanding one's own physical perception as a mode of understanding self, society, and their reciprocity. Both pushed to estrange their artforms from inherited tradition, cultivating a deep awareness of how sensory experience had been subsumed by an over-intellectualized and commodified regime of art, one that contains rather than opens potentiality.

## Chapter One

### *Ulysses*, Youlisten, Youbloom

*Ulysses* frustrates. For those first venturing into Joyce's magnum opus, the novel's unclear transitions among characters, obscure allusions, and stream of consciousness narration generate impasses that might seem insurmountable, yet *Ulysses* sustains these difficulties as the reader attunes to its playful strains. Halting to parse each phrase or look up each reference would break one's sense of its movements among pages and episodes. Initial readings of *Ulysses* often require one to "just enjoy the music of the novel's language;" however, this acquiescence to the novel remains a crucial part of its reception. Indeed, *Ulysses* teaches the reader how to engage text differently. Its unrelenting intimacy might disorient, but within this medio-passive strain one begins to acknowledge how the injunction to "enjoy the music of the language" emerges as a mode of access and critical practice. The shifts among various perceptions, memories, and dialogues distinguishes the novel as a paragon of high modernist style, and these fluid explorations also model the mobile nature of the auditory as it moves through bodies, spaces, and time. *Ulysses* sounds out to the reader, who must collate its profuse semantic content while remaining open to its volatile sonic arcs and turns. Moreover, reading *Ulysses* cultivates its sense of meaning as a *form of listening* throughout crucial scenes in the novel that focus on how characters process auditory and visual stimuli: Stephen on Sandymount Strand, Bloom in the Ormond Bar, and the complex channels of dialogue in Bloom's darkened apartment. Indeed, this listening works in concert *Ulysses* becomes a reading experience that simultaneously sounds out to the reader while providing a



phenomenology of *how* listening occurs with the characters who are opening to the world and self through auditory experience. To read *Ulysses* is to listen to its form. *Ulysses* frustrates, but it also opens.

Between the open listening of the reader and the novel's deepened attention to auditory experience, the form of *Ulysses* operates as a sonic event, resonating between the reader and the characters. Moments where characters listen open the way to their interiority and demonstrate how the self is imbricated within a much wider set of social relations, ideologies, and structures of being. *Ulysses* encourages one to listen by representing the synesthetic qualities of experience that move between body and discourse as well as text and reader. Moreover, Garrett Stewart argues that the audible features of a text do not need to be spoken aloud and that the "reading body" generates mentally activated sound:

This somatic locus of soundless reception includes of course the brain but must be said to encompass as well as the organs of vocal production, from diaphragm up through throat to tongue and palate. Silent reading locates itself, that is, in the conjoint cerebral activity and suppressed muscular action of a simultaneously summoned and silenced enunciation. (1)

In a similar vein, Mariko Dawson Zare argues in *Noisy Modernists* that readers are also listeners of texts as "sound objects," and that "the modernist soundscape is less restricted simply by sound acts within the action of the novel and extends beyond the page to construct the novel as a sound object, entering the auditory consciousness of the reader" (v). In other words, the aural does not necessarily entail the oral.

By understanding *Ulysses* as an auditory phenomenon, I propose that the novel's representations of listening instantiate an ethical imperative toward openness. The modernist styling of *Ulysses* embodies the chaotic soundscapes of modernity, but it also shapes its narrative by textualizing the listening experience through lexical play. Rather than providing a descriptive listening experience, one that records the speaking subjects' interactions with sound, the prose *creates* a listening experience by entering the mind of the listener or sounding out the event itself through onomatopoeia or strange textual arrangements on the page. Readers open toward the novel's auditory nature in two ways: the reader replicates these soundings through the process of reading itself; and the reader accesses the characters' minds as they listen and interpret the world of the novel.

The experimentalism of *Ulysses* offers a literary correspondence to the dynamic formation of human being itself. By training the reader's focus on everyday experience, the novel's style amplifies how these intimate experiences resonate within an expansive and resonating matrix of meanings. In his study of rhythm and literary modernism, William Martin argues that these stylistic features replicate the resonant features of auditory phenomena wherein the "*form* of such thought processes are motivated by the reception of physical rhythms, the production of physiological rhythms, and the imagination of psychological rhythms" (144). By attending to this styling, modernist novels compose networks of meaning that might begin with internal, individual experience but resonate with a wider range of social and ideological ties. Modernist listening stylizes the polymorphic relations among characters and world and marks the pathways by which the reader accesses those relations, and through these plastic movements the dialectical nature of the subject attains an auditory register marked by the

reader. *Ulysses* charts the polymorphic relations among characters, and world as a series of intersubjective openings, pushing against modernity's containing tendencies. When applied to socio-political spheres, listening becomes the function that can potentially liberate the modern subject from atomistic conceptions of self.<sup>4</sup> Listening becomes the constant yet fluxing phenomenon that embodies this novel's fluid, auditory form. Indeed, the novel goads us toward thinking of human being as a composition, a resonating complex instantiated through dialogues and sounds received and produced by the body. I offer that *Ulysses* subverts the partitioning of the senses and the self by engaging its characters and readers through listening. In depicting the person as a listening being, and by understanding being as the practice of listening, *Ulysses* unsettles the boundaries of modernity and make its strictures, both physical and ideological, far more porous.

Criticism regarding the auditory dimensions of *Ulysses* usually divides into two main camps: a historicist mode that examines the influence of auditory technologies on modernist style; and a phenomenological mode, which investigates how modernist style represents the processes of sense-perception and the shaping of subjectivity. The former category is the most popular and connects the emerging technologies of modernity such as gramophones, trolleys, pianolas, typewriters, and mass advertising as metonymically and symbolically manifesting Joyce's stylistic experiments. These studies fascinate with their attention to detail and their critical reminder that material and commercial relations exert deep influences on human behavior and art. However, the emphasis on commodities

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Wollaeger notes the "...long-standing theories of modernism—from Oscar Wilde to Adorno—that ascribe liberating social effects to revolutions in formal conventions" (131).

often diminishes the role of sense perception (Saint-Amour 26).<sup>5</sup> This chapter employs the phenomenological method, advocating a modified focus towards the position of the listener in the novel and that listener's interpretation of auditory phenomena. Modernist novels' attention to perception engages what Sara Danius calls a "phenomenology of pure perception" (164), and this focus on individual experience rendered so obscurely might lead some to argue that modernist style cultivates self-indulgence or elitism. I will employ the phenomenological methods, which are heavily indebted to Garrett Stewart's concept of the phonotext and phonemic reading,<sup>6</sup> to examine the playful textual contortions and sonic mimicry of *Ulysses* as an altered engagement with the reader's own body and consciousness. This chapter posits a nuanced understanding of listening in these modernist novels, using their depictions of listening to analyze how aural, visual, and tactile senses ultimately collaborate in shaping individual perceptions and their reaction to ideologies and social structures.<sup>7</sup>

## I. Vocal Movements

*Ulysses* inaugurates its listening experience by emphasizing vocal timbre, articulation, and the complex interlaying of these features in the composition of identity.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Saint-Amour's article, titled "*Ulysses*' Pianola," aptly notes this trend, diagnosing what could be construed as an overused critical method, but then substitutes his own discovery, the pianola, as part of the same historicizing mode. Sam Halliday and Angela Frattarola have also contributed significant studies that have enriched modernist studies by attending to the connection between style and technology.

<sup>6</sup> On the bodily involvement of reading as an aural event, Stewart writes, "The recognition of such a somatic quotient in the reading of writing ... nevertheless carries indirect but profound implications for the relation of subjectivity to text production, of consciousness to language" (Stewart 3).

<sup>7</sup> Sara Danius in *Senses of Modernism* argues "forms of visibility and forms of audibility have to be considered in tandem" (159).

Voice saturates the *Telemachus* episode and is modified as “gay” (Joyce 4),<sup>8</sup> “wellfed” (5), “descending” (9), “wheedling” (12), “finical sweet” and “hoarsened rasping” (13), “loud” (14), “quiet happy foolish” (19), and once after Mulligan mentions a hazing incident from earlier school days, Stephen hears internally, “Young shouts of moneyed voices...” (7). The sheer volume of descriptors and the repetition of “voice” suggests that the novel beckons to recognize the voice’s paradox: it becomes the physical phenomenon that announces personal identity while simultaneously introducing a separation from the speaker. The *Telemachus* episode initiates the novel’s polyphony, which Elizabeth M. Bonapfel reads as a crucial aspect of the novel’s fluid structure, explaining, “The interrelationship among multiple voices marks a formal and thematic constellation in Joyce’s works: voice is both theme and leitmotif in Joyce’s texts, hence its obsessive recurrence” (69). In this episode, Joyce theorizes voice by introducing speech as issuing from a voice rather than the character’s name alone (e.g., “Mulligan’s voice said” rather than just “Mulligan said”).<sup>9</sup> This textual feature aligns with Sara Danius’s claims that modernist aesthetics, “on the level of the sentence, pulls toward differentiation and autonomization” (Danius 153). Furthermore, this feature of the prose also ambiguates the relation between speaker and voice in what Mladen Dolar calls a “zone of undecidability, of a between-the-two, an intermediacy” (13). This undecidability of the voice becomes the interpretive space of reading where the reader must piece together the scene and

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<sup>8</sup> All subsequent citations of the novel will refer to the 1990 Vintage International *Ulysses* edition.

<sup>9</sup> This de-coupling also plays out the novel’s anatomizing of characters and episodes, which are loosely schematized into organs, techniques, etc. Ultimately, the novel’s anatomized structure signifies the body’s fluctuation among processes of fragmentation and coalescence. The more literal translation of anatomy as “cutting up” further embeds this theme of fissure and merging.

characters by tracing vocal pathways, unclear as they may be. This vocal ambiguity arises when Haines is initially introduced as, “A voice within the tower call[ing] loudly” (9). Haines, as the foreign Englishman, is textually signaled by his voice only, eliding his name. The phrasing here also intimates that the Martello Tower itself has a voice or contributes to this voicing, as any auditory phenomenon requires space in which to move. This personification would demonstrate that the voice slips between the Englishman Haines and the Tower, which was built by the imperial British. In both cases, the voice signals to Stephen a form of imperial oppression. After the introduction of Haines, the text declares, “Mulligan’s voice sang from within the tower,” (10) moving this displacement between speaker and voice to the most loquacious character in the episode. This description of character and voice estranges the reader from the acculturated processes of listening wherein people retrofit an acoustic phenomenon to the speaker. The *Telemachus* episode subtly explicates these processes by interrupting this metonymic cohesion and suggests an ontological fissure between entities (i.e., voice and speaker) normally figured as homologous. Effectively, the prose articulates the voice as that which articulates. The voice and the presumed speaking subject are identified more as a spliced configuration rather than a naturally assumed totality, even suggesting that a separate agency inheres within the voice itself.

Since the reader’s experience of voice is mediated through Stephen, his listening draws the reader into a sympathetic relation with him by detailing the listening experience. For example, in the scene where Stephen confronts Mulligan about insulting his dead mother, the narration states, “Stephen, depressed by his own voice, said” (8). Here, the separation of the grammatical subject from the verb is occupied by the

dependent clause that modifies the subject and elaborates Stephen's relation to his own voice. Within this context, there is no doubt about the speaker, so the possessive determiners of "voice" suggest Stephen's own alienation. This description syntactically performs how his listening embodies his emotional isolation, one exacerbated by debt and dispossession. In contrast to Buck Mulligan's obnoxious boldness, Stephen's reticent character emerges through the rich description of how Stephen listens to himself. Stephen is severed and even subjected by his voice, which has been noted as the expressive body function associated with individuation and self-representation. The separation of voice from speaker psychologically profiles one of the main characters of *Ulysses* while demonstrating the plasticity of the self, which moves between individual and social positions, neither completely independent nor completely integrated. The voice, then, becomes a vehicle and tenor for the novel's shaping of its characters and conceptual movements.

The opening episode of the novel subtly reworks the assumed connections listeners make between speaker and voice. *Ulysses* also figures the tensions between visual and auditory metaphors for form as character developments. Stephen's thoughts in *Nestor* characterize him as philosophically nimble yet conditioned by visualist thinking. When he is teaching his class, he internally rehearses and modifies parts of Aristotle's *De anima*: "Thought is the thought of thought. Tranquil brightness. The soul is in a manner all that is: the soul is the form of forms. Tranquility sudden, vast, candescent: form of forms" (26). These descriptors mostly relate to vision-based representations of form, suggesting that form must be seen to be thought. In some ways, the novel's opening and these internal monologues do warrant the popular interpretation of Stephen as resentful,

aloof, and intellectually isolated. However, the *Nestor* episode continues the previous episode's vocal activity, offering an auditory cut from Stephen's inward gazing thought when an unidentified voice outside is heard, compelling the boys to lose their attention and "[break] asunder" (27). The students are initially named (e.g., Armstrong, Comyn, and Talbot), but once they are called become simply "voices." In this moment, Stephen's mental visualization of form is interrupted by an unseen interlocutor, the class's quiet stillness dividing into raucous play. This moment suggests that the articulated voice, even when depersonalized, offers a hopeful escape from formal containment. Indeed, listening offers a sensory and intellectual function that opens or at least interrupts the labyrinthian workings of Stephen Dedalus's mind.

If the novel begins Stephen's opening through listening, the *Nestor* episode introduces the school's headmaster, Mr. Deasy, who provides an oppositional figure whose language is imbued with visualist metaphors that reflect his rigid thought patterns and attempt to reinforce Stephen's containment. As the two exchange a thin dialogue in Deasy's office concerning cattle, Deasy explains bluntly, "I have put the matter into a nutshell... It's about the foot and mouth disease. Just look through it. There can be no two opinions on the matter" (32). Here, Deasy figures his solution as a visualized understanding of the issue that has an already-confirmed answer. This figuration on its own does not warrant any suspicion, but he soon begins to make anti-Semitic comments about the supposed influence of the Jews on England, finally claiming that the Jews "sinned against the light" (34). These seemingly unconnected references and figures ultimately resonate with each other and implicate Deasy's potentially murderous designs. Deasy's off-hand comments about animal disease adjacent to a visualization of Jews,



which implicitly aligns them with darkness, suggest that his ability to throw light on any issue and contain it would be similarly simple and lethal. These spliced associations continue as Stephen's famous quotation about the nightmare of history is followed by another description of the boys' voices: "From the playfield the boys raised a shout. A whirring whistle: goal. What if that nightmare gave you a kick back?" (34). This juxtaposition between the boys in the field and the "nightmare" of history, coupled with Stephen imagining the shouts as battle cries, suggests that the hockey game and the riotous boys become a premonitory echo of future wars and catastrophes, their depersonalized voices becoming the masses who would be subjugated to mobilization and slaughter in the trenches. Yet, this moment of listening interrupts Deasy's menacing banality. Indeed, the shouts gesture to Stephen and the reader the hope of an outside, an escape from the office's stuffy interior and its stifling dialogue. In this scene, the metonymy of voice vacillates between figure and concrete auditory experience, suggesting that the boys are transformed into voices that escape the boundaries that have been set out for them by myopic authorities in government. Stephen's attunement to their articulatory freedom opens outward and, even momentarily, refuses "nutshell" answers or scapegoating those who "sinned against the light."

This slip between mundane observation and philosophical flight is amplified throughout the *Nestor* episode. Stephen and Deasy barely engage each other in this scene, and so one could read their spoken parts as separate monologues, loosely connected by a few choice words and observations. Deasy then shifts the conversation and offers a teleological reading of history as the unfolding of God's plan: "All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (34). This abstract eschatology is

countered by Stephen's famous reference to the shouting boys as God. When Deasy asks him to clarify, Stephen famously responds, "A shout in the street" (34). While Deasy figures the movement toward God's ends as legible and rational, Stephen reworks those abstractions in mundane, auditory terms, referring to auditory phenomena as an escape from the confines of Deasy's office and his totalizing theories.<sup>10</sup> It intimates Stephen's capacity to engage the phenomenal world as something more than a staging for his cycling ruminations. Stephen's recourse to listening to his ambient surroundings suggests a shift in his sensory apparatus that entails an ideational one. In listening with Stephen, the reader is situated with Stephen at an intersection between a closed mind and one open to the play of material signs. *Ulysses* conducts these movements through "each sentence [that] is pulled between the order of syntax and the freedom of newly created forms" (Gottfried 10), Stephen listens through his world and must conceive of himself as being pulled among different positions and modes of being through the movement of voices, which aid in cultivating a sense of openness.

In effect, *Ulysses* stages a sonic performance while elevating these listening scenes as deeply significant experiences that unfold an ever-widening resonance among relations that move from individual, to intersubjective, to social. The severing of voice within these first few episodes reveals that listening to the voice as a separate yet connecting entity affords one the ability to think of the subject as an ongoing process of construction, one that receives limitations but can imagine different ways of negotiating

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<sup>10</sup> Bonapfel aptly observes, "Describing God as 'a shout in the street' in a book filled with voices, in which all noises are described as music at the end of 'Sirens', not only denies God the omnipotence that Mr. Deasy claims for him, but also establishes God as one voice among many in a series of vocal comparisons, one of which is a ghost" (82).

those boundaries. If we take these two episodes in succession, we can discern a progression in Stephen from alienated outsider to one who is immersed in the world and able to open outward. *Ulysses* depicts varying ideological positions through its characters. As Stephen listens to others, the novel dramatizes the interpretation of colonialism or Social Darwinist race theory through an audiovisual interplay. Stephen, though, does not remain subjected to these forces as he is able to listen outwardly and imagine differently from those around him. The novel's movements between interior, personal thought and its engagement with ideologies works out as a listening experience, one that teaches the reader through Stephen that the boundaries of the individual are, in part, self-made; however, listening can also offer a way outward. *Ulysses* attends to these interior moments of perception as a nexus of the possible, of movement between interior and exterior that escapes totalizing containment.

Thus far, this study has examined the object-voice's separateness and movements as pathways by which *Ulysses* depicts listening among its characters and amplifies its significance within its reader. The syntax of these episodes "autonomizes" the voice and ambiguates how Stephen relates to himself and others. *Ulysses* also performs the intimacies of listening through wordplay and onomatopoeia. More specifically, the novel splices words together in unique combinations that alter the visual aspect of the reading experience, which subsequently modifies the words' new auditory resonance. Reading, or listening, to *Ulysses* becomes a process of reconfiguring the audio-visual patterns that disturb more conventional styles of narration. Garrett Stewart calls this effect "lexical syncopation," wherein there occurs "a perplexing...of syntactic continuity along with lexical integrity" (4). Like the estranging effect of the object-voice, this lexical

syncopation disrupts convention to elaborate the auditory and intersubjective potential of listening. Moreover, these words recreate soundscapes for the reader and express the listening character's interpretation and contouring of that auditory experience, which balances the text as a sound object and as a phenomenology of listening. Since these words variously splice and truncate morphemes, they perform the contiguities and breaks that occur through listening, thus instantiating another auditory model for the self as a resonant, polymorphic complex.

The *Telemachus* episode concludes with Stephen by the sea. Just as Stephen's auditory imagination moves beyond Deasy's office, his listening changes as he moves from the enclosures of Martello Tower to Sandymount Strand. Though haunted by the mental echoes of the "Liliata rutilantium" prayer and his strained discussion with his flat mates, Stephen is engaged by the ocean, which offers a fluid auditory alternative to his mental involutions. Since Stephen's hydrophobia might entail a revulsion of fluidity or contamination, one can discern in this listening experience a bodily engagement that moves Stephen or loosens his mind from its constraints. The sea, in its rhythmic and sensual plenitude, offers images that encourage openness of thought, an openness facilitated by the pages' lexical play. The last lines of *Telemachus* describe, "A voice, sweettoned and sustained, called to him from the sea. Turning the curve, he waved his hand. It called again. A sleek brown head, a seal's, far out on the water, round" (23). Here, the text combines the separateness of the voice with the merging of letters and sounds into an ambiguous call with several referents. Stephen is drawn into a series of sounds that have an unclear source, which are also known as acousmatic sounds. Elizabeth Bonapfel raises several important questions about this scene:

Is it the unidentified acousmatic voice that calls this word, or does this word derive from Stephen's thought? The indented line separates 'Usurper' from Stephen's previous perceptions as relayed through free indirect discourse, but because Joyce does not use quotation marks to indicate if this word is direct thought or speech, it is uncertain if 'Usurper' is Stephen's direct thought or if the word is spoken by the acousmatic voice calling from the sea. Or in a humorous twist, is Stephen giving the seal a side-eye and calling this animal the usurper?"

(78)

Like the split introduced by the object-voice, acousmatic sounds stage an epistemological break for the listener that destabilize strict delineations between subject and object and, subsequently, the everyday modes of listening that abide in one-to-one correspondences among sensory stimuli. In this scene of the novel, the acousmatic registers of the sea and seal merge pluralities without sacrificing their distinctions as a symphonic experience for Stephen and the reader. This blending occurs through the narration and the lexical play on the sounds of each word or allophone. Even the words "sea" and "seal" agglutinate and even echo or distort the word "sleek." The sounds suggest dynamic combinations just as the scene flits among the visually cued and sonically blurred imagery. In effect, following Stephen's listening and engaging the novel's fluid lexical play reinforces an openness between character and object that also suggests a plastic concept of form. What emerges from the sea and the seal, that which "called to him" is a call to being responsive, not in terms of intellectual discourse, but as an appreciation for an emerging world and his awareness of his own body within it. Though this scene or the later one in Deasy's office does not offer a fully developed rebellion against the constraints Stephen

perceives in his life, it does begin to modify Stephen's relation to world and self as partly constructed by listening. *Ulysses* attends to these interior moments of perception as a nexus of the possible, of movement between interior and exterior.

## II. Protean Listening: Natural Soundscapes and Music

While the *Telemachiad* depicts Stephen listening to the voice as a signal of potentiality, these episodes also elaborate his construction of the self as an intellectual prism, one that refracts experience for it to become legible and controlled. Subsequently, the prevailing critical evaluations of Stephen label him as closed subject. In a conversation with Frank Budgen, even Joyce commented, "But Stephen no longer interests me to the same extent. He has a shape that can't be changed" (Budgen 263). Joyce's geometric metaphor of Stephen and his narrative elaborates how Joyce thought of form in terms of enclosure and openness, and in many ways, Stephen represents a "solipsistic strain" (Inglesby 292) within *Ulysses* that portrays an isolated subject whose mental apparatus figures life as a series of polygonal stills, rigidly measured and absolutely contained by a collating imagination. These containment metaphors for Stephen are bolstered by his contemplation of Aristotle's tie between form and vision in *Nestor*, a line of thought that continues at the beginning of the *Proteus* episode. Stephen internally recites: "Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read" (37). Here, Stephen privileges the visual as the primary means of making the world legible as a visible form, which aligns with Jean-Luc Nancy's assertion that there is "more isomorphism between the visual and the conceptual" (2). Angela Frattarola argues that the beginning of *Proteus* evinces Stephen's visualism, claiming, "Stephen follows the philosophical tradition of

equating sight with knowledge, and finds this mode not only inescapable but the one dependable way of ascertaining anything” (145). Indeed, these visualized modes of knowing faintly reflect Deasy’s ideology with its “nutshells” and Jews who “sinned against the light.”

This visual thinking aligns with Stephen’s references to Lessing’s *Laocoön* as he recites *nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* (translated from the German for “in succession” and “side by side,” respectively) as part of the sequencing processes of perception more generally and as the dominant modes of poetry and painting. Stephen’s reference to *Laocoön* implies that he is still intellectually beholden to a rigid phenomenology that extends Enlightenment era aesthetics and its “partitioning of the senses” (Idhe 43) that often subordinate the auditory within a visualized schema. Subsequently, Stephen, though a careful observer, tends to divide himself from his environment and his own bodily processes, as John Lurz argues that, “Stephen thus resists, in more ways than one, being ‘in touch’ with the world” (65). Effectively, Stephen’s intellect not only dismembers bodily experiences for them to be read, but it also transfigures them into silent stills that will be sublimated into visualized thought.

However, I contend that the *Telemachiad* offers a more generous portrayal of Stephen than many critics allow, especially when the novel attends to how he listens. Indeed, the episodes dramatically and imagistically portray Stephen’s movement outward starting from the enclosed alienation of the Tower to the intimation of escape from Deasy’s office toward the full-scale imaginative wandering along the beach. If the *Telemachus* episode begins with the alienating features of the voice before moving to its potential for escape from spatial and ideological confines in *Nestor*, the *Proteus* episode

engages the natural world's auditory features as an analogue for the flux of perception, knowledge, and selfhood. Textually, the style of the episode becomes more fluid, skipping from sensation to associated idea with even fewer textual cues than in *Telemachus* or *Nestor*. Like the end of *Telemachus*, the *Proteus* episode situates Stephen by the sea, and its unofficial title alludes to the shapeshifting Greek god of the sea mentioned in the *Odyssey* along with references to the Celtic sea god Mananaan, who is also polymorphic. These mythic figures resonate with the episode's exploration of form, both as sensible experience and intellectual concept. Just as Proteus and Mananaan embody mythic models of form-shifting, Stephen's own thoughts move among different senses and modalities of experience. So, although I agree with the critical consensus that Stephen represents a more closed and less sensual mode of being in *Ulysses*, Stephen's inner speech and representations of listening figure as a burgeoning toward a wider sensorium and perhaps a more integrated experience of being.

To embrace listening more fully, Stephen closes his eyes and marches along the beach. The rhythmic qualities of language and the sea performs the movement of Stephen's mind. He mentally recites part of a ballad: "*Won't you come to Sandymount, / Madeline the mare?*" (37), which follows with, "Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. A catalectic tetrameter of iambs marching. No, agallop: *deline the mare*" (37). These phrases initially refer to Stephen's noisy gait. They also state in sensory terms the *nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* in the intransitive phrases "you see" and "I hear," splicing the sensory functions of visibility and audibility. The more technical "catalectic," which refers to the cutting of the initial or last syllable of a verse line, refers to the prosody of the preceding ballad. Here, the initial syllable would likely be "Oh" in both



lines, so that the original “Oh won’t you come to Sandymount,” a verse in iambic tetrameter, is truncated. Stephen pares the line down further, saying “No, agallop: *deline the mare*.” Although “*deline the mare*” is in iambic dimeter, he plays with the slip between the spelling of “mare” as a female horse and its homophony with “mer,” which is French for “sea.” “Agallop” is a Joycean neologism that affixes “a” to “gallop,” like “afoot,” and conveys a hurried progression that covers more ground. Here, Stephen switches from scansion to playing with the sound of words to embody his own movement between metered walking and its relation to the sea. By entering Stephen’s stream of consciousness, we listen with him to the sea and consider his own musings on how the senses, these modalities, affect the form of his thoughts and the shaping of his being as an alternation among regular rhythms and playful cuts.

In following how Stephen listens to his world, the reader approximates a real-time listening experience, moving between imagining a character’s interpretations and attending to how the novel’s style performs those movements of sense and thought. *Ulysses* relentlessly figures corporeal involvement, locating the open orifices of the body as some of the key locations that absorbs the resonant materiality of the world. Subsequently, this physiological openness can shift toward an openness that moves beyond rigid abstraction or a closed system of thought. The act of reading encourages this openness “since it is exactly with the *openings* of our body (eyes, ears, mouth, as well as other bodily orifices) that we approach the book” (Lurz 60). Stephen’s mind is narrated during scenes of listening, and these moments signal how the impact of sensory experience can alter one’s recollection of being and the metaphoric frameworks one deploys to narrate them. His listening pushes him toward an engagement that begins to

trouble the rationalized boundaries often laid out by modern life (Erlmann 10). While the stream of consciousness produces an interior listening experience of a character's thoughts, Joyce's novel also emphasizes that listening moves among exteriority and interiority, thus destabilizing modernity's model of an atomized self that accepts the circuitry of control.

With the waves breaching his vision-centered mentality, Stephen thinks, "Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible" (37). In reading for visualized forms, Stephen continually finds that his listening body "ineluctably" reminds him of his embodied existence and its multisensory dynamism. Notably, Stephen acknowledges the auditory modality between references to *nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* from Lessing's *Laocoon*, which discusses the formal differences between poetry and painting. Lessing argues, "All bodies, however, exist not only in space, but also in time. They continue, and, at any moment of their continuance, may assume a different appearance and stand in different relations" (91). So, while Lessing divides artistic media based upon the division of senses, his argument also gestures to the multisensory perceiving body as a complex mediator of these differences that collaborate as much as they vie with each other. Stephen's musing on sequencing and modalities might falsely divide or bracket the senses via Lessing, but Stephen's listening amplifies his willingness to feel integrated within the world, rather than treating his surroundings as mere objects for analysis. Moreover, through listening he internalizes how physiology and interpretation are intimately linked, rather than categorically riven (Lurz 60).

The flowing syntax replicates the flow of Stephen's philosophizing about his sensory world, but the novel's lexical play concomitantly intensifies. Stephen's

observation of the surf's movement and sounds becomes the external sensory embodiment of his contemplation of form. The analogue between sea and sound waves begins to collapse into a realized physical event that encourages Stephen's engagement. This intimate engagement deepens when he urinates into the ocean, which occasions another moment of listening. Stephen thinks, "Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeis, oooos" (49). This description elides the space between individual words, their respective sounds slipping together while remaining visually marked on the page. Effectively, Lessing's argument and Stephen's ruminations about different modalities are merged here as Stephen's fluids connects him with the surging of the sea. Stephen, here, rounds out his reading experience, discerning the correspondence between human subjectivity and language as interwoven senses and modalities of reading. Garrett Stewart claims that Stephen's listening begins to apprehend, "the speech before language waiting in the 'signatures' of the phenomenal world" (253). Furthermore, the auditory images produce a form of being that does not rely upon a rigid structure of thought to articulate it. The movement of sound and the conditioning influence of the listener embodies a deconstructive movement. Henry Staten argues, "Form in the sense of the repeatable identity of the thing—the Aristotelian definition that grounds classical mimesis—comes unglued from itself in the onomatopoeic project. And this ruin of form reverberates at every level of *Ulysses* as the undoing of all ontological security and the unleashing of the anxiety of individuation" (175). The undoing of form as a "repeatable identity" opens the potential that being can modulate, like sound, with its environments. With a caveat, I argue that the undoing of form's rigidity does not necessarily abolish form as much as alter how it is figured. If form is understood as a resonance, then listening offers

intersubjective, dialogic, and polymorphous modes of access. Staten is correct to identify onomatopoeia as crucial to Joyce's deconstruction as a "reverberation," a figure that resists stillness and containment yet evanesces just as quickly as it posits its coherence.

Stephen's ruminations on the beach exemplify how listening contributes to the formation of knowledge of one's world and one's self as a multisensory experience. In the preceding analyses, Stephen has been proven more open and fluid than what many critics have previously argued, and his gradual opening corresponds with the reader's acclimation to the novel's style. Just as Stephen attunes his listening imagination to voices and the ambiguous play of the sea, the reader also enters a more sympathetic relation with the novel's complex circuitry. This experimental listening intensifies as Bloom becomes the focus of the novel. The famous *Sirens* episode characterizes Bloom's curiosity and openness by simultaneously replicating and examining musical listening. This episode's treatment of musical listening analyzes how the body's involvement with the soundscape bears as much significance as the notes moving through the air. Moreover, the representations of sound and music situating the audio-visual tensions that arise in the listening situation (Lurz 58). Moreover, the style of the episode mimics the music while narrating Bloom's listening. The prevalence of onomatopoeia further suggests the text's musical aspiration.<sup>11</sup> Bloom's bodily engagement and intellectual parsing of music flows, and "vibration of sound waves motivates the form of the thoughts passing through Bloom's stream of consciousness in *Sirens*" (Martin 155). This episode has undergone numerous readings for its heightened experimentalism and explicit

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<sup>11</sup> In *Peculiar Language*, Derek Attridge addresses Joyce's unique use of "nonlexical onomatopoeia" (138), which marks another stylistic shift away from convention toward the capacity of text to alter our reading-listening experiences.

references to music, which often yield fruitful analogies between literature and music. Although musical forms align loosely with the prose's auditory effects, I argue that the episode conducts a more radical fusion of music and text by moving beyond analogy with specific music forms (e.g., the contrapuntal fugue) to a questioning of how human being can be understood as musical formation. Through Bloom's listening to music, the reader recognizes the physicality of music as integral to being. In other words, music opens the subject by relating the physical with the mental, and even the auditory with other senses—especially sight and touch—and so the episode performs musicality as the *process* of listening more than a specific type of musical analogy. While the musical qualities of the chapter are crucial to understanding it, I build upon these sensory tensions in *Sirens* as a literary manifestation of *listening as form*. By attending to this relation as a series of listening positions, we find that the novel's stream of consciousness opens us toward the fluid experience of music. Thus, the style of the episode deploys its experimental effects to engage listening as the plastic form of human being.

Musical listening produces an embodied process of how one responds to, and perhaps modifies, the boundaries of the self. Rather than an object outside of oneself, set apart and distant, music penetrates the body and involves it within its resonating operations, subsequently altering how we think of the body as a material object that participates in the flux of reality. Susan Mooney observes, "Acoustic dynamics not only include hearing and interpreting the collage of sonority in the world, but also involves the listener's mental life" (230). Derek Attridge attends to the embodied experience of sound in the novel as an extension of the novel's syntactic variation: "Joyce's transgressions of the selectional restrictions of English syntax can be regarded as stratagems that liberate

the body from a dictatorial and englobing will and allow its organs their own energies and proclivities” (167). These stratagems permeate the novel, and *Ulysses* ties its syntactic variations to a musical ontology. The musical style performs a rhythmic liberation from an atomized self by playing out through the fluidity of listening. In Bloom, the novel amplifies this liberatory gesture, and it reaches its most self-conscious pitch in *Sirens*, since understanding music engages a sensory apprehension of structure and dissolution. Thus, Bloom contemplates his being as musical form, and the novel’s depiction of his listening experience unfolds his intuitions through experimental onomatopoeia and syntax.

The musical quality of the episode emerges through the prevalence of onomatopoeia, but *Sirens* also attends to how characters listen to this abundance of sonic material begins to blur them as separate subjects. The “overture” of the *Sirens* episode lays out the schema of the episode itself by allowing each “instrument” its preliminary sounding. The imperative, “Listen!” (256), implicitly addresses the reader. However, this call to listen is not followed by a cogent discourse; rather, the subsequent sounds build toward an ever-changing layering of experiences, interspersing ambient sound, music, and truncated questions: “The spiked and winding cold seahorn. Have you the? Each and for other splash and silent roar. Pearls: when she. Liszt’s rhapsodies. Hissss” (256). Here, the novel manifests the often-chaotic movement of sound and visual associations through fragmented syntax. As noted by other critics, the sensory experience is not divided but melded into a sliding matrix of experiences where the “visual appearance of the two Sirens is translated into music by the rhythmical language of the narrator, an effect that is reinforced by the play of call and response that punctuates their dialogue” (Martin 151).

The barmaids are being watched and listened to by Bloom: “In a giggling peal young goldbronze voices blended, Douce with Kennedy your other eye. They threw young heads back, bronze gigglegold, to let freely their laughter, screaming, your other, signals to each other, high piercing notes” (260). The synesthetic tensions of color and sound perform how listening to an auditory phenomenon also instigates a search for a visual anchor or source to resolve perception into a coherent narrative, a search that is consistently challenged within this section. *Ulysses* continues estranging voices from their everyday, communicative function. The laughter of the barmaids moves from a signal emanating from a speaker, i.e., a mode of sonic identification, to an observation of the sounds themselves. Here, the melding of “giggle” and “gold” lexically blurs Miss Douce with Miss Kennedy through their musical giggling, while producing a lilting repetition of hard “g” sounds. The choppiness of the syntax confuses description of the women, their sounds, and the observer(s) by listing “your other” as a confusing interruption of the sequence before restarting the narration with “signals to each other” before ending with “high piercing notes.” This single line offers a glimpse of how the episode moves among different positions by blending words and altering syntax. Effectively, Joyce’s episode narrates how Bloom listens to the barmaids’ high-pitched voices while replicating the pitch and repetition that accompanies giggling. For Bloom and the reader, listening to the barmaids expands into a meditation of how music identifies human being as a modular process of formation and dissolution.

*Sirens* further deepens the relation between being and music by instrumentalizing voices: “Over their voices Dollard bassooned attack, booming over bombarding chords” (270). The vocal action becomes an instrument, just as “trumpet” itself can refer to either

an object or action. The unconventional use of “bassoon” showcases the characteristic wordplay that revises our understanding of common phrases, and it continues the decoupling of voice from speaker by transforming the vocal into instrumental sound. This separation complicates the movement between transitive and intransitive, listening and speaking. The novel asks, perhaps through Bloom’s perspective, how is music produced and how does it change those making it and listening to it? Indeed, the collapsing of character with musical production alters subjectivity by making subject-object distinctions less rigid. If carried further, the containment of a person within a singular identity is undermined here as the voice moves beyond the speaker to engage others within a communal space, the performance of the song altering Dollard and those listening alike.

The episode also expands the bodily involvement of listening to music. When Simon Dedalus begins to sing, the listeners are described as, “Braintipped, cheek touched with flame, they listened feeling that flow endearing flow over skin limbs human heart soul spine” (273). As opposed to the abstractions associated with music, the episode delves into the bodily processes that constitute listening. “Braintipped” offers another Joycean neologism just before visualizing the flushing effect of the song on people’s cheeks. The movement from interior brain to the exterior cheeks then catalogues other organs involved in the experience, vacillating between the anatomical (e.g. skin, limbs, and spine) and the ideal (e.g. soul). Notably, terms that could be either, such as “human” or “heart,” are embedded within this listing, suggesting that listening mobilizes the imagination through the senses. For Bloom and the reader, song engages every dimension of being, those seen and hidden or heard and silent.



This scene continues as, “Bloom signed to Pat, bald Pat is a waiter hard of hearing, to set ajar the door of the bar. The door of the bar. So. That will do. Pat, waiter, waited, waiting to hear, for he was hard of hear by the door” (273). Here the repetition of “r” sounds circulates among the prosaic description of Pat the waiter, the rhyming and agglutinating effects elevating the scene into a performative syntax that “sings” to the reader as Simon does. The morphing of “waiter” to “waited” to “waiting” also offering a grammatical transformation from noun into simple past and then participle also expresses the anticipation of Bloom who is “waiting to hear,” before moving back to the description of Pat “for he was hard of hear.” The quick movements between Bloom’s stream of consciousness and descriptions of Pat figure for the movement of song among the listeners. The episode’s sonic effects morph words, repeating and blending sounds so that they become phonological symbols of how listeners in the scene concomitantly play out modes of repetition and blending that open Bloom and the reader toward an intersubjective model of being.

Bloom’s interior narration then combines the corporeal and figurative aspects of listening: “Through the hush of air a voice sang to them, low, not rain, not leaves in murmur, like no voice of strings of reeds or whatdoyoucallthem dulcimers, touching their still ears with words, still hearts of their each his remembered lives” (273-74). As in previous episodes, the voice’s articulation is emphasized and here defined negatively, its mobile nature evading linguistic capture. Yet, the voice then adopts a haptic attribute by “touching their still ears with words,” creating a listening experience that blends bodies and memories, or even figures memories as corporeal. Through these stylistic effects, the episode plays out how listening engages the senses through a complex and interweaving

temporality: listening requires a remembering of previous movements, an appreciation of the present ones, and perhaps an anticipation of future ones. Although the song's lyrical contents are sentimental, the phenomenology of listening is conducted through the narration, which culminates in an intersubjective model of the self. Moreover, the scene teaches the reader how art, specifically music here, simultaneously touches and conceptualizes being as a mobile dynamic of shifting forms.

Building on the intimacy of the characters' thoughts and utterances, the narrative takes a strangely distant digression when Bloom asks, "Words? Music? No: it's what's behind" (274). This question creates a moment where the character or narrator broaches the narrative to discuss with the listener a fundamental question that may have no answer beyond the auditory movement. The "behind" intimates an unspeakable boundary and source. Brad Bucknell argues, "The border between interiority and outward expression is blurred in 'Sirens' to such a point that the very notion of a self existing outside or separate from the communal codes of expression and understanding of that self is cast into doubt through Joyce's representation of music" (7). Bucknell's reading rightly attends to the blending of musical movement and subjectivity as a confusion of self and "communal codes," yet this blurring or doubt need not abolish meaning itself. Rather, the emphasis on the transient nature of music and language encourages a more intuitional approach to meaning making. Just as Stephen wanted to escape the containment of Deasy's office and vapid teleologies, Bloom in the *Sirens* conceptualizes listening as a mode for avoiding a totalizing containment of the subject. If the episode figures music as a process of understanding intersubjectivity, these enigmatic lines remind the reader that understanding self and other remain open convolutions. Unlike the song sung by the

barmaids or the artificial terminations of narrative, life does not always resolve itself neatly. *Ulysses* presents a paradox that situates sound and silence as oppositional yet collaborative contraries: “Calmer now. It’s in the silence you feel you hear. Vibrations. Now silent air” (277). Just as listening to song produces a fluid movement among bodies and times, here the characters begin to register how underlying silences, the negative complements in music, open their understanding of sonic differences as a mode of understanding, and even figuring, themselves. Bloom, like Stephen in the *Proteus* episode, opens toward a wider sensorium through the ear. But *Ulysses* also does not allow these meditations to end with the same sentimentality as the song being sung in the Ormand Bar since the end of the episode, perhaps expressing Bloom’s worldly disappointments, ends with his own bodily yet musical contribution to the score. Nonetheless, *Sirens* offers the reader a challenging episode that plays with and questions the boundaries of perception and ontology through musical listening.

### III. Shaping Dialogue: A Sense of Ethics

This chapter has been emphasizing the phonemic qualities of *Ulysses* as they stylize the most intimate experiences of physical and mental life. Indeed, listening becomes that ligature between experience and thought that represents the world’s dynamism and human being’s modulating configuration within it. The novel opens and flows through semantic and sonic details to build a more fluid conception of human being as resonant, rather than cordoned off as an isolated subject. While many of the examples from this chapter have focused on open listening through individual experience, the novel also keys the reader into this open listening between characters. As explored above, *Proteus* and *Sirens* engage Bloom and Stephen as they listen outward, simultaneously

producing auditory effects for the reader who imagines with these characters the self as mobile, dynamic, and interdependent. While *Proteus* focuses on a more intellectual approach to listening and *Sirens* connects musical listening and being, *Ithaca* gradually pushes us to think of human being as a dialogical process, one replete with the hope of communication and the possibility of its degradation. We have followed Stephen as he moves outward from the Tower and indeed outward from his self-enclosures through acts of listening, while Bloom's meditations on music rethink the sensual and temporal boundaries of experience. The *Ithaca* episode brings these characters and the reader home by playing out the dialogue between the two, the narration serving as a play-by-play commentary on their words. The painstaking and dispassionate detailing of setting and characters offers a scientific exposure while elaborating on how one senses one's world as an interlacing of sense and imagination: "The chapter incorporates Joyce's ideas of making sense of the world and about making sense of a literary text" (Lawrence 198). I will build on this assertion and play with the phrase "making sense" to think of how one *senses* the world and text—namely, through listening. In its dialogic structure, the episode shapes the page and the dynamic between Bloom and Stephen as a model for the complexity and ethical resonances of listening to another. Moreover, this ethical resonance does not emerge through a didactic explanation from the narrator but as an emergence, an inference that accumulates through the sensory faculties of Bloom and, subsequently, the reader.

*Ithaca*'s style defamiliarizes dialogue. Its attention to detail and the movement from outward expression to interior interpretation often obscures exactly what is going on and aligns with the novel's previous styles that sacrifice narrative clarity while deepening

the psychological probing of Stephen and Bloom. In contrast to this merging effect, the episode plays with the division of the two characters by splitting the narration into a series of questions and responses. *Ithaca*'s unofficial technic is catechism, which explains its dyadic form and the heavily Latinate and Greek vocabulary. Catechism's literal translation from the Greek means "to teach by word of mouth" or even "understanding by sound." However, the episode parodies the memorized theology of the form to think more precisely about how Stephen and Bloom listen to each other. The pre-set answers are substituted for a more detailed narration of the characters' perceptions. The episode divides the page with its questions and answers, moving from the exterior spoken sounds produced by each character to the internal explication of their free associations—the "resounding" of the dialogue, as it were. As the reader listens to the responses, the dialogic structure performs an alternate blending and separating of the two characters based on their flowing interpretations. This structure offers the first lesson of the episode: dialogue contains a world of details that will always escape the mere recitation of information. Furthermore, the impersonality of *Ithaca*'s catechism ironically piques the reader's involvement with Bloom and Stephen's dialogue. Karen Lawrence argues, "The complete avoidance of sentimentality here allows for the entrance of the reader's sympathy" (185). The episode, therefore, intimately portrays the two characters' dialogue as an attempt, albeit a frustrated and even futile one, to merge the two main characters of the novel. Where so much the novel is devoted to the characters' interiorities, here the foci of the novel begin to overlap like an acoustically rendered Venn diagram or a harmony of two musical strains. *Ithaca* explicates this overlaying as a sensory experience and reinforces the novel's unifying and divergent forces through dialogic form.

On a lexical level, the two characters are nominally blended as in “Bloom Stoom” and “Stephen Blephen” (682). Though a mere play on their names, these textual features coupled with the fluid content represents how speech and ideas merge, divide, and define its speakers and listeners, not so much by the origin of the speech but in the transformative space opened through listening. It produces a lexical anchor and metonymizes how “the various points of contact are outlined according to the principle of identity and difference” (Lawrence 194). Marian Eide, writing on *Finnegan’s Wake*, suggests that Joyce’s prose “demands an altered process of interpretation that allows for selective intrusions of understanding without collapsing into solidified habits of extraction” (96). The “solidified habit” of inauthentic, mundane banter that exists through the mere exchange of information is here banished by a disorienting style of expression. Yet, the lexical play that would seem to merge the two characters simultaneously names their difference. The whole episode has moved between their union and division, reminding Bloom and the reader that dialogue does not always promise edification. Just as the division of voice from speaker reminds us that communication requires division, this episode depicts dialogue as the meeting and splitting of speakers. The narrator’s interjections guide the reader while slowing the narration so we can attend to the intricacies of conversation, which often attend to matters of culture and politics. Vacillating between the two, the text creates a chiasmic structure (expressed in terms of their names as noted above) that alternates between Bloom and Stephen. While this chapter has demonstrated that Stephen is perhaps more open than what other critics have claimed, this episode’s intimate contrast between Stephen and Bloom highlight the latter’s superior generosity. When Stephen refuses to clean his hands, the narration offers

a brief psychological portrait of Stephen, revealing that he distrusts “aquacities of thought and language” (673). Although the aquacity here refers to Stephen’s hydrophobia, the text’s merging of this phobia of water extend to the looseness of thought and language. The movement and even amorphousness that explains the rich dynamism of sound and thought is repressed by Stephen here. Indeed, Stephen’s hydrophobia expands into a fear of movement or changing forms.

The alternation of the characters is expressed in their alignment with different senses: “What was Stephen’s auditive sensation?” and “What was Bloom’s visual sensation?” (689). The difference between the two characters opens further when the narration asks, “What were Stephen’s and Bloom’s quasisimultaneous volitional quasisensations of concealed identities?” (689). This question suggests the merging of will and sensation as concepts, but it also demonstrates this blending with the words on the page by eliminating the hyphens that would follow “quasi.” The question provisionally links the two characters’ interiors, giving sense to how their perceptions of a single moment is shared yet divided within their respective minds. The narration divides the two between the senses as well: Stephen’s response is rendered “Visually” and alludes to several obscure figures from late antiquity; then the narration reveals, “Auditively, Bloom’s: The traditional accent of the ecstasy of catastrophe” (689). This verbose response, in keeping with the Latinate and Hellenic vocabulary of the episode, does not clarify Bloom’s response as much as it intimates his burgeoning dread, which may be found in his encounter with Stephen with whom he invests paternal feeling and cultural hope. The earlier questions are chiasmatically transposed, here aligning Stephen with the visual, and Bloom with the auditory.

The most hopeful moment arises when Bloom and Stephen discuss the differences and similarities between Celtic and Hebrew languages, and though neither can translate the other's words, this scene of listening evokes the openness of listening without the expectation of full comprehension. With the lack of semantic understanding, the characters are left to engage the other as a sound-producing being. Speech becomes more of a sonic offering instead of a carrier of information. As the two offer their recitations, the scientific style of the narration asks, "What was Stephen's auditive sensation?" which is answered with, "He heard in a profound ancient male unfamiliar melody the accumulation of the past" (689). So, the Hebrew is not comprehended by Stephen, and it is most likely missed by Bloom, but the enunciation of Hebrew and Stephen's listening as an experience of temporal depth and cultural foreignness stands in stark contrast to the anti-Semitism exhibited by Deasy and the citizen from the *Cyclops* episode. Moreover, the sounds of the languages, despite belonging to separate language families, provide an acoustic proximity that stands in for the two characters. Bloom, himself, embodies this mixing, his own being open toward a hopeful understanding of the fluidity of culture and language—a celebration of the "ethnically irreducible consummation" (689). While two bodies and two languages remain separate entities, the act of speaking nonetheless offers a type of merging, a linguistic exchange offered and received through the body. Margot Norris argues that the two characters' ethnic focus analogizes the dialogue between their respective cultures, "But the narrator extrapolates from this exercise a virtually transcendent possibility of communion not only between Stephen and Bloom as individuals, but between the Irish and the Jewish people as races with analogous genealogical, cultural, and political histories" (206). Indeed, these intimate moments



elaborate how the text engages the reader's sympathies by amplifying the attention to sound itself.

Yet this section also indicates how quickly these dialogues can devolve. Indeed, Bloom does not even remember the end of the Hebrew chant, the ending of which he substitutes with paraphrase. Moreover, Stephen later sings the ballad "Little Harry Hughes," which slides into the anti-Semitism Bloom has experienced throughout the novel. It is a moment of betrayal, especially coming from Stephen who had rebuffed Deasy earlier in the novel. The episode writes out the sheet music for the song in Joyce's handwriting, further blending music and text while interrupting the text just as Bloom's feelings begin to turn. He feels implicated and imagines his daughter as the possible target of the song. Mack Smith has argued that this song ultimately resolves the fraught experience just as the song is musically resolved among tonic and dominant (Smith 414). But this reading elides Bloom's "mixed feelings" and that "Unsmiling, he heard and saw with wonder a jew's daughter, all dressed in green" (691). Like one's experience of music, the reader must remember notes from other episodes and scenes to comprehend the novel's theme, and while the episode focuses on dialogue and the closeness between Bloom and Stephen, this scene acoustically announces the chasm between them. The reader could infer that this conversation does not offer an image of union, nor even of effective communication between the two characters. Margot Norris observes, "What is *said* by the men frequently needs to be disentangled from what is *not* said" (204-5). Notably, Bloom does not respond to Stephen as he had done with the Citizen in the *Cyclops* episode. The episode, rather than resolving this conversational impasse, ironically aligns Bloom's intimations of catastrophes and his discomfort in listening to

the anti-Semitic song with Stephen's desire to awake from the nightmare of history as noted in the *Nestor* episode. The reader, then, is left to parse these differences since the novel does not explicate these themes; the episode allows the flow of language to unfold within the reader, who shares Bloom's discomfort and the grim implications of his outsider status. Here, the promise of listening also entails that opening to the other risks pain and disappointment. Even then, when the narration asks, "Which event or person emerged as the salient point of his narration?" the response is, "Stephen Dedalus, professor and author" (735). Despite the betrayal of Stephen, Bloom still regards the young man with a modicum of respect. The novel does not condone Stephen's song, but the novel does force the reader to join to this process with Bloom by listening with him. In this way, the catechism of *Ulysses* requires the reader to move with its characters, to listen with them, and to learn through its ambiguity.

This episode also broaches the enigma of listening to silence. Instead of a mere antiphonal element, silence opens the opportunity to regard the other; however, the novel implicitly asserts that the often-abstract ethics of alterity play out through sense perception and the novel's stylistic wordplay. The narrator describes Bloom and Stephen as, "Silent, each contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces" (702). Here, the words' splicing lexically demonstrates the unification of the two that does not abolish their distinctions. The reader is confronted by an unfamiliar fusion of words that nonetheless point to their constitutive parts. The phrase begins with the plural possessive before moving into the singular, a negation, and ending with the singular before moving to the next "word" which combines and seems to reinforce the unified meaning of "fellow" as companion and "face" in order to emphasize

their physical proximity as a foundation for an ethical relation. One could also read the first portmanteau as a division between the “o” and the “t,” which would negate the possessive pronouns before issuing in the demonstrative “this,” the following phrase clarifying “this” as the faces of the two fellow speakers. This merging of words as a lexical manifestation of the intersubjectivity of Stephen and Bloom in silent contemplation offers an image of listening that does not require the auditory imagery that this chapter has been examining. Instead, the prose enunciates the characters’ regard for each other, an attention to the other that metaphorically “speaks;” however, this speaking that does not enunciate emerges as a phonemic and semantic puzzle that combines the visual and auditory interplay of word and sound that had accompanied the previous episodes’ depiction of listening to natural sounds, voices, and music. Here, the non-verbal and silent encounter proves itself replete with semantic cues. The silence opens toward an internal reading, just as the reader’s “silent” reading occurs as an audio-visual experience (Stewart 2).

Their differences also become more apparent as they listen differently to the same sound: “What echoes of that sound were by both and each heard?” The answer for Stephen is the “*Liliata*” prayer, whereas Bloom hears “*Heigho, heigho*” (704). This juxtaposition affirms that Stephen’s listening relates to his own experience by echoing the prayer that has been resonating throughout the novel. Bloom, on the other hand, hears the bells themselves, their musical quality. Curiously, the questions begin asking what Bloom hears and feels alone, to which the narration answers, “The double reverberation of retreating feet on the heavenborn earth, the double vibration of a jew’s harp in the resonant lane” (704). Bloom hears again the ominous signs of possible exclusion, the

retreating feet as the possible expulsion of groups of people, and the Jew's harp offering another instrumentalized figure that balances between a musical and ethno-cultural identity. These brief descriptions affirm that the two like, any other human being, listen differently because they are shaped by individual histories that alter how they understand sonic phenomena. Stephen gradually leaves the scene, and Bloom is left alone. In many ways, this final solitary image of the listener encapsulates Bloom's character throughout the entire novel. We have followed him throughout, moving from exterior to interior. The effect of this evocation of the characters' interiors lays out how one senses for alterity. The exchange between Stephen and Bloom moves between cultural consummation and reinforced exclusion, but the reader is the agent who has access to the unexpressed feelings and interpretations of each; therefore, it is the reader who must understand these encounters since Bloom and Stephen are caught within the real-time of their conversation. We, the readers of *Ulysses*, attend to the nuances that are laid out and find our own implication within the novel's fluidity. Through scenes of listening, *Ulysses* celebrates the particularities of everyday life, but he also expands those moments into wide-reaching interrogations of subjectivity, language, and ethics. The intimacy afforded by the novel's form emerges through the act of listening. This closeness is reinforced by the elision of space between letters and words, suggesting new aural and semantic connections that proliferate with every new reading. This expansiveness of subjectivity is modeled by Bloom, whose listening practice becomes a template for our reading of self and world.

By the end of the episode, the novel's frenetic style and sensory output winds down with Bloom as he falls asleep. With the exit of Stephen and the rest of the

characters of the novel, the reader is left alone with Bloom. The dialogue, or “catechism,” enunciates Bloom’s consciousness as he attunes to his domestic and imaginary world. Here, the reader follows him into the dark, where Bloom is labeled as “narrator” and Molly as “listener.” Even clever wordplay dissolves while Bloom’s mind substitutes initial letters on “Sinbad the Sailor” to divert himself (737). These general labels offer the roles played by Bloom and the other characters that have played out throughout the novel. The narration substitutes Bloom’s name for a role, a universalizing movement that addresses his purpose in the novel. However, even the distinction between narrator and listener dissolves: “The narrator instead merges with or marries the listener, giving up the illusion that the one person writes or tells a story that other people hear” (Tratner 214). Not only do the characters of Bloom and Molly merge the roles of narrator and listener, but these lines also address the reader’s position in relation to the text, wherein, “The dialogue of the characters and the dialogue of the narration become one” and so the reader merges with Bloom’s searching in these final lines of the episode (Lawrence 199). As Bloom sloughs his name before sleep, we understand that Bloom has always signaled openness, in both its bodily and mental registers. Bloom the narrator-listener, with whom we have been traveling and listening, makes his final catalog and falls asleep, for even in sleep we cannot help but remain open and continue listening in the dark.

*Ulysses* teaches how to listen. Its styles engage the auditory to emphasize life’s flux, and that human being does not so much reside as much as it flows among sensations. Perhaps more importantly, *Ulysses* reminds the reader that sensation is the phenomenological foundation for sense-making. Life is not a collation of data sets, but an organic and ongoing process of interpersonal vibrancy. The strain of reading I had noted

at the beginning of this chapter is part of that open listening that seeks for alterity while constituting the self. These scenes of listening in *Ulysses* attend to daily auditory phenomena, while resonating on more abstract registers that range from philosophical meditations on knowledge to debates concerning alterity and the composition of a dialogic polity, and it is through modernist style that the openness of listening is expressed on the page. *Ulysses* thus establishes a mimetic listening experience while teaching us through the elisions and play of the letter that these movements are conducted upon the minutest of scales but can be amplified onto much broader ideological strata. The novel establishes listening as a liminal process of understanding one's own embodiment in the material world, and by reading *Ulysses* and listening *with its* characters, we understand that our own subjectivities are shaped by auditory encounters and that "In its singularity, an encounter with the other reconfigures the subject even as the subject begins to apprehend or even understand that other" (Eide 7). Moreover, the resonance of individual and community through dialogue plays out through the movement of listening, and that *Ithaca* "should sound, echo, and re-echo, through both symbolic suggestion and direct statement, the theme of isolation and community" (Madtes 86). These reconfigurations are perhaps best represented by the fluid movements of the auditory, those hints of understanding registered by the listening subject.

Earlier, I had mentioned the frustrations one might encounter with initial readings of *Ulysses*, and in many ways this enigmatic difficulty embodies the injunction to open to the other despite sometimes-unbridgeable differences. Listening as the physical and interpretive engagement of text and person, of self and other, participates in a collaborative process of becoming, a mutual shaping. So, while *Ithaca* creates an

ambivalent encounter between Stephen and Bloom, the episode embodies the perpetual exchange between intimacy and alienation that a listener might experience in dialogue, music, or any natural soundscape. After the long journey through the book, the soundscapes resonate with the reader's imagination, and that which seemed so frustrating and daunting about the novel becomes an auditory pathway to one's own understanding of self and world—hopefully as a process of opening out, of blooming. Through the strain, the reader begins to listen *with* the novel, allowing the auditory textures to shape the reader as much as the reader tries to configure the novel's elusive sonic play. What had seemed so foreign and difficult about *Ulysses* flows into new patterns and intimacies that often require the reader to assemble into new patterns of understanding and appreciation. Indeed, listening with the novel and its characters makes you realize that *Ulysses* begins with you.

## Chapter 2

### **Sounding Space and Subject in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Passage to India***

The modernist novel's depiction of fluidity and audiovisual metamorphoses animate the process of listening as an affirmation of embodiment and articulation, of intimacy and alienation. The previous chapter analyzes moments of listening in *Ulysses* to establish how its pulsing form models the resonant subject's formation of self and world as a compositional process that unsettles the boundaries of ossified thought and generates a liberatory movement outward. The vital patterns of *Ulysses* sound out a paean to a more open understanding of subjectivity. Yet this vital resonance necessarily evokes its own mortality, and openness can only be situated in relation to enclosure.

Furthermore, openness often threatens the subject with complete dissolution. This chapter examines listening in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* to identify how the modernist novel figures sound and space as metonymies for the subject's formation and dissolution. In listening, the characters identify with sound's vital and mortal pulses that signify their own beginning, duration, and cessation. The mobility of sound transposes these characters as they listen, attuning them to their own being as a structure that invites modulation. Both novels mark their narratives with moments of listening that either attune to the spaces in which these sounds resonate or ascribe spatial qualities to those sounds. *Mrs. Dalloway* progresses through the soundscapes of London as much as along the footpaths of its characters, and *A Passage to India*'s three-part division ("Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple") likewise stages how sonic modulations shape the listening characters. By detailing the process of listening, modernist novels engage the spatial dimensions of their settings and characters' subjectivities since,



“Sound creates a relational geography that is most often emotional, contentious, fluid, and which stimulates a form of knowledge that moves in *and* out of the body” (Labelle xxv). The novels’ soundscapes and the listening subjects resonate with each other and ultimately propel the narratives, becoming a dynamic structure that emerges as a “relational geography” that locates the potential and finitude of their subjectivities.

The proceeding analysis will identify this more deliberate or compositional approach to listening in Clarissa Dalloway, who is associated with the refrain “must assemble,” and Prof. Godbole, whose singing and affirmation of life’s modular forms allows him to adapt among the varying spaces and cultures of India. However, while these spatial and resonant dynamics form the novels’ narratives and characters, the novels also ward off strictly delineating or mapping their subjects. The resonance of these spaces often locates listening characters within ambiguities that leave them within an indeterminate hiatus or threaten to dissolve them. Julia Kristeva’s interpretation of this liminal space of the subject as the *khora*<sup>12</sup>: “Although the *chora* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitely posited: as a result, one can situate the *chora* and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form” (*Revolution* 26). Here, one can imagine that this “semiotic space” exists within *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Passage to India* wherein we can read, “in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position” (*Revolution* 26). As opposed to Clarissa and Prof. Godbole, the listening experiences of Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* engage this *khoric* rhythm and move toward dissolution.

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<sup>12</sup> While Kristeva transliterates this term as “chora,” I will use “khora,” which appears in Derrida’s essay of the same name and distinguishes it further from other common words with the same root.

## I. *Mrs. Dalloway's* Auditions

*Mrs. Dalloway's* has undergone numerous analyses that attend to its soundscapes. Angela Frattarola's analysis of "found sound" (134) examines how sonic interruptions mark the auditory pathways by which individuality and communality are constructed by modernity's regimes of transportation and consumption. Additionally, Leah Toth identifies the private and public listening methods that changed with the popularization of radio and the gramophone, figuring characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* as transducers that afford readers access to the characters' subjectivities (566). Toth also argues that these instances of listening draw in readers who, "auscultate through the characters' ears, as it were, and in this way learn their idiosyncrasies" (Toth 571). While Frattarola and Toth's historicist analyses focus on modernity's technological influences, I will shift toward a phenomenological analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* that identifies listening as the mode of access, or auscultation, that shifts among spaces and characters' subjectivities. In effect, the novel's representation of listening extends the dynamics of sound to the characters, who conceptualize themselves as auditory formations that reverberate between the present "found sound" and their imagined sense of self that alternately opens and contracts. The exterior phenomena ultimately resonate within them, triggering memories and ultimately shaping their regard of their own mortality.

As noted above, two models of listening emerge within the novel. One is featured by Clarissa Dalloway who opens to sound and allows her ruminations about mortality and finitude to resound before she ably returns to her daily goal of planning a party. This shaping or "assembling" of experience figures life as a series of auditory openings and contractions. The character who engages this pulsing rhythm maintains a type of

homeostasis while exploring imaginative bypaths. The other listening model is demonstrated by Septimus Warren Smith, whose auditory hallucinations leave him too open and unable to stabilize himself. He remains a passive filter whose synesthesia confuses his experiences and undoes his being. While Clarissa might journey along auditory pathways before returning to her set goal, Septimus is completely immersed and dissolves, perpetually bound by his experience of war trauma. The contrast between Clarissa and Septimus displays how the novel diversifies the plastic movements that form the characters' identities.

*Mrs. Dalloway* fittingly inaugurates its auditory movements with Clarissa's opening of her house's French doors: "What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air" (Woolf 3). Standing at this physical threshold, Clarissa opens herself to the exterior world while also remembering past sensations of beach air and waves, modeling the novel's stream of consciousness that corresponds spatial and temporal movements. In this case, the hinge's squeak is both mundane and exceptional as suggested by the clause, "which she could hear now." It exemplifies Frattarola's "found sound," since the hinge's squeak moves beyond signifying itself toward a host of mental associations. This minor acoustic accompaniment to Clarissa opening the window presents an irruption of the past into her present, one that reminds us that subjectivity is always diffused among temporalities and sensations that pull in different directions. Within the opening pages, this act of listening stages the auditory pathways of the novel as it meanders through memory while the narrative continues its onward progression.

As Clarissa moves into the street and praises London's noisy vivacity, the correlations among space, sound, and subjectivity continue to evolve. While the hinge at the opening of the novel produces a positive auditory association, the novel also follows Clarissa's ruminations upon a perceived lack of sound that gestures toward the imbrication of the mortal within the vital:

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,— one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. (4)

Clarissa thinks upon her life in Westminster and how its busy soundscapes are understood in relation to these quieter moments of contemplation. Here, Clarissa the listener attends to pauses and considers the processes of her body. Since these rhythms have endured for twenty years, the timespan provides more opportunities to feel that even the comprehensible and mundane presence of a daily soundscape can be punctuated by the “indescribable” pause, a *choric* opening into Clarissa's interiority. Furthermore, the prose's rhythms that shifts from traffic to pause to heart to Big Ben perform the pulses of their contents. The rhythms of the city and the rhythm of her heart resonate, both equally subject to this hush that opens just before the tolling of the bell. These resonant rhythms are expressed here through the halting syntax, generated by syncopation of phrases that range between five and twelve syllables before they are interrupted by a variety of punctuation marks, themselves producing hushes among the words' traffic. Even the parenthetical phrase contains four divisions that could be characterized as appositives or

as Woolf's own idiosyncratic punctuation. Clarissa's thoughts syncopate like her heart and reveal her body's vulnerability.

When the bell does toll, the description of Clarissa's listening moves sequentially through the sound as exclamation and description before slipping into broad evaluation: "There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street" (4). The tolling of Big Ben becomes one of the few constants within the novel's cascade of change. While functioning as the novel's marker of objective time, the bells signal a private reckoning of each character's mortality, one that is more regular or conventional than Clarissa's attention to the hush that precedes the bells. This recognition emerges from the traditional use of bells to announce deaths or other major events, but the bells' intermittent presence within *Mrs. Dalloway* refers to the passage of time as a deeply physical experience. Don Idhe observes that "Sound embodies the sense of time," which elaborates how the material progression of sound from initiation to duration and then cessation metonymizes the same rhythms in life" (85). The novel's language performs this linking between sound and mortality when the exclamation is followed by an onomatopoeia and then the synaesthesia that combines the tactile heaviness of "leaden" with the auditory dissolution. The bells' melding of auditory and tactile embodies the novel's overarching search for the latent significance in the mundane that can be intimated through listening. Idhe recognizes that "It is in the ordinary babbling traffic that we have with others where the ambiguous richness of sound is both directional *and* encompassing that there is revealed a special kind of 'shape.' This is what may be called an auditory 'halo' or the *auditory aura*" (79). While this concept of the auditory aura

might seem counterintuitive since we associate auras with hazy visuals, the bells and their description suggest a similar emanation deriving from a single source that overlaps and interpenetrates other sounds, spaces, and bodies. In this regard, Big Ben's sound personifies human life, and the bell's relation to the keeping of time further entwines its meaning with the confrontation with mortality, the tolling serving as the mundane marker of punctuality and as auditory *memento mori*. While the tolling of bells and reminder of mortality is a well-trodden trope, the novel embodies it within the rhythm of Clarissa's thoughts and in the description of the sounds that animates how a soundscape and body work in tandem to produce subjectivity. The novel, then, layers these tensions among senses to produce imagery that shapes both the narrative and the characters as auditory auras that move, interpenetrate, and dissolve with each other, figuring subjectivity and space as rhythmic dynamic. Clarissa's anticipation and attention to her heart enmesh her subjectivity within this patterning, effectively shaping Clarissa along with the bells.

While Clarissa continually finds new sonic "hinges" for her meditations on mortality, she also projects herself along the soundwaves to imagine herself in the place of others. Back in her house, Clarissa begins to think of her attraction to women: "And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident—like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt" (32). In this instance, the violin's sound produces an estranging auditory image that carries Clarissa's thoughts along from one interior to another, both environmental and bodily, and ultimately resting within the visual image of "a match burning in a crocus" (32). The narration temporarily transposes

Clarissa's gender before moving toward a recognition of her status when she listens to the house as the servants prepare it for that evening's party:

Strange, she thought, pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person, strange how a mistress knows the very moment, the very temper of her house! Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs; the swish of a mop; tapping; knocking; a loudness when the front door opened; a voice repeating a message in the basement; the chink of silver on a tray; clean silver for the party. All was for the party. (38)

Here, the movement between musing and concentration characterizes Clarissa's personality. Clarissa reinforces a dominant position from a higher vantage point, and she is described in more visual terms, namely the "diamond shape." This strange image describes her silhouette, and it also visualizes Clarissa's resolve. The angular, hard visual metaphor reaffirms her centralizing presence and produces a delineated geometry of her "single person," characterizing her as separate and contained. Clarissa's focus then moves to the sounds of the house, rendered as spirals. Both offer an auditory pathway through spaces—the violin as a movement of sound from the domestic interior outward, and the noise "spirals" as an upward movement from the lower sections of the house toward Clarissa's dominant position on the landing. One auditory movement recalls her love of other women and the imaginative capacity to think of gender as more fluid category, and the other as a marker of her position as lady of the house. Clarissa's subjectivity in one aspect is open to life as a dynamic form that can escape from its immediate surroundings, and in the other willing to subordinate and shape one's surroundings to a will. Clarissa's listening modes alternately embody her will to

“assemble” and her musings, complementary functions that emerge through her listening positions and figure for the movements of the narrative.

Listening’s power to displace one’s subjectivity is further amplified when Clarissa observes an old woman listening to Big Ben toll:

How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady...move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn. She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move—to go—but where? (127)

Clarissa describes the old woman as “attached” to the sound, reinforcing the sound’s connective power. Since the sound is a shared phenomenon, and since the bells’ tactile attributes (the “leaden circles”) touch the listeners, Clarissa and the old woman share in this reckoning of time that spreads throughout the city and within their bodies. Indeed, Clarissa’s phrasing of the scene as “touching” limns the literal and figurative.

Furthermore, the sound is also metaphorized as “that string,” which also calls back to the violin, the stringed instrument that moves her thoughts back in time and into erotic reveries. This scene, then, imbricates several moments of listening as a series of associations among Clarissa’s erotic thoughts with an image of an older woman positioned by a window. Desire and mortality are here sonically merged, with this scene of listening by a window demonstrating Clarissa’s preoccupations with mortality being projected onto this “old woman,” who becomes an image of her future self while simultaneously calling back to the novel’s opening. Like Clarissa imagining what men feel, this scene displaces Clarissa from her present moment to move outward and imagine



inhabiting other people's lives and spaces. The sound's dimensions resonate with its origin within Big Ben, since the tolling is "gigantic," but the spreading of the sound creates a spatial awareness as it moves "down, down" and permeates "ordinary things" with a resonant solemnity. The repetition of d-sounds reinforce the image's acoustic heaviness, and the last sentence's halting syntax and divisive punctuation interrupting Clarissa's thoughts before ending in repeated infinitives and a question. The combination of voiced consonants and dissipating sentence structure perform the bell's heavy toll before its dissolution, just as Clarissa's imaginative focus coalesces and undoes itself among these thresholds and scenes of listening.

This tension between formation and dissolution emerges again when Clarissa thinks about apparitions. Clarissa continues her musings later when she scans others around her. She claims to have "odd affinities" with strangers or even objects:

It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death...perhaps—perhaps. (153)

Here, Clarissa theorizes the self in visual terms, since "appearance" and "apparitions" both commonly describe viewed objects. However, the "unseen part of us" that "spreads wide" resembles a dissipation like the bells' "leaden circles." The person becomes a sensory remnant detected in its passing, escaping total disclosure yet persisting as intimation. Kristeva's *khora* "precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization"

(*Revolution 26*) and resonates with Clarissa's theory that imagines the self as something generated among kinetic and rhythmic sensations that subtend any visualizations.

Clarissa's listening in these scenes moves among auditory, visual, and tactile sensations that culminate in an opening to being that resists complete definition. The subject becomes a site in and through which listening occurs, a confluence of echoes and dissolutions moving through space like the ringing of Big Ben. Here, Clarissa figures this enduring aspect of a person as that which is remembered in its wake and distributed as a reverberation.

Although *Mrs. Dalloway* focuses these contemplative moments around Clarissa, Peter Walsh experiences a similarly disruptive sonic event. Peter's preoccupation with his unrequited love for Clarissa is momentarily dissolved when he listens to an old woman singing in Regent's Park:

A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into *ee um fah um so / foo swee too eem oo—* / the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube station from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing... (80-1)

The old woman's song sheds any specific identity, attaining an oracular property. Like the *khora*, it wells up from below and defies any singular shape. The voice in this quotation has no singular, personal identity, so it intimates the primordial working of the *khora*, both spatial and generative, opening and penetrating. Peter valorizes British

technological superiority, but here he is confronted with intimations of deep time and impersonal natural forces instigated by the voice's flux, suggesting an irruption of the primeval into the modern. The metaphors ascribed to the voice, as "funnel" and "rusty pump," reinforce the voice's transportive effects. If we extend the metaphor, Peter is "carried away" in this moment like a fluid channeled by the voice's tubular structure. These metaphoric tensions also limn between the voice as transportive container and as the fluid itself. In this momentary subjective displacement, Peter must reckon with an existence beyond a utilitarian modernity. The fluidity of sound creates an imaginative space that is immersed in the present yet aware of wider vistas of time, opening the subject outward. The sound moves him, like Big Ben in the previous passages, to conceptualize himself as part of a wider narrative of time, appreciating his mortality, albeit briefly. In this scene, Peter conducts a similar "assembling" of himself as he opens to an imaginative wandering and then carries on with his day.

*Mrs. Dalloway* signals shifts in an individual's consciousness through sound, but it also transitions among its characters through the shared soundscape. The passage of time is marked by Big Ben "whose stroke wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke, and died up there among the seagulls—" (94), which also enacts its metaphoric relation between sonic and mortal decay. Moreover, this blending of the bell with other atmospheric sounds parallels the intersections and divergences of the novel's narratives. After Peter's experience in Regent Park, the novel transitions among characters through listening to the bells:

twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. Twelve was the hour of their appointment. Probably, Rezia thought, that was Sir William Bradshaw's house with the grey motor car in front of it. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. (94)

So, while in separate spaces, Clarissa's activity is described along with the Warren Smiths' movements, which then leads to a mention of the house of Sir Bradshaw, who is Septimus's doctor. Molly Hite observes that this scene, "brings Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway together in an analogical 'embrace,' a consummate triumph of metaphor to effect a synthesis that never occurs on the metonymic level of plot" (11).

This scene also shifts focus from one character to another, unifying them within the novel through the shared experience of listening to the bells and their dissolution throughout the atmosphere. The shared auditory experience and reckoning of time hearkens back to Clarissa's "transcendental theory" about the aspects of a person or thing that spread out and persist. The images in this scene elaborate on this fluid model of subjectivity, using the physicality of sound as a mobile and dynamic relation that interpenetrates spaces and bodies. Since the clocks' bells intermingle and drift, sounding the passage of time as they dissolve, the metaphor that compares bells with humans extends into an interpenetration of the subject with others. So, while the characters are not described as meeting, they share the listening experience of the noon tolling and experience a contiguity staged by the novel. Additionally, the bells sustain their reiterative theme on mortality, the tolling described as "dying up there" and the end of the paragraph returning to the "leaden circles" refrain. Here, the novel's focus on the sound's materiality further cements its link to human life, imagining sound as tied to cohesive purpose, as in the direct link between

the bell and its measuring of time, and sound as a dissolution of its being, the blending and undoing of distinctions.

This section in the novel also begins to focus more on the Smiths, and the transition scene also marks a radically different mode of listening. Clarissa moves between the purpose-driven and open, but she is always able to assemble, to yoke her ruminations and move on to the daily practices of life. On the other hand, Septimus Warren Smith stands in for a subjectivity unable to reassemble. While Clarissa displaces herself along auditory pathways, Septimus suffers auditory hallucinations that distort the sources of sounds. While in his room, he listens to the street and details the experience:

Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. (68)

This rupture between imaginative and real sounds also distorts the dimensions of the spaces in which they occur. The modulations of the sounds ambiguously move between an accurate description of their source and Septimus's distortions, a movement that takes on spatial metaphors. The sounds "cannoned," which clearly connect with his war experiences, but the following description where those reverberations "rose in smooth columns," spatializes sound in synesthetic terms. While columns would seem to "build" a stabilizing image for his experience, Septimus is unable to construct meaning from these

fragments. He imbues these sounds with too much significance, their surplus of meaning cascading into non sequiturs that reveal his inability to collect his experiences as Clarissa does. Just as sound figures characterize modes of listening for different subjects, these descriptions characterize Septimus as diffused among these auditory notes, his delusional and fragmented series of observations reveals a mind that is caught within the synesthetic and associative flux of listening but unable to collate the listening experience into a comprehensible experience. His anxiety emerges as “sudden thunderclaps of fear,” a description which balances between literal and metaphoric registers. While Clarissa sustains a balance of the dynamic between open and closed, Septimus models the listening that is too open, one that expands and spreads out until it loses cohesion. If the novel’s description of sound traces the movements of vitality and mortality, Clarissa resembles the initial ringing of the bell and its powerful signification of the day’s ebb and flow being subordinated to a rational goal, while Septimus resembles the sounds as they chaotically blend into unrecognizable forms before dissolving into silent death.

While there is a basic contrast between these models of subjectivity, Septimus’s listening marks him as a tragic figure whose auditory hallucinations fundamentally sever him from others while producing some of the most moving passages in the novel. He stands as “a crucial character who is an attuned and acute listener in the novel, although he is rarely understood in such terms” (Clements 109). While treatment of his condition might include reckoning how to pacify his responses to auditory stimuli, the novel proves that the efforts to subdue Septimus are catastrophic. Just before he receives “treatment” from Dr. Holmes, Septimus thinks, “Now for his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans,

Evans—his messages from the dead” (147-8). In this instance, his thoughts wander among textual and vocal references. One cannot know if “conversations with Shakespeare” means reading the texts or speaking with the Bard in person. In imagining dead voices in the bushes before mentioning his dead friend, Evans, Septimus’s auditory blurring of past and present along with living and dead suggests a collapse of time. In opposition to the mobile and willful Clarissa, Septimus remains within the charge of Rezia and the doctors. Indeed, Septimus seems to inhabit the *khora*’s liminal and undefined substrate of consciousness, open to rhythm or auditory sensation but without the structuring feature of any conscious organizational principle. While Clarissa’s narrative indicates a purposeful movement and a subjectivity that “must assemble,” Septimus’s interior narration reveals a plenitude of sound and association that cannot cohere. Within this auditory diffusion and decay, Septimus remains too open for the world. Septimus thinks, “Life was good. [...] Only human beings—what did *they* want?” (149). The novel, then, affords a glimpse into a subjectivity that has been prescriptively excised based upon normative standards of mental health. Here, the novel models a subjectivity that remains too open and cannot “assemble,” despite its withheld beauty.

After Septimus’s suicide, Rezia’s listens to the chimes of a nearby clock: “It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking—one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself” (150). Rezia fixes on the indistinct whisperings of the doctors and aligns it with the scattered thoughts of Septimus. The thunderclaps and whisperings become the auditory analogues for Septimus, and Rezia’s understanding of him and this tragic scenario also as

entrance into “some garden.” Rezia remains unsure where this spacing will open or onto what scenes she will see, but the movement of the sounds begins to transport her consciousness. The sounds travel and become analogues for Septimus, but they also become Rezia’s vague yet profound spatial comportment toward relief.

In the auditory wavering and overlaying, *Mrs. Dalloway* sounds out the spaces of London by exploring the characters’ modes of listening. This interweaving of narratives involves Clarissa’s party, where the Bradshaws discuss the suicide. This episode connects the upper echelons of British society to the lower ones through an interruption of the party’s expectations for levity. For Clarissa, she understands Septimus as a dim echo, a contrast to her own enjoyed experience. Septimus’s dissolution into the sensory starkly contrasts Clarissa’s own dictum to assemble:

She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun.

But she must go back. She must assemble. (186)

This scene produces a sonic adjacency between Clarissa and Septimus through the bell. Like previous scenes that refer to the bell ringing, the characters remain physically separate but achieve a type of closeness through the soundscape. Furthermore, this scene unifies the sense of objective time passing and the subjective reminder of one’s own mortality, except in this case Clarissa vicariously experiences death through the mention of Septimus’s. Just as Clarissa had felt the vital rhythms and Septimus had dissolved into the chaos of perpetual association, the leaden circles of the clock here become a real-time sense of the world’s interconnections that are not always bound within the circuitries of



modern life. In listening, as well as reading, one must assemble just as Clarissa reiterates. Her interior monologues exemplify listening as the paramount function in the novel, becoming a mode of being in the world and a revelation of the inner workings of the subject. The form of the person spreads wide, as in Clarissa's transcendental theory and the leaden circles of Big Ben.

## II. Resonant Passages

Just as *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the resonance of the subject in the soundscapes of London, *A Passage to India* forms its characters through their listening experiences. These experiences correspond to the composition or dissolution of the characters' subjectivities. Also, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Passage to India* features two characters as focal points for these different modes of listening. Mrs. Moore represents the Western, British perspective that assumes subjective stability until she is radically undone by the Marabar Caves' overwhelming echo. On the other hand, Professor Godbole embodies Hinduism's plasticity of forms and openness to sound's potential.

*A Passage to India*'s three-part division relates to the general setting for that section (i.e., "Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple"), and each has its own soundscape through which the characters engage these settings and conceptualize themselves through listening. The "passage" named in the title, then, is how one moves through these spaces and how these movements are both physical and mental. Gail Fincham writes, "individuals' experience of space, in the place in which his novels are set, is simultaneously geographical, cultural and psychological" (38). Fincham continues that the novel's depictions of spaces "demonstrate a pattern of constriction and expansion—containerised space versus free space" (38). These patterns of expansion and contraction

correlate with this chapter's analysis of the resonance between sound and the subject. By conceptualizing the spatial movements through the auditory, *A Passage to India* figures listening as its primary mode of passage among its three-part structure.

The first section, "Mosque," refers to an Islamic place of worship, which represents a more closed, or "containerized space," in Fincham's phrasing. The containment of space signaled by the mosque corresponds with this section's more restricted forms of subjectivity, since religious and cultural codes of behavior dominate this section. However, the characters' subjectivities begin to move past these boundaries through listening experiences, signaling a type of resonating cultural exchange. One of the initial episodes in this section features the recitation of poetry by Dr. Aziz during a gathering of prominent community leaders. His selection of poems in Persian, Urdu, and Arabic embodies the rich diversity of Islam and India: "India—a hundred Indias—whispered outside beneath the indifferent moon, but for the time India seemed one and their own, and they regained their departed greatness by hearing its departure lamented, they felt young again because reminded that youth must fly" (Forster 12). The reading allows the small audience to reaffirm their cultural bonds. Furthermore, the variety of poetry embodies the varied character of India, which is here analogized to whispers. This performance characterizes the difference between the Indians and the British through the emphasis on vocal expression. John McBratney observes that an event such as this demonstrates how the novel "shows vividly Forster's sensitivity to the capacity of the oral to complicate the form and meaning of literary texts" (109). These moments align the Indians with an older, oral tradition that contrasts with the more private forms of expression cultivated by the British; however, their more public and demonstrative

listening experiences afford those who do not speak the languages to appreciate the rhythms and auditory features of the poems. The recitation, then, begins to span these cultural differences between the British and Indians through a formal art that signals unity through diverse expression. Here, we apprehend a fundamental movement of *A Passage to India*; listening opens the subject to the paradoxically singular and multiple.

As this section continues, the narration moves from the confines of a home to the eponymous mosque and stages the confrontation between two characters that represent two of the novel's identity groups. Like the house, the mosque offers an image of contained space where the architecture facilitates listening. Here, Dr. Aziz coalesces his religion, culture, and identity into the mosque's redemptive confines, which function "to symbolize the whole into some truth of religion or love" (Forster 16). This account elevates the mosque into a dwelling for Dr. Aziz, a space that sutures his identity and bolsters feelings of alignment: "Here was Islam, his own country, more than a Faith, more than a battle-cry, more, much more...Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and his thoughts found their home" (Forster 16). When Mrs. Moore arrives, her British and Anglican Christian identity produce dialogic counterpoints to Dr. Aziz's Indian and Muslim identity. While the two exchange views and intimate a cross-cultural understanding, Mrs. Moore's attention shifts toward an ineffable outside, an unspeakable alterity that haunts the scene. This shift is accompanied by noticing that the space also becomes a passage to a silent beyond: "Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence" (54). The mosque that serves to "house" Dr. Aziz's identity serves as a point of departure for Mrs. Moore. With one character, the architecture delineates and contains, but for the other it exposes a seeming

infinity of arches. Furthermore, this initially visual description shifts to the auditory by focusing upon an ultimate silence beyond the echoes that perturb Mrs. Moore's more provincial intellect and emotions. Effectively, Mrs. Moore and the mosque stage the subject's confrontation with the *khora*, which, according to Kristeva, is "no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him" (*Revolution* 28). These charges and stases can be analogized with auditory pulses, further suggesting that the formation of the subject occurs as a spatial and auditory dynamic. For Mrs. Moore, the interplay of the mosque's architecture and the auditory image of an echo and terminal silence initiate a similar assembling and dissolution of the subject. As indicated in this episode, Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore become subjects in radically different ways based upon their personal histories. For Mrs. Moore, the reaction to foreign spaces begins to challenge her otherwise "settled" identity through a simultaneous expansion and amplification of her sensibilities that reveal their stases and their mutable construction.

The next and largest section of the novel, "Caves," moves from the human architecture and confines of the home and mosque to the enigmatic, geologically formed Marabar Caves. The descriptions of the Marabar Caves escape definition: "There is something unspeakable in these outposts" (Forster 136). This apophatic definition continues: "Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech. It is as if the surrounding plain or the passing birds have taken upon themselves to exclaim 'extraordinary,' and the world has taken root in the air, and been inhaled by mankind" (137). As opposed to the descriptions of the home and mosque, the caves do not house anything, nor do they provide comfort. Instead, they

become a space that forms Mrs. Moore's earlier intimations of the abyss. The echoes and silence that appeared on the periphery of the mosque in the first section become centered in the second. Even though the narrative shifts focus to the caves, they continually evade encapsulation. The caves, then, structure negation. They also undo the primacy of sight. Tony Jackson argues, "First, the caves are pre-eminently places of the aural-oral, and not the eye. Though there are two images of light connected to the caves, both in fact undermine the primacy of sight" (9). Like the *khora*, the caves structure the encounter with alterity and the strangeness of the self as an auditory experience that confounds any visual framing. Derrida's discussion of the *khora* elaborates on this auditory orientation: "these names do not designate as essence, the stable being of an *eidōs*, since *khora* is neither of the order of the *eidōs* nor of the order of mimemes, that is, of images of the *eidōs* which come to imprint themselves in it" (95). The Marabar Caves escape labeling and the confines of that which can be expressed.

In escaping the visual imagination, the caves become a negative locus. Indeed, this centralizing yet negating function emerges in the novel's first sentence, which refers to the caves even though it appears in the "Mosque" section: "Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary" (Forster 3). The introductory clause simultaneously refers to and excludes the space that occupies the central position in the novel and foreshadows their elusive significance. In situating yet de-centering the caves, the novel forms its spaces as sites of paradox and deferral. Forster's prose style, though generally more accessible, plays with the form of the novel as interlocking references that unfold through resonance rather than a clear sequencing: "The use of form in modernist works frequently implies an assertion

as well as a retraction; to posit, in this regard, is also to deny, or...to include is also to exclude” (Medalie 98). The dashes also offset the independent clause that distances the Marabar Caves from the city that is the grammatic subject of the sentence. This grammatical displacement of the subject figures as the novel’s central tension—that of the subject as a space. The caves, which were to be a curiosity for the British travelers, come to dominate the travelers and the narrative. Similarly, descriptions of the caves’ unique echo emphasize their reductive function:

The echo in a Marabar cave is...entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. ‘Boum’ is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or ‘bou-oum,’ or ‘ou-boum,’—utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce ‘boum.’ (163)

This echo resounds throughout the novel, an auditory rendering of India that perpetually escapes a singular definition or metaphor. The echo neutralizes the distinctions of other sounds by reducing them to a version of “boum.” Moreover, the echo acts as a response but one that has no clear beginning or end. Even when approximated by the “human alphabet,” the echo’s onomatopoeic rendering turns itself inside out, its interior vowels just as easily serving as the initial or final sounds. Echoes often repeat an initial sound and reinforce a stable, causal relationship; however, the Marabar Caves’ echo gestures toward a primordial fissure. In an archetypal sense, caves figure as generative womb images, but *A Passage to India* represents them as sites of violent undoing. This auditory negation resounding within a cave resembles Kristeva’s *khora*, which is where “‘concrete operations’ precede the acquisition of language, and organize preverbal semiotic space

according to logical categories, which are thereby shown to precede or transcend language” (*Revolution* 27). In “Mosque,” Mrs. Moore is convinced of her own stability and the cohesion of a comprehensible world. Upon listening to the echo, these foundations of subjectivity are answered by the echo’s pre-discursive response, something that cannot be comprehended, something that limns the boundary of human capacity for language and thought. It is as if the echoes and silence beyond the arches Mrs. Moore listens for in the mosque are here answered, yet the response itself undoes the grounds of discourse and solidity. However, the sounds in the cave are not exact echoes, but distortions: “So in this case Mrs. Moore hears only the estrangement of the sound’s departure (frustrates identification of origin). The affirming return does not happen. Again, strictly speaking, this is not really an echo, and yet we have just this word for the event” (Jackson 10).

While the “Caves” section escalates dramatic tensions in the novel, Mrs. Moore’s “horrid” experience is only mentioned after it occurs when the narrator comments, “A Marabar cave had been horrid as far as Mrs. Moore was concerned, for she had nearly fainted in it, and had some difficulty in preventing herself from saying so as soon as she got into the air again” (Forster 162). Like the cave’s description at the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Moore’s experience of the echoes becomes a peripheral yet central event, which extends the role of a caves into the human sphere. Mrs. Moore’s trauma echoes throughout the narrative, indicating that this central event disrupts her versions of selfhood. Where Miss Quested perceives herself as the object of another’s violence, Mrs. Moore’s situation conflates violator and violated. Any outward expression of her subject, within the cave’s space, becomes abject. Yet this abjection, this foreignness that so

deeply disturbs Mrs. Moore's interiority, reveals itself as abject yet necessary. According to Kristeva, abjection constitutes "one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (*Powers* 1). The caves present themselves as abject to Mrs. Moore, but they also penetrate her being and reveal that the construction of herself is also abject, and that this auditory experience becomes "the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being" (*Powers* 5). In other parts of the novel, Miss Quested explains her distress as a sexual assault committed by a racialized other. It elaborates the sexualized racial tensions underpinning the novel's colonial setting. On the other hand, Mrs. Moore's trauma is rendered as an internalized wounding with an auditory image: "And consequently the echo flourished, raging up and down like a nerve in the faculty of her hearing, and the noise in the cave, so unimportant intellectually, was prolonged over the surface of her life" (Forster 215). Mrs. Moore internalizes the trauma of the echo, and just as the text represents the echo as simultaneously penetrative and exteriorizing, Mrs. Moore's experience leaves her exposed and without a clear spatial sense of her interiority. The noise and her subjectivity have interlocked, morphing with the fluidity of the echo.

After the experience in the caves, Mrs. Moore comes to realize that all distinctions, be they vocal, spatial, or ontological, circle around an aphasic, amorphous negativity. Any desire to explain or deny life's contingencies continually returns to or circles around this disturbing revelation. It seems that the caves, and India itself, prove too overwhelming for her, and she dies on her return trip and is buried at sea. Just as the



opening of the novel centers and defers the caves, now the central part of the novel defers and dissolves one of its main characters. This echoing and dissolving of elements of the novel plays out as a reverberant structure. The “Caves” section answers by dissolving the stabilizing values espoused by some characters in the “Mosque” section. While Mrs. Moore’s affliction resonates within the structure of her own body and compromises her comforting beliefs, Dr. Aziz’s comments about India are figured in both structural and auditory metaphors when he claims, “we all build upon sand; and the more modern the country gets, the worse’ll be the crash” and that, “The original sound may be harmless, but the echo is always evil” (Forster 307). This refers to the fraught history within India, involving Hindus, Muslims, and the more newly arrived British Christians, as well as the history of vying empires. This occasions Fielding’s thoughts about Dr. Aziz’s metaphor: “This reflection about an echo lay at the verge of Fielding’s mind. He could never develop it. It belonged to the universe that he had missed or rejected. And the mosque missed it too. Like himself, those shallow arcades provided but a limited asylum” (307). Forster explicitly analogizes the spatial and personal, the architecture of the self resembling that of the sections’ titles. Here, Fielding’s thoughts echo with Mrs. Moore’s own intimations when she discussed religion with Dr. Aziz in the mosque.

If Mrs. Moore represents a stable subjectivity that is irreparably disturbed by the caves’ echo, then Professor Godbole embodies an open being, one able to accommodate many forms, voices, and perspectives without losing an anchored sense of self. Professor Godbole, like the caves, weaves through the text as both central and peripheral character. His Brahmin role affords him analytical distance from the events around him, and he verges upon functioning as a secondary narrator. His aloof temperament and equivocation

seem to relegate him to the margins of the novel, but when he sings in the “Mosque” section, his vocal performance reaffirms the oral traditions of India, but the performance serves as an auditory counterbalance to the caves’ disruptive, aphasic function. The narrator describes the scene as a sensual opening that both captivates and bewilders:

His thin voice rose, and gave out one sound after another. At times there seemed rhythm, at times there was the illusion of a Western melody. But the ear, baffled repeatedly, soon lost any clue, and wandered in a maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible. It was the song of an unknown bird. Only the servants understood it. They began to whisper to one another. The man who was gathering water chestnut came naked out of the tank, his lips parted with delight, disclosing his scarlet tongue. The sounds continued and ceased after a few moments as casually as they had begun—apparently half through the bar, and upon the subdominant. (84-85)

The narrator emphasizes the song’s plasticity, creating an “illusion of a Western melody” that would make it accessible enough for non-Indian ears. However, the song resists simple categorization and is figured as a “maze of voices.” This moment echoes with Dr. Aziz’s poetry recitation in this part of the novel, but here the vocal performance becomes the enigmatic element, not its language. Song, voice, and verbal communication are often metaphorized as journeying, suggesting a stable ground, mode of transportation, and destination. If comprehension emerges as the total effect of these components working in conjunction, Godbole’s song complicates this semantic “journey,” which is here figured as when the ear “lost any clue” and “wandered in a maze of voices.” According to Mladen Dolar, the voice, “introduces a scission, a rupture in the middle of the full

presence, and refers it to a void—but a void which is not simply a lack, an empty space; it is a void in which the voice comes to resonate” (42). By elaborating on Godbole’s voice, which performs like “an unknown bird,” the description addresses how the voice itself becomes an elusive presence that can distort or even undo the subject to which it seems attached. The multiple, successive metaphors applied to Godbole’s song and voice suggest an unsettling effect that refuses connection to any single referent. As noted above, the “Mosque” section emphasizes spatial containment that aligns with the nested or settled subjectivity of someone like Dr. Aziz or Mrs. Moore. Yet, Godbole’s performance within this section indicates that the self cannot be structured by cultural and religious securities alone. Here, Godbole’s song vocalizes the shape of the subject as a variable theme.

Indeed, even Forster’s reference to music theory in this quotation reinforces the theme of variation and wandering. Starting and finishing “half through a bar” would seem incomplete to someone accustomed to Western music, who would prefer a discernible rhythm or scale progression to continue until it repeats or introduces a new measure. Godbole’s song begins and ends arbitrarily, suggesting a more open form that does not abide by a strict teleology or assume the audience’s desire for measures to “resolve.” Furthermore, beginning and ending on the subdominant reveals another alternative Western tonic music centers around a center that “anchors” the music, and the dominants representing the modifications around that center. The song audibly de-centers the expectations of listeners, which in turn challenges their notions of narrative. Even in tonic music, any leitmotifs are often variations that lead back to the central “narrative” of the music. Adwaita P. Ganguly notes, “Most of Indian music is improvisation depending

upon the imagination and the creativity of an artist” (191). If music constitutes a form, Godbole’s song offers entry into a type of music that reorients that form and his listeners’ expectations. When Fielding asks further about this song, Godbole answers, ““It was a religious song. I placed myself in the position of a milkmaid. I say to Shri Krishna, “Come! come to me only.” The god refuses to come”” (85). The notion of calling Shri Krishna to come also functions as a *double entendre*, positioning the singer as one who evokes and seduces to commune with the divine. Effectively, the song projects an altered identity while Godbole remains physically static, effectively troubling of gender and class distinctions (Ganguly 186). Although Godbole challenges the boundaries of identity by singing as a milkmaid, the separation between singer and the object of desire remains. This song emphasizes dynamism, variation, and a sense of endlessness. Effectively, the song foreshadows some of the caves’ echoes, but they occur on a comprehensible, human level. While the echoes contort other sounds and reduce them to the caves’ “mode,” the song expresses variability and is generated by cultural forces. In listening to the song within the temple, Fielding finds access to an existential wandering and openness that will not be afforded by the caves’ echo.

In the “Caves” section of the novel, Prof. Godbole’s adaptability contrasts Mrs. Moore’s dissolution and the other characters’ attempts to rationalize events. The narrator observes, “Professor Godbole had never mentioned an echo; it never impressed him, perhaps” (163). This dispassionate reaction emphasizes the intimacy with which Godbole approaches the world and contrasts starkly with the effect of the echo on Mrs. Moore. As the increasing tensions brought on by the trial mount, Godbole remains apart and seems to embody the balance of forces that someone like Fielding only makes after the incident

in the caves and trial when he comments, “Everything echoes now; there’s no stopping the echo. The original sound may be harmless, but the echo is always evil” (307). The narrator indicates, “This reflection about an echo lay at the verge of Fielding’s mind. He could never develop it. It belonged to the universe that he had missed or rejected. And the mosque missed it too. Like himself, those shallow arcades provided but a limited asylum” (307). Here, architectural and somatic structures are compared, and both encompass spaces in which an echo may travel and give itself over to interpretation. Both mosque and Fielding are defined and thus limited. The echoes that resound beyond the arches mentioned by Mrs. Moore in the “Mosque” section, and the darkened, amorphous structure of the caves become the most adequate spaces for the awareness of negation. When pressed by Ronny to describe the echo, she responds by refusing to positively describe them, complaining, “I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings; I have listened too much” (222). Later, Mrs. Moore dies at sea before she could testify in court, her dissolution occurring away from the action and fading into the silence she had discerned in the mosque. While Mrs. Moore fades to silence, Prof. Godbole remains and morphs with each context.

“Temple” focuses on the Hindu celebrations for the birth of Krishna and elevates the importance of Godbole’s singing. If “Caves” stages the violent relations among space, sound, and the subject, then this section attempts a more holistic, reparative relation among them. When Fielding enters the Hindu temple, a celebration of Krishna is taking place, and Godbole is the officiant who leads the worshipers in prayer. The narration juxtaposes statements about God with Fielding and Godbole’s positions within the temple: “[God] is, was not, is not, was. He and Professor Godbole stood at opposite ends

of the same strip of carpet” (317). In the description, opposition entail continuity, and the song itself produces a tactile yet evanescent connection between the two. Like the difference sustained by Godbole’s milkmaid song, the space indicates a differential structure through which the Hindu celebration derives its energy. Like the earlier abhang, the song does not emerge from strict adherence to regular form: “Music there was, but from so many sources that the sum-total was untrammelled. The braying banging crooning melted into a single mass which trailed round the palace before joining the thunder” (318-19). Although the plurality of sources threatens to create aural chaos, the gradual unification reflects the emotional fervor, or bhakti, shared by the devotees, emphasizing that emotion and sound do not need to be orderly to express divine love, which becomes “a frustration of reason and form” (Forster 319). The song and its relation to the temple allows for oppositions and divisions to play out, but the temple unifies their purpose without rationalizing them. The frustration becomes the songs’ generative power, unlike the caves’ inhuman negation.

The “Temple” section also begins tying the various narratives together, as if drawing varying musical strains and echoes into a harmonic whole. Where the narrator or Fielding might identify the “frustration of reason and form,” Godbole and other Hindu worshipers understand as generative paradox and open forms of being. The novel also mentions a spelling error that ultimately relates to other words and sounds in previous sections. On a lexical level, this frustration of form emerges when the narration highlights the tapestries and panels in the temple: “The inscriptions which the poets of the State had composed were hung where they could not be read....and one of them (composed in English to indicate His universality) consisted, by an unfortunate slip of the draughtsman,

of the words, ‘God si Love’” (320). Through its misspelling, “si” reverses “is,” and this “frustrated” copula opens being toward linguistic play and the notion that being can be read or listened to in different forms. This misspelling echoes with a previous mispronunciation in the “Caves” section when the protesting Indians chant for Mrs. Moore but pronounce the name as “Esmis Esmoor” (250). Notably, Mrs. Moore’s son Ronny despises the pronunciation, calling it a travesty and they had turned his mother into a Hindu goddess (250). His revulsion ignores the pathos of the chanters and that his mother was being called toward a social duty that he expressly wanted her to ignore. The spelling error offers a legible challenge, while the caves’ echoing escapes any cohesion. The Caves section dramatizes a space being entered and then radically deconstructing subjectivity. The Temple section reconfigures the British listeners’ expectations to song and devotion, while offering a mode of entrance.

The resonance of the novel’s three sections continues when Godbole, at the end of the temple celebration, remembers Mrs. Moore and thinks to himself, “‘He was a Brahman, she Christian, but it made no difference... It was his duty, as was his desire to place himself in the position of the God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to the God, ‘Come, come, come, come’” (326). Godbole reminds himself that his relation to others subsists in personal displacement; or, to empathize and love another, the notion of a fixed personality must dissolve. Here, Moore and Godbole come together despite distance and death. The novel overlaps and echoes the two characters just as it does with references to the Marabar Caves and the contortions of phrases. *A Passage to India*’s structure and attention to auditory phenomena interpenetrate, commingle, and rupture spaces and characters, simultaneously presenting

and pulling apart just as the echoes in the caves expose and distort sound and the subject. Both novels assert that the form of the subject is not a bound space, but a mode through which one moves. Like the khora, the novels open the reader to the processes of listening that shape subjectivity but without prescription, opening the grounds of signification as a surging dynamic interpenetrating physical spaces and bodies, exchanging and involuting interiors and exteriors.



### Chapter 3

#### Unsound Voices: Synchresis and Acousmatic Listening in *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness*

While the modernist novels that have been analyzed up to this point depict listening as an activity that opens the subject to difference and the acknowledgement of the subject's resonance, *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness* dramatize how militaristic and imperialistic ideologies subordinate the listening subject to a sovereign voice. Willard and Marlow's mode of listening ultimately reveals their desire to stabilize resonance within the preconceived coordinates of their ideologies. While listening moves as a dialectic between sense and interpretation, between self and other, their motives ultimately work toward a foregone conclusion that the will and sovereign exclusion validate their actions and that the voice itself sanctions the ground for this belief. These ideologies propose a natural coherence between voice and body, or perhaps more accurately between voice and person. The film and novella structure their narratives around Willard and Marlow's fantasy to de-acousmatize<sup>13</sup> this sovereign voice. Moreover, in the enunciation of their respective narratives, they assume special access to and become the transducers of Kurtz's voice. The audiovisual tensions inherent to acousmatic listening become analytical keys toward examining how *Apocalypse Now's* cinematic form plays out the formation of the subject, one constituted by resonance and echoes as much as visual cuts and dissolves. A similar audiovisual form applies to *Heart of Darkness*, which similarly represents listening to the voice as its central narrative.

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<sup>13</sup> Listening to sound that does not have a visualized point of origin is called "acousmatic listening" (Steintrager 7).

Many critics tend to focus on the influence of Conrad on Coppola;<sup>14</sup> however, this chapter deliberately abandons chronology to theorize the cinematic nature of the literary, deploying *synchresis* as the technical ligature between the texts and reading *Apocalypse Now* as a template for *Heart of Darkness*. This sequencing avoids the almost-inevitable discussion about adaptation that accompanies literature-to-film analyses. In effect, *Apocalypse Now*'s cinematic form "reports back" to the audience and will lay out an analytical template for this chapter's analysis of *Heart of Darkness*. While I do not equate cinematic and literary forms, their audiovisual textualities suggest affinities in regards to their mode of expression and the audience's reception. The novella obviously does not engage an audience in the same way as the film; however, the centrality of listening invites one to conceptualize reading as a listening experience. Melissa Free appropriately refers to the audience of the *Heart of Darkness* as "reader-listener" (1). Just as the audience of the cinema also engages these audiovisual tensions the literary reader attends to visually printed words and their attendant sonic values. The effect of perceiving cinema as a unity between sight and sound is labeled by Chion as *synchresis*: "the forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between what one hears and what one sees" (*Audio-Vision* 5). This term is a portmanteau of "synthesis" and "synchronous" and identifies how an audience connects disparate audiovisual effects. I contend that *synchresis* operates as a mode of listening that collates auditory and visual stimuli within the imagination. Moreover, this technical and perceptual play between vision and sound maps out the texts' interrogation of onto broader questions of subjectivity. Chion posits,

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<sup>14</sup> See Pamela Demora's "*Apocalypse Now Redux: Heart of Darkness Moves into New Territory.*"

“Basically, this question of the unity of sound and image would have no importance if it didn't turn out, through numerous films and numerous theories, to be the very signifier of the question of human unity, cinematic unity, unity itself” (*Audio-Vision* 97). In other words, the question of unity must continue as a question, one that is not simply a repeated form, but ongoing and reconfiguring its angles of inquiry. I argue that Willard and Marlow refuse this question and assume unity’s stability and coherence within the voice of Kurtz and thereby sanction the imperialism and militarism that substitutes the question for the sovereign voice’s order.

In the previous chapters of this dissertation, representations of listening in modernist novels often approximate a phenomenal listening experience, particularly in the case of *Ulysses*, but sound film works out listening as an experienced audiovisual form. Therefore, two layers of listening operate: one in the soundscape produced by the film and perceived by the audience, and the other the depiction of the characters’ listening experiences. Just as these two narratives immerse the audience within their soundscapes, they also dramatize listening. Both the film and novella emerge through the voices of distant, jaded narrators, who in turn are attracted to the voice of their respective Kurtz. This attraction to voice becomes the primary focus of the narrative, which acts as metonym for the cinema. Chion notes, “It is as if the voice were wandering along the surface, *at once inside and outside*, seeking a place to settle” (*Voice* 23). Later, Chion reinforces this claim by noting, “the cinema is a vococentric or, more precisely, a verbocentric phenomenon” (*Audio-Vision* 5). Willard and Marlow, then, are both drawn into a fantasy, a search to settle the voice into a cohesive and comprehensible entity. Each narration fixates upon the voice as a seductive coherence or as image of total dissolution.

Furthermore, these texts immerse their audiences<sup>15</sup> within these questions of identity, voice, and ideology. In doing so, the texts' narratives demonstrate how representations of these categories depends on their audio-visual tensions. Furthermore, this psychological examination does not emerge as a moralistic tale. Replete with echoes, screams, and silences, both texts profile those who seek these "immediate and necessary" links within their hostile environments and often discover an equally hostile self that has forced these links. Indeed, both titles announce the importance of some form of vision: *Heart of Darkness* conjures the image of an abyss, while *Apocalypse Now*, literally translated, heralds "revelation" and immediacy.

*Synchresis*, then, becomes the intersensory function that can open audiences to critical awareness of these nightmarish texts and their seductive ideologies. Through *Apocalypse Now*'s fragmentary form, the film affords audiences an audio-visual experience of the film's characters. Garrett Stewart claims, "Phonemic play and photogrammatic disclosure...can both goad us to notice the unstable successivity of their mechanism by skipping a beat or two, exposing overlay itself as the undertext of the consecutive" (*Between* 273). When cinema and literature explore violent or constraining ideologies, these media also draw the audience into an experience that affords an intimacy with the profiles of those they might think distant from themselves. Like the modernist novel's stream of consciousness, the voice-over and the flow of images engage the alternation between interiors and exteriors that speaks to the varying formations of the subject. Film offers the audiences the opportunity to enter the minds of those, like

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<sup>15</sup> "Audience," from here on out, will refer both to the viewer of a film and a reader of written text.

Willard, Marlow, and Kurtz, who would be merely condemned by those who would label them “unsound.” The film and novella engage the characters’ subjectivities to offer a *sense* of their motivations, revealing that the same who condemn are the ones who enabled the likes of Kurtz to follow these imperial and militaristic ideologies to their ultimate conclusions. By featuring the voice so centrally, the texts allow an intimacy with the power of the sovereign voice and the violence it condones. Since the voice is intersubjective, even the audience may feel interpellated by its seductive move toward coherence, toward elevation of a transcendent idea. Both film and novella amplify the significance of the voice to herald that the audience is part of a continuum with these characters and their motivations.

*Apocalypse Now* opens with acousmatic listening, enticing the audience with traveling sounds and no visual orientation. The first second of the film begins in complete darkness with a faint whirring stereophonically emerging from an unseen source pulsing mechanically. The sound continues moving its point of audition just as a jungle skyline comes into view and we then coordinate a passing helicopter with this rhythmic movement. Along with the whirling dust generated by the wake of the helicopter’s passing, the tinkling guitar strings and the opening notes of “The End” by The Doors accompanies the napalmed trees in the distance, the non-diegetic lyrics, “This is the end,” directing us to think of this opening as the closing, an ending in fire. Jim Morrison’s voice continues until we see Captain Willard’s upside-down face, his eyes darting back and forth, dominates the left side of the screen before the rotating ceiling fan blends into the right side. The film offers one shot with three layered visuals: our perspective of Willard’s face, his upward view onto the ceiling fan, and the nightmarish vision of a

burning landscape. A partial view of a Buddhist statue briefly replaces the ceiling fan. The rich color palette, soft dissolves, and blends to create a pastiche of images that visualize Captain Willard's fractured mind, and Jim Morrison's voice accompanies these images, suggesting a thematic keynote in the lyrics that ask, "Can you picture what will be? So limitless and free?" Eventually, the point of view adjusts to a slow pan of Willard's room strewn with bottles of alcohol and the fragments of his civilian life. The frame returns to a single view of Willard with the helicopter blade sound drowning out all others, and a cut to the ceiling fan suggests it as the source until the frame adopts Willard's point of view as he approaches the window blinds, which he lifts and peers out to the streets of Saigon and the ambient noise of traffic and distant helicopters.

The opening scenes frame the dissolution and reconvergence of the visual and auditory to portray Willard's fragmented world and the more general chaos of the war, which serves to "overturn the traditionally subordinate relation of sound to image, and of spectacle to narratives, and thus raise the issue of power and agency by generating doubts about who or what is in control" (Elsaesser and Wedel 162). Even Willard's opening lines create a temporal disorganization for the audience when he remarks, "Saigon. Shit—I'm only just in Saigon." The present tense quickly follows with the past as he recollects his experiences in combat and the mission that brought him to Kurtz, which subtly prompts the audience to question when the film's action is occurring and when Willard is recounting it. Do we listen to his voice-over as a future Willard separate from the present visual one being revealed, or are we witnessing the voice-over as a present commentary resonating within Willard's mind? Willard continues drinking, and his voice says, "I'm here a week now, waiting for a mission, getting softer" but before *The Doors*'

song strikes up again, he notes, “Each time I looked around the walls moved in a little tighter,” shifting back to the present. This temporal disjuncture complements the audiovisual ones until the song’s volume surges, and we see Willard continue drinking and practicing martial arts. As if acting out the film’s fragmentation, he smashes a mirror before crumpling into a bloody, naked heap. Notably, the mirror’s breaking is accompanied with sound, a *synchrestic* moment that suggests that violence offers a moment of cohesion for Willard, yet this cohesive motivation, paradoxically, produces more fragments: a shattered mirror, the fragmenting of his reflection, and his now-lacerated hand. However, this convergence of visual and auditory switches back to Willard silently crying out while “The End” finishes with dying chords, crashing cymbals, and Jim Morrison snarling, “Kill. Kill. Kill.” Willard’s unheard screams here are substituted with the song. The audience again engages in acousmatic listening since the unseen voice of Morrison singing there the audience is denied the voice of someone visually screaming while listening to an unseen one singing the last lethal strains of “The End.” This alternation of voices and the destabilizing styling of *synchresis* inaugurates the form of the film as the deliberate substitution of vision and voices that portrays the subjects’ fragmentations and search for cohesion.

We do not see Willard speak until other soldiers arrive with a mission from headquarters. Willard is hungover and agonizing in his alcohol and blood-soaked apartment. The soldiers decide to “clean him up.” Just as his diegetic voice shouts out when he is thrust into a cold shower, a cut to a helicopter landing at headquarters also returns us to the voice-over. While walking to HQ, Willard’s narrative voice-over comments, “There is no way to tell [Kurtz’s] story without telling my own, and if his

story is really a confession, then so is mine.” This admission confirms the role of the voice-over—to confess what we will be seeing and listening to in the film as, perhaps, an admission of guilt (Willard also claims earlier that the Army’s offered the mission “for my sins”). Willard, then, aligns his confession with Kurtz’s.

The dominant, unseen voice emerges again when we are introduced to commanding officers and a CIA operative. After introductions and Willard’s denial of conducting assassination missions before, the officers show a picture of Col. Kurtz and then play two transmissions. This indirect introduction of Kurtz with photographs and his recorded voice engages the audience with what Chion labels embedded listening, which occurs when “a character in a film listens to a sound recording (with or without images) on a tape recorder, editing console, or other playback medium” (*Film* 476). The radio transmission features Kurtz’s voice as he details his hatred of the US Army and Viet Cong alike with nightmarish imagery. This scene further elaborates *Apocalypse Now*’s dramatization of the acousmatic voice since Kurtz is not speaking directly; however, the film plays with an incomplete de-acousmatization, or process of anchoring a sound to its point of origin. This process remains incomplete, though, because Willard and the audience do not view someone speaking, but they are presented with a visual representation of Kurtz. These two simulacra further elaborate the textual nature of Kurtz, who is reduced and elevated into an evanescent, haunting figure, emerging only through these auditory and visual media. After listening to this recorded transmission, the Army general is visibly shaken and labels Kurtz’s ideas and methods “unsound.” Finally, Willard is commanded to “terminate the Colonel’s command,” which equates to assassinating a fellow officer. Aside from establishing the film’s primary external goal,



the film's audiovisual arrangements continue the dissociation between voice and speaker. As the general moralizes about the fall of Kurtz, banally claiming "good does not always triumph," the frame cuts to Willard staring directly back, unblinking at the audience, suggesting that Willard and the audience are sharing in this moment of acousmatic listening. The visual detachment from the general and his continued pontificating offers an image of the Army's required deception (e.g., claiming that missions have not occurred to keep them classified). Here, the moralizing attempts to detach the general from Kurtz's "unsound methods," which, as previously mentioned, are merely an extension of his own ideology. Willard knows this, and his stare signals to the listening audience conveys incredulity and resignation to the absurd hypocrisy of the American military.

Willard also engages Kurtz through the dossier he receives from headquarters. The voiceover from Willard opens a strange space in the film: Willard's voice substitutes for the written texts, while the frames cut between scenes of Willard reading and close-ups of photos depicting Kurtz. Indeed, these moments begin Willard's gradual seduction. He reads about Kurtz's impressive record, and he later confesses, "I had heard his voice on the tape, and it really put the hook in me, but I couldn't connect up that voice with this man." Willard announces here his desire to de-acousmatize the voice of Kurtz. He wants to anchor the voice of Kurtz with "this man." Furthermore, this *synchretic* desire for cohesion ultimately reflects on Willard's own search for cohesion. The projections of Kurtz through the dossier registers in Willard a diffuse sense that these elements must be pieced together to understand the truth of Kurtz and the war.

Willard's desire to encounter Kurtz echoes and projects his own fragmentations, since he had mentioned at the beginning of the film that Kurtz's confessions, the ones the audience hears through Willard's voice-over, are also Willard's. The scene culminates with a close-up of Willard's eye as he begins reading a letter from Kurtz to his son in America. He reads, "In war there are many moments for compassion and tender action. There are many moments for ruthless action, what is called ruthless but, in many circumstances, could only be clarity, seeing clearly what there is to be done and doing it directly, clearly, awake. Looking at it." Here, Willard's recitation of Kurtz's letter vocalizes what he had mentioned earlier—that Kurtz's confession was also his own. This moment of reading aloud gives the audience an auditory phenomenon of the voice's "hooking" effect. Furthermore, in reading, Willard channels Kurtz vocally to the audience and offers what seems like a rational explication of the war's absurdity. Yet, Kurtz's insistence on clarity belies the content of the letter itself, which proposes that deciding action is a simply a matter of "looking at it." What "is to be done," though, remains unnamed; therefore, the clarity Kurtz elevates is simply the ability to act ruthlessly when one decides. The close-up on Willard's eye in this moment suggests that, as he recites Kurtz's letter, he begins accepting this proposition by parsing the text that commands one to look. Along with the hooking effect of Kurtz's voice, the text's contents solidify Willard's convictions that Kurtz's ideology of willful and sovereign brutality offers direct accessibility to the truth. The film plays out this coalescence between the visual and auditory as the cut from eye to text is then voiced over with the reading of the letter that itself points toward the visual focus required to commit to violent action. Soon after Willard reads Kurtz's letter, Willard tears up the dossier and

tosses the fragments into the water. These fragments of written and photographic documents floating on the river pass the frame, creating an image of cinematic motion and mediating once again the tension between the visual photos and Willard's voice. Here, as Willard prepares himself for the end stages of his mission, he admits, "But the thing I felt the most, much stronger than fear, was the desire to confront him." This desire for a convergence of speech and a present body indicates that Willard's mind has become cinematic itself. In other words, the photos and recordings do not coalesce Kurtz the man in Willard's imagination, and the audience ultimately shares in Willard's anticipation. *Apocalypse Now* subtly begins to dramatize these audio-visual relations as markers of how ideology functions as a series of coincidences and ruptures.

Willard also engages Kurtz through the dossier he receives from headquarters. The voice-over from Willard opens a strange space in the film: Willard's voice substitutes for the written texts, while we cut between scenes of Willard reading and close-ups of photos depicting Kurtz. Indeed, these moments begin Willard's gradual seduction. He reads about Kurtz's impressive record, and he later confesses, "I had heard his voice on the tape, and it really put the hook in me, but I couldn't connect up that voice with this man." Here, we begin to get a sense of Willard's own desire for *synchresis*, a cinematic desire to anchor the representations of Kurtz, either in photographed or audio-recorded form. Furthermore, this *synchretic* desire for cohesion ultimately reflects on Willard's own search for cohesion. The projections of Kurtz through the dossier registers in Willard a diffuse sense that these elements must be pieced together to understand the truth of Kurtz and the war. Soon after Willard reads Kurtz's letter, Willard tears up the dossier and tosses the fragments into the water. These fragments of written and

photographic documents floating on the river pass the frame, creating an image of cinematic motion and mediating once again the tension between the visual photos and Willard's voice. Willard confesses his desire to de-acousmatize the voice, to experience the convergence of Kurtz's voice and body as an idealized anchor for Willard's own conscience. *Apocalypse Now* subtly begins to dramatize these audio-visual relations as extensions into the structure of ideology, which itself emerges through a dynamic process of congealing and rupturing, or an ideological *synchresis*.

However, after Willard is briefly imprisoned at Kurtz's command post, he is brought into the shadowy interior of Kurtz's room. While the two share the same space, they never occupy the same frame. Furthermore, even when Kurtz is shown to be speaking, the shadows cover his face and mouth. The audience infers that Kurtz is speaking, but even in this scene the film emphasizes a separation between voice and body. Kurtz's voice, characterized by Brando's gentle nasality, emerges out of the darkness as he waxes poetic about gardenias on the Ohio River, but once he emerges from the shadow, it becomes a menacing gesture that imposes itself upon Willard and the audience who shares his point of view. During Kurtz's famous monologue, the audience listens with Marlow to the colonel's harrowing experiences and theories on psychological warfare. The scene continually cuts between Kurtz's shadowy frame, his speaking face completely shadowed, and shots of Willard. Kurtz moves from left to right across the screen, while Willard continuously turns his head from right to left, exposing his ear. Like most of the other scenes involving Kurtz, they never occupy the same frame, but their movements suggest that they are moving toward each other. Since they do not meet face to face, Kurtz's voice becomes the wavering ligature between the two. The audience,

in turn, listens with Willard to Kurtz's anecdote and must infer that the two characters occupy the same space despite never sharing the same shot. Like the scene of Willard listening to Kurtz's recordings, the voice paradoxically draws them together even as it differentiates them. The auditory merging and splitting also finds a visual complement since the shadowy interiors occlude their faces. Yet, the chiaroscuro dynamic further suggests that the two are completing each other, attaining a symmetry of separation.<sup>16</sup> This turning by the two characters from different yet consecutive shots suggests that they are turning toward each other, meeting and perhaps even merging within the off-screen darkness. The voice of Kurtz and the ear of Willard pair between these cuts, offers a bodily anchor for Kurtz continuing to speak and Willard's ongoing listening. The cuts to close-ups of their faces visually represents Kurtz's allegory of facing "horror and moral terror." Kurtz voices the confrontation with moral terror, while the audience sees him as the audiovisual manifestation of that terror.

This scene seems to reveal Kurtz's compassion in his painful narration of his mission to inoculate a village for polio. One can see his face becoming more strained, but his voice reveals his compassion when he recounts a village elder following them. Kurtz says that the man was overcome and that "He couldn't say." As he recounts this, Kurtz turns away from the camera and seems to toss a fruit rind that he had been casually peeling and gnawing before, as though Kurtz is trying to cast off or exorcise the memory by discarding this waste. He recounts that upon returning to the village after the Viet Cong had passed through and had left a "pile of little inoculated arms." Kurtz admits that

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<sup>16</sup> This splitting complementarity also plays out in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, where the two lead characters are often featured as occupying the same space but never completely revealed, suggesting that the two are separate yet "moving into" each other.

he “wept like some grandmother,” and the audience verges on empathizing with the Special Forces soldier who has simply seen too much and has gone mad. However, Kurtz continues his monologue, saying:

Then it hit me. Like a diamond. And then I realized...like I was shot...Like I was shot with a diamond...a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought: My God...the genius of that. The genius. The will to do that. Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we.

Kurtz’s figures his epiphany appropriately as being shot, revelation becoming yet another act of violence. Instead of turning away from repeating violence, Kurtz concludes that he must meet uncompromising violence with more of the same. The circular logic of “what must be done,” which echoes his letter to his son that Willard had read on the boat where he writes that one must conduct war ruthlessly “looking at it,” here continues in an ever-widening scope. Here, too, we notice the visual images that Kurtz uses, the crystalline and diamond descriptors emphasizing a sharpness and geometric precision that overcomes Kurtz. These visual images also Kurtz silences these experiences, reducing them to visual similes and subordinating them to a vision of ideologically motivated violence. Where Willard and Kurtz would accuse the U.S. Army as hypocrites, Kurtz ironically abides by their murderous logic and posits, “If I had ten divisions of those men, our troubles here would be over very quickly.” He then concludes that it is “Judgment that defeats us,” yet judgment directly relates to the ability to decide among actions. As noted above, Kurtz nests that decision within the “clarity” of the issue, but that clarity is ultimately determined by the one who views “what must be done,” and therefore the

viewer, in this case Kurtz (and by extension Willard), are necessarily always judging. Kurtz does not transcend judgment as much as acquiesce to the ruinous pathway of the “diamond bullet.”

The ending of the film is accompanied by the The Doors’ “The End,” and the parallel narratives of Willard and Kurtz meet during the disorienting assassination scene, which cuts from the two shadow figures to the sacrifice of a water buffalo. Kurtz’s final words, “The horror. The horror,” emerge from a close-up of his bloody mouth, which then cuts to Willard covering his ears, attempting to block them out. The man who had been so drawn to the voice can no longer stand it: The vocal object of desire has become wholly abject. However, just as “The End” signals a musical symmetry with the film’s beginning, the final scene closes on a layered image of Willard’s eye aligning with that of the transparent Buddhist idol. Willard’s voice-over has long since faded, replaced by that of Kurtz’s haunting echo of “the horror.” The fragmented and transparent visuals fade along with the acousmatic voice of Kurtz as the film’s end returns to the same darkness with which it opened. I contend that this audiovisual splitting and fading produces a stylized, modernist critique of militaristic ideology by a warning for those who would abide in the circular logic of The film’s unease and uncertainty, its disorienting divisions, unveils how the cinema itself presents the audience with audiovisual techniques, cultivating a critical *synchresis*, or a mode of listening that attends to the polymorphic and multisensory.

Where *Apocalypse Now* begins in the darkness, *Heart of Darkness* opens in the fading of light over the Thames and thus initiates the novella’s ongoing thematic interplay of light and darkness. Joseph Conrad was keenly aware of the role the senses

played in his fiction, stating his commitment to the visual when he writes, “And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing light to the truth” (Preface 279). Given these vision-based metaphors and the voluminous criticism attending to it, *Heart of Darkness* seems to be a paradigm for a visualist approach to the truth, with the readers as those who must glimpse upon the narration’s phosphorescence as it lights upon the truth. But this hyper-visual attention is only part of Conrad’s aesthetic. The interplay of vision and sound offers a fuller sense of Jamie Sherry characterizes Conrad’s famous lines about making the reader see<sup>17</sup> as part of the “inherent cinematic qualities of Conrad’s pre-Modernist writings” (374). While critics such as Sherry examine the influence of cinematic technologies on Conrad’s prose, I contend that these “cinematic qualities” move beyond historical aftereffects toward a phenomenology of the text itself. But what does it mean for *Heart of Darkness* to be cinematic? And perhaps more broadly, what is cinematic about literature?<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, literature is a different medium from cinema, but the visual and mobile aspects of reading aptly describe Conrad’s picturesque (and often grotesque) movement through his narrations. Indeed, the moving quality of his prose links to the etymological root of cinema as *kinema*, or “movement.” However, any reading experience, as explored in other chapters of this dissertation, requires a multisensory attention from the reader, an attentive listening to the text. So, just as the cinematic audience engages the visual

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Conrad famously wrote in his preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, “My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see.”

<sup>18</sup> Susan Sontag argues that “films are primarily a visual form, yet they are also a subdivision of literature” (10).



images on the screen and the auditory ones paralleling them, the reading audience actively scans the visual words and engages their contents by registering their acoustic images. These two movements of the visual and the auditory interweave and produce the dynamism of cinema and reading. W.J.T. Mitchell argues a case for the multisensory resonance of differing media: “The specificity of media, then, is a much more complex issue than reified sensory labels such as ‘visual’, ‘aural’ and ‘tactile’. It is, rather, a question of specific sensory ratios that are embedded in practice, experience, tradition and technical inventions” (“There” 261). As noted above, visualism would align with distinct senses and elevation of sight, which complements the myopia of ideological containment.

One could conceptualize this cinematic engagement a form of *synchresis* that forges links among visual and auditory stimuli. In Conrad’s work, though, this dynamism that unfolds for the audience is reflected in Marlow’s own tale; *Heart of Darkness* becomes Marlow’s own frustrated attempts to “forge a necessary link” between the visual and auditory. Melissa Free observes that this listening experience allows the “reader-listener” to “register the absence of the elucidation [Marlow] so desire and compels his listeners to anticipate from Kurtz; and, finally, to hear the hollowness of his own claims to knowledge” (2). And Eric Rawson argues that Marlow “uses sound and silence as a means of orienting himself in an alien environment” (43). Listening allows us access to Marlow’s mind, and, furthermore, Marlow’s attachment to Kurtz’s voice reveals his ideological commitment as one that would seek to turn sound into a stable, visual object. Rather than dialogue or an attempt to understand the foreign, Marlow projects his imperial fantasies onto the voice of Kurtz. Just as an audience passively accepts the

cinematic illusion of *synchresis* as the necessary lie of art, Marlow's cinematic narration culminates in his own visualization of Kurtz's voice.

The entire narrative unfolds as a listening experience relayed from Marlow's experiences in Africa, to the unnamed narrator, and then to the reader. Both the visual and the auditory are crucial to the novella's thematic explorations. Additionally, this audiovisual tension underpins how the reader engages the text as well. While literature lacks the moving images of cinema, a similar audiovisual experience unfolds for the listening audience who must forge links between vision and hearing as part of the process of reading and interpreting text. Listening to cinema and literature becomes the attentive orienting of multiple senses. As with *Apocalypse Now*, *Heart of Darkness* requires a form of *synchresis* to be read—the reader listens with the unnamed narrator to Marlow's tale. Marlow's own audiovisual figurations eventually align him with Willard and the filmic Kurtz who search for a cohesive image of the world and in so doing conceive of the world in ideologically limited terms. While Willard desires to de-acousmatize the voice of the cinematic Kurtz, Marlow's own motivations are identified as a loyalty to Kurtz's voice and the imperialist ideals it champions.

This desire to suppress the auditory emerges when Marlow forges links among the visual and auditory as part of his ideological makeup, which is explicated during Marlow's recollection of his boyhood "passion for maps" further characterizes his visual fantasies about the blankness as potential for conquest, and as other European nations color the map, Marlow claims "it had become a place of darkness" (8). This description, then, can be read as Marlow's confession of his scopic relation, his adventurer's gaze focused on the silent maps that picture a world being ordered through violent division,

exploitation, and dehumanization. Marlow's "redeeming" idea relies upon a fantasy, one that visualizes the world by mapping it, stilling life into contained categories. In other words, Marlow's ideology is one of visualism, a mode of perceiving that reduces the world to silent, visual stills. Indeed, the imperial mapping of Africa indicates that dominance of land manifests in the cartographic. Furthermore, it shapes the imperialists themselves, conditioning them to abide in the idea that the world, when figured in the visual, becomes more easily accessible to the gaze and therefore more desirable. While figuring the world as a map does not necessarily inculcate the viewer or necessarily exclude the auditory, Marlow's rapturous descriptions reveal that maps feed into his own ideological cycle of desire that compels him to delineate and control Africa as an extension of his own fantastical projections. Kimberly J. Devlin describes this as Marlow's "cartographical bewitchment" (22). Marlow continuously emphasizes the visual aspects of experience, perhaps as an extension of this dominating gaze, one that ascends to a perspective of dominance and can reduce the complexity of Africa to a series of colored patches on a map. Devlin's and others' critical readings of this "scopic drive" in Conrad aptly address how visual representation provides a sensory basis for a psychological profile of characters, and perhaps authors, who are ideologically mired. This mapping of Africa as part of the colonial project finds a pseudo-medical analog in Marlow's doctor's phrenological examination of his skull (*Heart* 11). Indeed, these mappings of a continent and the subject's skull produce a loose association that is generated by the same scopic drive to infer more than what is seen, that mapping initiates the process of visual mastery—either over a whole continent or over an individual.

Yet, the novella is also replete with the auditory. Melissa Free argues, “Visual attention to *Heart of Darkness* may lay bare the materiality of imperialism, but aural attention to the novella attunes us to the dangers of semantic appropriation. Befogged in darkness, we have failed to perceive the vibrating note of warning that Conrad so audibly struck” (2). This “vibrating note of warning” is attended to by Eric Rawson’s article that pushes the novella’s narrative structure, one based upon listening, toward a psychoanalytical model that examines the Lacanian underpinnings of Marlow’s fantasies of Africa and Kurtz. Moreover, Marlow’s audiovisual treatment of the Western European cities as “whited sepulcher” unifies the visual with stillness, that the cities of Europe are the source of Marlow’s civilization, yet their vitality has been sapped and silenced. As the novella progresses, Marlow’s description of the soundscapes of Africa begin to reveal his contorted, racist representations of Africa and Africans. His listening is not listening at all; rather, Marlow is constantly attempting to calm himself and wrangle the foreignness of the jungle or the voices of the natives as emerging from a hyperabundant foreign terrain—attempting to pacify his mind and align his surroundings into a comprehensible image.

Marlow also begins fetishizing the voice of Kurtz, which becomes Marlow’s source of purpose. The voice becomes the authority of ideology, one that instantiates itself and is directed with monologic focus. At one point, Marlow interrupts his narration and addresses the men on boat: “Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation...” (27). Here, Marlow asks his listeners if they have been able to forge their own visual images of his narration,

suggesting that he expects his listeners to create visual imagery, to coalesce his voice into a visual. The unnamed narrator describes Marlow's silence, and then he describes Marlow: "For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more than a voice" (27). This sublimation into a voice, though, is precisely what drives Marlow's narration. As the narrative progresses on the Congo and Marlow recounts moving closer to Kurtz, Marlow's desire to encounter the voice of Kurtz begins to supersede all other considerations. The attachment to the dream-like voice that has yet to be heard becomes a focal point. Marlow recounts:

'For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with...I flung one shoe overboard and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to—a talk with Kurtz' (47).

Mladen Dolar, in his Lacanian reading of voice, argues that the voice marks a fissure in the subject:

This location—the intersection, the void—turns the voice into something precarious and elusive, an entity which cannot be met in the full sonority of an unambiguous presence, but is not simply a lack either. The moment this voice is taken as something positive and compelling on its own, we enter the realm where obnoxious consequences are quick to follow. In politics it quickly turns into His Master's Voice, supplanting the law. (121)

Marlow and Willard both desire to take this voice as “something positive and compelling on its own.” Moreover, they align this positivity with their will to de-acousmatize this voice within Kurtz. If Marlow’s imperialist subjectivity relies upon a visual, idealized order, then the complementary expression of that order would be the voice as the law. As much as Marlow figures imperialism within a visualist schema, he is also in search of a voice that will uphold colonial ideology. Returning to Chion’s discussion of *synchresis* signifying the question of unity, the novella portrays Marlow as one who is aware of the multisensory tensions of his world but continually trying to cover over these tensions with an ideological crust. Unity is not a question as much as a hallowed assumption carried forth by Marlow’s memory of Kurtz’s voice. Rather than the voice as a signifier of an ethics of the other, it becomes the phenomenal projection of the tyrant, one constantly grasping for sovereignty and calling for perpetual violence.

Also, Marlow’s narration starts merging the senses. When he recounts the meaning of Kurtz’s voice, Marlow says, “I saw it—I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself” (66). This sudden shifting of the senses indicates Marlow’s disorientation as he attempts to wrangle with his experiences in Africa and the confrontation with Kurtz. Once the descriptions of Kurtz’s voice appear, they amplify and continue abstracting until they are then grounded in visual terms. Marlow exclaims, “Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart” (67-8). The move from discourse to voice makes sense as he describes its resonance, but this auditory experience soon evolves into “folds of eloquence,” an image that suggests undulation but also one

traceable by the eye. Finally, as with so many of Marlow's descriptions, it ends with darkness. These sensory descriptions reflect upon Marlow's own confusion, and they also embody his desire to reduce or anchor his experiences and descriptions within an imaginary cartography.

After the death of Kurtz, Marlow recounts, "There was a lamp in there—light—don't you know—and outside it was beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there?" (69). Here, Marlow admits that the body of Kurtz, the "full" encounter with the man, had only ever been the evanescent ligature of voice, one that would inevitably dissolve even as it arrived. He derides the natives for being scared by the boat's siren and the previously mentioned shouts, while he deeply admires the inhuman majesty of Kurtz's voice, but here he begins to admit that the voice acts as the substitute for Kurtz as much as it had announced presence. Marlow, previously intimidated by the Kurtz's voice, now desires to be carried away by Kurtz's voice and the authority it manifests (Erdinast-Vulcan 420). In effect, Marlow's relation to Kurtz's voice becomes the substance of his being: "He has, in fact, assimilated Kurtz's Voice and Word," and, "he has taken on the voice of the other to redeem it through his own" (Erdinast-Vulcan 421). This assimilation, though, suggests that this drive to subservience had always been latent, Marlow's narrative merely providing a prolonged mapping of his own revelation. Kurtz the man, and at times his inhumanly instrumental voice, are mere facets of a much larger ideological edifice, one that Marlow had already constructed for his audience at the beginning of the novella with his "passion for maps." In effect, Marlow has been expressing an anterior belief, not a discovery that he had

made about Africa, Kurtz, or himself. Kurtz and the voice merely provided a catalyst or apparatus by which Marlow could concentrate and project his ideology.

The final pages of *Heart of Darkness* reveal Marlow's commitment to the voice of Kurtz and the ideology which it represents. Marlow confesses, "That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more not his own voice but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal" (Conrad 70). Marlow here establishes his commitment, his credo, of loyalty. Moreover, he here admits that it is not the dynamic, interpersonal voice itself that compels him, but the echo. Perhaps most conspicuous here is that he visualizes listening as a cinematic experience. The echo thrown, or projected, from Marlow's increasingly abstract but visual images, culminating in "soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal." This figuration confirms that Marlow's understanding of auditory phenomena had always relied upon stable, visual anchors. In this sense, Marlow's *synchresis* adopts a cinematic quality in distorting experience or assuming connection where there is none. His ideology becomes the prism through which he refracts the world, dividing the senses and reducing some into the visual. These lines also resonate with Col. Kurtz's lines from *Apocalypse Now* where he explains his "diamond bullet" revelation as, "Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure." These descriptions, though, are not mere poetic inclinations but symptoms of their desire for containing phenomena, and by extension their world through the gaze. This reduction of voice into soul or will and then into diamonds or crystal marks a drive to silence, a privileging of the visual and deathly stillness whose boundaries are marked by ideology. Marlow also waxes rhapsodic about Kurtz's musical affinities, which is paralleled in



*Apocalypse Now* when Kurtz recites poetry and is known as a man of letters. While in conversation with a former associate of Kurtz, Marlow finds out “that Kurtz had been essentially a great musician” (71), and Marlow, in an observation fit for a visualist, admits that he thought Kurtz would have been more of a painter than a musician (72). The former associate continues noting that Kurtz was eloquent enough to have been qualified to make a bid for political positions. This indicates that Kurtz was a highly motivated man, capable of harnessing his intelligence and proclivities for auditory projection into others. Kurtz endures as a (non)visual presence whose auditory haunting shapes Marlow’s experience, becoming “a shadow darker than the shadow of night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence” (73). Here, Marlow makes a similar visualist gesture, one that transforms the voice into crystalline eloquence.

*Heart of Darkness* ends with Marlow praising the echoes of Kurtz’s voice while sitting in the darkness, and *Apocalypse Now* fades out with its disorienting pastiche of images and the echoes of “the horror.” In an obvious homage to the novella, *Apocalypse Now* blurs images of the boat leaving Kurtz’s compound alongside a superimposed Buddha statue, which echoes the novella’s description of Marlow who, “sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (*Heart* 77). The image in both texts offers a withering irony, for both have become static idols of their respective ideologies, attempting to harbor the voice of Kurtz, the sovereign, and by extension partake in that power. In both film and novella, these narrators fetishize the voice and seek to anchor their reality within it. In serving voice itself, they deny the dialogic and intersubjective and fold in upon themselves.

## Chapter 4

### **“By ear, he sd.”: Open Listening with Charles Olson and John Cage**

This chapter expands the dissertation’s temporal frame into the postmodernist works of Charles Olson and John Cage. Both artists signal a continuity between the high modernism of the first half of the twentieth century and the inception of postmodernism: Olson corresponded closely with Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, while Cage was a student of Arnold Schoenberg. Both artists theorize listening as a fundamental aspect of their practice, but they move from representations of listening toward a more radical staging of sound’s role in art. Where the previous chapters have examined how novels and film represent listening within their narratives, this chapter examines how Olson and Cage reconceptualize an audience’s participatory role in art and socio-political dimensions of the self’s formation. The two artists relate dialectically: Olson engaging a more active, “projective” sense of the sound’s speaking voice addressing the audience, while Cage deploys a more passive, Zen-like appreciation of sound’s ipseity. Olson desires the poet’s voice to extend and to inspire others to resist base commercialism, whereas Cage works to undo the role of the composer and allow an audience to appreciate sound without aesthetic expectation. The two artists’ essays will be compared to parse this dialectic, while the analysis of Olson’s poem, “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You” will poetically render Olson’s theory of resonant form.

Though working among the same circles of poets, musicians, and visual artists, Charles Olson and John Cage did not sustain a close or amicable relationship. At Black Mountain College, Olson had participated in one of Cage’s experimental happenings, but

the poet would later mock the composer's use chance operations<sup>19</sup> in "A Toss for John Cage." Later, in his 1954 essay "Against Wisdom as Such," Olson obliquely derides Cage, claiming, "Only sectaries can deal with wisdom as separable. And even they do it by symbols and signs, and in secret. Example, the eight signs of the Book of Changes (I Ching). Or its sticks for coins, to be tossed" (*Complete* 261).<sup>20</sup> For Olson, Cage's sonic experimentalism carried an air of pretense that could only dissipate into irrelevance.<sup>21</sup> If one were to search for musical influences on Olson, other contemporaries such as David Tudor or Pierre Boulez would be the most likely candidates, and scholars such as Michael Jonik and Seth Forrest have detailed those composers' influences on Olson's poetry and poetics.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the mutual respect and open communication that characterizes so many of Olson's influences simply does not exist with Cage. If contempt or outright antipathy characterizes Olson's estimation of Cage, how or why can one discuss influence at all?

Influence, however, often emerges from the unexpected or unbidden, and explicit derision often speaks from an anxiety seeking to create distance despite underlying affinities. Olson and Cage's shared time at Black Mountain College suggests that the two

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<sup>19</sup> Cage would toss coins and correspond them to the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, an ancient Chinese divination book. This method would allow the work to emerge through chance rather than the conscious decisions of the composer.

<sup>20</sup> All subsequent citations of Olson's prose refer to the *Complete Prose* and will be abbreviated as *CP*.

<sup>21</sup> In Olson's letter to Robert Creeley where he praises Pierre Boulez and then comments about the "shit of 'music,' or experiment" (*Correspondence* 111), which implicates Cage's methods.

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Jonik's "Olson's *Derive*, Near-Far Boulez" and Seth Forrest's "'Mu-sick, mu-sick, mu-sick': Charles Olson and the Poetics of Noise" in *Staying Open*, edited by Joshua Hoeyneck. Jonik notes how Ezra Pound's warning about over-regimented rhythm was heeded by Olson who conceptualized listening as part of literary form as moving beyond the limitations of a metronome or poetic conventions (59).

were engaged in the school's ethos of reshaping of artistic creation, reception, and appreciation—all while advancing new forms of self and polity in the process. So, the simple fact of their proximity to such a creative nexus opens possibilities for a quiet or implicit influence on each other. Even their respective arts open possibilities since the relation between poetry and music also sustains underlying sympathies. Though far from homologous, poetry and music require listeners. Even silent reading stages a modified auditory process whereby visual and acoustic images build meaning. In one way or another, writing, voice, music, and sound all engage auditory faculties, and the shaping of these sonic phenomena instigates critical questions of value in aesthetic and socio-political spheres. The paramount importance of open listening, of truly attending to one's environments and discourses, marks where Olson and Cage's values resonate with each other.

So, despite Olson's expressed antipathies for Cage's compositions, their theoretical explorations manifest a closer association than even Olson would admit. Indeed, both artists are motivated to move beyond the mere perception of art toward *how* audiences understand their perceptions. This hyper-awareness of how art can unveil the operations of one's senses, a process known as proprioception,<sup>23</sup> addresses Olson and Cage's desire to instigate audiences to appreciate the physiological bases of aesthetic experience. When one turns to their prose, both Olson and Cage situate listening as a physical operation that manifests in art and resounds throughout social relations. Listening, too often rendered as mere passive reception, calls us to open and critically

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<sup>23</sup> Olson's experimental 1965 essay collection, *Proprioception*, studies the roots of human perception through archaeology and historical linguistics, not his treatment of sound and listening.

assemble sonic phenomena, to attune and project our senses as a process of self-discovery. Therefore, to listen differently means to unsettle the boundaries among arts, ideologies, and commercial structures. Olson and Cage understand listening as active engagement, a function that verges on collaboration with a composition—be it musical or poetic. Cage rethinks sound's ipseity as a reverential opportunity for a listening subject to relax anticipations and appreciate the unfolding of sound as meditative experience. For him, a composition should avoid formulae or the display of virtuosity, opting to produce communal yet differentiated listening experiences through the unique or simple. On the other hand, Olson theorizes that poetry projects the voice of the poet, but this projection elevates listening into a means of understanding one's own physical perception as a mode of understanding self, society, and their reciprocity. Listening opens the subject toward the resonant dimensions of aesthetics and politics, becoming an invitation to critique one's cultural order while exploring the body's active role in constituting those relations. Both pushed to estrange their artforms from inherited tradition, cultivating a deep awareness of how sensory experience had been subsumed by an over-intellectualized and commodified regime of art, one that contains rather than opens potentiality.

By emphasizing the potential of sound in their writing, Olson and Cage advocate dynamic changes to definitions of form, substance, and medium by thinking closely about how listening shapes these aesthetic and socio-political categories. Although meter and rhythm have been long-standing concerns in poetry and music and feature within Olson and Cage's poetics, their essays move beyond technique toward sonic reception and the possible changes that listening can instigate. Indeed, thinking critically about sound and listening has garnered increased attention from a wide range of scholars working in sound

studies. In addition to enriching disciplines or even creating new ones, sound studies marks a critical shift in discourses often limited to vision-based metaphors. Though listening plays such a vital role in everyday experience, we rarely pause to question how auditory perception and production configures many of our conceptual models of human being and social interaction (Cavarero 35). Contrarily but not surprisingly, vision tends to dominate our representations of thought. As addressed earlier in the introduction, Don Ihde argues broadly that a philosophy of sound “begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional double reduction of vision as the main variable and metaphor” (13). Moreover, Adriana Cavarero claims that western discourse generally emerges from a “fundamental gesture that locates the principle of the system of signification, of the signified, in the visual sphere” (35). This “dominant tradition” of visual representation often overlooks the importance of auditory forms of understanding and sometimes undergirds epistemologies or political theories that emphasize containment and stillness rather than fluidity. Jacques Attali attends to the socio-political dimensions of sound, arguing, “More than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies” (6). By linking social values to their sonic formations, one can also trace the conventional distinctions made among sounds, voices, and music to phenomena judged as noise. David Novak observes, “Noise is an essentially relational concept. It can only take on meaning by signifying something else, but it must remain incommensurably different from that thing that we do know and understand” (126). This difference in knowledge and understanding becomes the opening of Olson and Cage’s listening wherein the sonic becomes the mode of transference and transformation. What could be understood as mere noise or everyday

sound becomes an invitation to contemplate our polymorphic relations to self, others, and environment. Therefore, auditory artforms can stage shared experiences that resonate intellectually and bodily in a way that visual artforms cannot and provoke listeners to think differently and openly.

Cage's radically different approach to music composition, indeed his revolutionizing of listening itself, may have resonated with Olson who had already begun developing a physiological understanding of poetry in his seminal 1950 essay "Projective Verse." In turn, Olson's encounters with Cage may have enhanced his conception of poetry and human being as auditory complex, one hearing and projecting its engagements with the world and often wrangling with the commercialism that would commodify art and, more generally, human experience. Plenty of critical works have discussed the tensions between poetry and music. This article will not examine those relations, but it will attend to Olson and Cage's writings and link the two within a critical tradition that aims to advance the auditory dimension as a field of potential that questions aesthetic boundaries and resonates with sensory appreciation, belonging, and critical awareness.

The biographical grounding of this resonance between Charles Olson and John Cage emerges from their shared time at Black Mountain College in the early 1950's. Olson would remain as the school's rector until its closure in 1957, while Cage only taught and performed there for a couple years. The college's meager size created an intimate space of discussion, collaboration, and experimentation among students and faculty alike, and from its earliest days, the college represented an alternative to pedagogical and aesthetic norms, requiring instructors to practice the arts they taught and encouraging participatory learning. Many faculty members advanced modernist

experimentalism, emphasizing fragmentation and often referring to music as influence. While Olson reckoned with Modernism's analogizing of poetry and music, Cage was thinking beyond his teacher Arnold Schoenberg's tonal music composition toward an entirely different mode of composition and audience experience that would challenge how music is conceived, performed, and received.

In 1950, Olson published his seminal "Projective Verse," which advocates a poetics of that attends to syllabics, breath, and listening. This turn to the forceful relations between language and the body escaped both the academic pieties of the ascendant New Critics and even the techniques of many Modernist predecessors. The early 50's was also when Olson and Cage were both working at Black Mountain College: "During the summer of 1952, John Cage was working on Williams Mix. As his first composition made exclusively from meticulously cut and spliced magnetic tape, the work was rooted in collage. Charles Olson's landmark 'Projective Verse' was an assemblage of fragments from his epistolary friendship with poet Robert Creeley" (Molesworth et. al 56). Given the chronology, it seems like Olson could have influenced Cage more than the reverse. Nonetheless, the cross-disciplinary openness of the college encouraged a mixing of forms and ideas. Olson's observation of visual arts, dance, and music at Black Mountain College worked in tandem with the inclination that art could no longer be limited to an object of consumption or confined by strict aesthetic categories or discrete bodily experiences: "Breath, speed, tempo, space: as much as the essay (Projective Verse) delves into the building blocks of poetry, it also perhaps betrays the exposure Olson had to music and dance at Black Mountain" (Molesworth et. al 56). The experience of the



poet and the audience in the techniques of poetic performance became salient aspects of Olson's work and were quickened by his stay at the college along with Cage.

The collaborative nature of Black Mountain College dissolved the boundaries among the arts as well as their traditional sensory associations, i.e., auditory and visual arts were conceptualized as part of a sensory continuum that also included haptic experience. Moreover, many artists began conceptualizing artistic endeavor as a bodily experience that has the potential to involve those who approach it as artist or observer. This blending of art forms plays out in Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1*, a "happening," of which he later said, "I had a vague notion of where they were going to do it. I knew that M.C. Richards and Charles Olson would climb a ladder which was at a particular point. I had less knowledge of what Merce and the dancers would do because they would move around" (Kostelanetz 225). In this interview, Cage observes that his piece sequences music, poetry, and dance as a strange convergence, simultaneously presenting artistic occurrence while instigating critical awareness of how that art is being produced and perceived. Many of the artists developed an aesthetic that broke down between the artist and observer to the point where art becomes a platform of interaction: "Indeed Cage's extension of the haptic into the realm of music shows us how the haptic works to reorganize the senses and expand the body's capacity for proprioception—the unconscious mechanism for perceiving one's body in relation to movement and position" (Molesworth 71). This integration of haptic experience among Black Mountain artists does not privilege one sense over the other. Instead, it rethinks how art can attune a person to the complex relations of those senses. Haptic experience can be instigated by visual treatments of textures, and auditory experience, in fact, emerges through

resonance, or the alternating pulsation of objects that create airwaves. The eardrums themselves are concussed by these sound waves, and therefore the listener is touched by sound. Listening becomes a bodily and psychological function that exceeds accepted limitations. Cage often discussed silence as much as active sound; his collection of essays from which this article selects is titled *Silence*. The experience of auditory art, then, must also think about the limits of how we sense that art and define its limitations. Instead of conceiving of listening as a purely positive function that registers and interprets auditory phenomena, both artists wanted their respective arts to become bodily experiences. Just as Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* blends art forms and how they are perceived, Olson's poetics move away from a silently conceived verbal art restricted to the page to an auditory art that touches the reader through the ear. In "Projective Verse Olson states, "It is my impression that all parts of speech suddenly, in composition by field, are fresh for both sound and percussive use" (*CP* 244). This blending of the sonic and percussive qualities of poetry aligns with Cage's theories that any sound, be it voice or instrument or noise, can move toward an immersive experience that not only refreshes the experience of art, but also creates a reflexive movement within the audience that makes them aware of their own ability to perceive the immediate and the structures that influence those perceptions.

#### I. Cage, sounds themselves, and tuning resistance

John Cage's experimentalism defied conventional, marketable music and art. In a film interview recorded soon before his death in 1992, Cage remarks "the activity of modern music has been to open the eyes and the ears of people to things that they were not aware were beautiful" (Miller). This revelatory aesthetics expands to include noise as

a sensory experience that can recalibrate the listening act, the evaluation of art (be it music or poetry), and our sense of self. Mayumi Miyata, a traditional Japanese shō performer, notes, “[Cage] didn’t want to be a composer, but a listener,” and that he wanted “to point his antennas out to the world” (Miller). This figuration of Cage from composer to listener and from producer to receiver turns our understanding of musical composition on its head. His concept of musical experience does not follow the logic of an individual artist producing work that is received by an audience and then scrutinized; rather, he seeks to open the listener to the ambient influences of an environment’s soundscape and move away from a traditional and increasingly hyper-commodified music that relied upon predictable sequencing of phrases and a hierarchical organization of composer, production, and consumer. The openness of listening effectively becomes a source of resistance to a hyper-commodified aesthetics.

For Cage, a listener must forego anticipating musical structure and, instead, embrace sound’s complex operations, thus imbricating the listener within and leading toward an appreciation of sound itself. The strict teleologies of musical phrases, chord progressions, or even keys dissolve. Audiences should not listen for a composition’s completeness or its relation to musical genre, and a composer should relinquish ideas of virtuosity. Ultimately, individual agency diminishes, communicating a loosened boundary where composition, performance, and listening interact. Furthermore, sounds, through their emergence and decay, mark potentials rather than completed musical intentions, instantiating moments of appreciation for the everyday. One of Cage’s earliest talks offers insight into his balance of open, chance operation and the will of the composer. In “The Future of Music: Credo,” he says, “When we listen to [noise], we find

it fascinating... We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments” (*Silence* 6). Cage enables us to rethink the sound and our subjectivity as a dialectical construct, one that achieves a paradoxical sense of placement and mobility in the act of listening. In this almost naïve regard for the material simplicity of sound, Cage’s works seek to authenticate listening as an embrace of one’s present world while furnishing audiences with a critical aesthetic practice that instigates questioning and revaluing of one’s surroundings.

Almost two decades later and after his stint at Black Mountain College, Cage’s formative experience in the Harvard anechoic chamber leads him in 1957 to recount in “Experimental Music,” “There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot” (*Silence* 8). The immersive quality of listening, for Cage, suggests that the auditory is a perpetual source of inspiration, a fullness of material that reaches into the listener and performs change through its articulations and differences. As noted from “Credo,” sounds become the instruments, and his later prose begins to personify them: “And sounds, when allowed to be themselves, do not require that those who hear them do so unfeelingly. The opposite is what is meant by response ability” (*Silence* 9). Here, the deliberate breaking of “responsibility” into its two component words draws our attention to how responsibility, a foundational ethical concept, has an intimate link to aesthetic being. In other words, our sensory apparatus not only directs our perception; it refines our standards of conduct by moving us through the world. To feel and listen intimately cultivates an open awareness of the beauty of things, in this case sounds, in and of themselves. Ideally, this appreciation could transfer toward an appreciation of

others separated from restrictive artforms too often guided by market values. Even in his prose, Cage uses pauses to push sonic meanings into new directions, instigating us to listen and be differently.

Cage's lectures indicate his deep concern for creating music that would also alter people's minds through challenging music: "Cage was a composer, and if he was to do something useful, he could do it (at least) in the realm of music. In this sense virtually every piece he made after 1950 was intended to further, in one way or another, changes of mind and in society" (Brooks 214). His work at Black Mountain College indicated a movement away from the strict distinguishing of the senses, and his lectures indicate that Cage had a deep social commitment to awaken his listeners and move them beyond the confines of tradition, both in aesthetic as well as socio-political terms. To listen carelessly, for Cage, was tantamount to political passivity, while listening to minimal auditory differences could lead to an imaginative awakening of self and world.

Cage would sometimes make political statements that echoed these sentiments. In a 1972 interview with Hans G. Helms, later published as "Reflections of a Progressive Composer on a Damaged Society," Cage's critical stance on capitalism and commodified music becomes an idiosyncratic social critique. Though interspersed with his admiration for Mao Zedong's sweeping unification of the Chinese people, he aligns Madison Avenue advertising music with Mao's musical and theatrical propaganda efforts ("Reflections" 82). Instead, he claims he would likely prefer the music made by the Chinese peasants in their daily activities over explicit political messages. Furthermore, Cage's advocacy for popular resistance never manifests in violent diatribe, but by the end of the interview he does suggest that music, even on the most private level, can instigate small yet significant

change, noting, “people don’t know how to listen, that they haven’t even thought what music could be or what it could do to them” (“Reflections” 82). In 1988, Cage gave a lecture on anarchism that promoted a dissolution of normal relations as controlled by the market and government; however, Cage’s gentle disposition and Zen-influenced values align him with a far more benign anarchism that idealizes a general awakening, an attunement to social relations that have become too confined. His politics, then, echo his sonic experiments: never authoritarian and reveling in a listening practice that advocates awareness, appreciation, and openness.

## II. Olson, listening, and the poetics of the *polis*

While Cage’s compositions differ substantially from Olson’s poetry, their written works bear several similarities in their commitment to understanding art as a bodily experience; their objective rendering of sound; and their commitment to reshaping listening practices into a more open plane, one that could allow appreciation of everyday sound and often by flouting traditional composition and listening practices. No longer could poetry exist as a separate, precious endeavor cultivated by aesthetes. Just as Cage undid listening expectations in the service of opening audiences to a broader appreciation of sound’s materiality, Olson’s poetics and poetry attended to the mundane functions of breath and listening to advocate wider social change, a shift in consciousness that could revitalize a society dominated by market values. Furthermore, these new methods of composition and listening de-center atomistic subjectivity through poetic listening through, what Mark Byers calls, a “projection beyond the ego toward the world itself” (67). In “Projective Verse,” Olson elevates beyond passive reception toward an activity comparable to the poet’s process of composition. He writes, “Listening for the syllables

must be so constant and so scrupulous, the exaction must be so complete, that the assurance of the ear is purchased at the highest—40 hours a day—price. For from the root out, from all over the place, the syllable comes, the figures of, the dance” (*CP* 241-42). The ironic rendering of the assurance of listening “purchased at the highest...price” offers a critique for his audience: how else can one understand the value of listening unless it is understood through time and money? Nonetheless, Olson valorizes listening as a fundamental aspect of poesis, one that links the syllable to the processes of meaning making and other arts. Indeed, this passage anticipates the synesthetic understanding of poetry and listening that would later be amplified by his explorations among composers and dancers at Black Mountain College.

The value Olson ascribes to listening applies to poets and audiences, but it amplifies outward and further, projecting and establishing a resonant relationship between the activity of the ear and the awareness of social structures. Olson had deep connections to small New England towns. He grew up in Worcester, MA and would settle in Gloucester until his death in 1970. Despite the peripheral status of these places, Olson discerned value in their small boundaries yet complex histories and cultures. His searching for the universal within the particular emerges in *The Maximus Poems* through the eponymous character who meditates on Gloucester’s provincial yet pivotal location on the Atlantic and its inhabitants. Effectively, the boundaries of Gloucester and the Hellenic voice of Maximus situates the fishing town as Olson’s *polis*. Given the paramount importance of place in his poetry, listening develops one’s awareness of the everyday as a metric of one’s place and the vitality of its social structures. To understand the dynamism of one’s *polis*, one must listen openly, and one must listen *despite* the

encroaching commercial values that would displace the vibrant values and traditions of a town. Far from a reactionary closing off from the world, Olson would push for remaining open to understand the complexity of the *polis*—that it is an ongoing composition, a dialogic process among many voices.

As Cage undid the assumptions one brought to the performance and reception of music, Olson approached poetry to recalibrate how one understands form and ego as listening practices. Like Cage’s dissolution of ego, Olson works within an “objectivist aesthetics” that worked “to eliminate the influence of an isolated Cartesian or Kantian subject” and sought to present “the object world as an aesthetic fact” (Need 201). Unlike Cage, Olson does not cede conscious activity to chance operations. While Cage deferred to the *I Ching* to determine a composition’s outcomes, Olson embraced a thoroughgoing focus on the object that would expand his perception and subsequently diminish his subjective interlocution. One could imagine their differences as complementary opposites: Cage’s passive, receptive openness opposed to, but not contradicting, Olson’s active, even aggressive, extensions through sound. In “Human Universe” Olson argues, “that a thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to any other thing, in short, the very character of it which calls our attention to it, which wants us to know more about it, its particularity” (*CP* 158). This object-centered approach to what becomes the material of poetry hearkens to Cage’s listening to sounds themselves as instruments, and it even figures objects as impinging and calling to the poet. Nonetheless, Olson still maintains a more rigid crafting ethos that sustains the curiosity and prying intelligence of an active poet. The poet communicates through line and breath the nature of these objects. Olson’s aesthetics of listening and



speaking, though moving beyond convention and confession, maintains the poet's direct participation in the poem through its expression (Shultis 73).

Olson composed poetry as listening and breathing practice. As such, the sound of poetry is not simply a textual experience where sound is a side-effect; instead, listening to sound is vitally integral and experiential. Olson would also theorize that the poem's reception must also be part of its revelation. Listening, then, becomes the ligature between poet and audience, but it suggests a more bodily, phenomenal experience as Roland Barthes argues in his 1976 essay, "Listening": "Corporeality of speech—the voice is located at the articulation of body and discourse, and it is in this interspace that listening's back-and-forth movement might be made" (252). For Barthes, and Olson, listening's dialectical movement forces a subject to reckon with its exteriority as part of a vocal operation. Subsequently, the subject, either poet or listener, relinquishes an atomistic self and opens toward new dialogical and social potentials: "by deconstructing itself, listening is externalized, it compels the subject to renounce its 'inwardness'" (*CP* 259). As noted by Byers, Olson may have been influenced by Cage's ideas of artistic self-renunciation. Rather than relying on a cultish devotion to tradition or one's image as artist, the movement of listening and projecting becomes a mobile mode of engagement with one's environment and dominant values. would become the basis for Olson's 1950 "Projective Verse" where he ties the composing poet with breathing and listening and claims, "Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of essential use, must, I take it, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings" (*CP* 239). For Olson, his projective verse

calls for the poet “to register both the acquisitions of his ear and the pressures of his breath and to, in turn, address the audience” (*CP* 241).

Furthermore, Olson defines this new practice of composing and listening as a paradigm shift that requires a rethinking of print culture. Writing during the New Critical domination of literary discourse, Olson pushes beyond containment of an object, a mere set of signifiers configured upon a silent page and advocates a practice that will renew poetry as an embodied, listening experience (*CP* 245). In “Projective Verse” Olson claims, “Sound is a dimension he has extended. Language is one of his proudest acts” (*CP* 248). This line arrives near the end of the highly fragmented essay, and it resonates with the famous earlier line that declaims, “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT” (*CP* 240). The figurations of language, sound, and listening move away from old poetic forms that fall into convention and containment; instead, the form must be open yet cohesive enough to be perceived, regulated by breath and listening instead of the stable visual line. In effect, Olson engages the content of poetry as auditory dimensions. Like Cage, Olson situates listening and attention to one’s own breath as deeply intimate and mundane, yet full of potential. That potential exists in sound’s expansive, fluid qualities that can communicate semantic content, as in language, but also sustain its value as sound itself. There are some moments in this volatile essay where his claims do not build a consistent model of form, but the paramount importance of breath and speech for Olson conclusively position listening as one of the poet’s highest forms of poetic engagement.

Olson’s poetry demonstrates the importance of listening and its relation to form in terms of artistic materiality, human subjectivity, and social relations. Both critique the

conception of ego as an atomistic, self-contained entity, though Olson's model of projection still relies on a dialogic structure that implies a relation between separate people. While Olson values the individual, he decried the rise of consumerist society in America, which had begun associating individuality the acquisition of commodities. As noted above, Olson's idea of the poet developed in tandem with his models of subjectivity and politics, manifesting in his *Maximus* poems. In "I, Maximus of Gloucester, To You," Olson unifies his theories of form with listening and its ramifications upon the *polis*.

The second stanza begins mapping a materialist conception of love and form and quickly moves toward a cynical critique of the prevailing values of Gloucester, MA, here to be read as an example of the universal form of the *polis*. The stanza defames a value system based on profit and leaves the definition of love, form, and substance dangling until the third stanza. It should be noted that this criticism of materialist culture does not designate Olson as a romantic idealist. Olson was deeply invested in the details of material culture and embodied experience, and his poetry affirms this reverent materialism, one that attends to the correlations of auditory phenomena through individual and social registers. Olson suggests that listening, a function that oscillates between object and subject introduces these mind-body frictions, simultaneously grounding experience while sustaining the possibility of its transformation. Substance, then, does not inhere within the grossly material or commercial, but in how we negotiate our relations to them. For Olson, and those invested in sound studies, this relation is material yet continually pointing to how it escapes delineated categories, performing the turns that do not restrict value but encourage them to multiply and round out our

understanding by mapping their material bases, i.e., auditory terms situate form as mobile containment that modulates according to spatial and temporal contingencies. In section 3, Olson turns to facts:

3

the underpart is, though stemmed, uncertain  
is, as sex is, as moneys are, facts!  
facts, to be dealt with, as the sea is, the demand  
that they be played by, that they only can be, that they must  
be played by, said he, coldly, the  
ear! (*Maximus* 6)

This stanza juxtaposes, and in some cases confuses, different values. The first two lines are syncopated and suggest doubt while exclaiming that sex and money are “facts,” a strange equivalency between intimate bodily experience and forms of currency. Yet, the final way by which we access them is by playing by ear, a phrase suggesting deep listening and improvisation, a mode of access open to modulation but aware of form. The section continues:

By ear, he sd.

But that which matters, that which insists, that which will last,  
that! o my people, where shall you find it, how, where, where shall you listen  
when all is become billboards, when, all, even silence, is spray-gunned?  
when even our bird, my roofs,  
cannot be heard  
when even you, when sound itself is neoned in? (*Maximus* 6)

The injunction to listen directly contrasts with the base commercialism signified by billboards and neon. Olson names commercialism as a threat to artistic expression and authentic appreciation of one's community. Visual is here exposed as the modes by which commercialism disseminates and dominates the public sphere as an arena of billboards, neon, and their advertised products. Olson's metaphor aptly engages this fallen aesthetic and commercial regime. The last line's splicing of "when even you" and "when sound itself" spatially converges "you" and "sound," loosely tying them to each other. This intimate bond between the two suggests a reciprocal model between the person and sounds. Moreover, the adverb "even" broadens the scope of the human as Olson suggests its impending confines and the closeness with which "sound itself" follows this exploration produces a ligature between "even you"—the most fundamental yet evasive aspects of the person—with the reflexive "sound itself." The billboards become two-dimensional planes that thrust desire upon viewers, while the neon becomes a controlled and enclosed channel of expression, relying upon a binaristic operation to function: on or off, open or closed, advertising or not. Here, Olson unifies his conception of form as an auditory complex, one capable of being sensed and understood by the listener, but one that is modulating and changing with time. In both stanzas, Olson's poetic persona, Maximus, critiques commercial values that have reduced communication into flashy, visual signs. The fallenness of commercial life and the degradation of arts is noted by Horkheimer and Adorno who identify advertising as a "negative principle, a blocking device" (131), and it is precisely this negativity that Olson identifies in commercial values that elevate visual commercialism over authentic art and its political resonance. The socio-political tensions between modes of representation and

communication embody the values of that society. Just as Horkheimer and Adorno characterize commercialism as an impediment, Olson writes, “Spectatorism crowds out participation as the condition of culture” (*CP* 159). Here, he suggests the visual reduction philosophers Idhe and Cavarero identify in western culture’s conceptions of form, human being, and polity. For Olson, listening and attending to breath become the auditory and haptic means by which one engages self and world, a recognition of balance and an affirming ethos that advocates for rejuvenation and authentication through the ear.

### III. Conclusion

John Cage and Charles Olson practiced radically different forms of auditory art. Regardless of Olson’s antipathy for Cage’s experimentalism, both recalibrated aesthetic paradigms and rethought the boundaries of their artforms as deeply intimate, bodily experiences that can rethink our ontologies and values. For both, our sense of being emerges from our attentiveness to sound, and this auditory form of being can in turn shape how we engage the world. Cage sought to reformulate the listening experience to awaken people’s appreciation for sounds themselves. Olson argues that poetry cannot abide as an abstracted verbal set; rather, it must aspire to become a corporeal extension, blurring the boundaries among body, text, and idea. A listener must be drawn into the experience of the poem, into its projections, and then find a way to respond. Furthermore, both artists seemed to advocate a direct, participatory form of government wherein the people and their needs could be addressed and controlled.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it seems that Olson

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<sup>24</sup> Both Olson and Cage referenced the revolutionary politics of Mao Zedong. Olson alludes to Mao in his 1953 poem “The Kingfishers,” and, as noted above, Cage had an affinity for radical change. However, Olson’s commitment to the Democratic Party and Cage’s anarcho-primitivism distance both from Mao’s authoritarianism.

and Cage took listening as a metonymic function that performed the complexities of everyone and each community. The resonant and mobile nature of sound instantiates a paradoxical sensory tension in the listener, one that attends to our most intimate, distinct interiorities while also being externalized and made aware of the richness of the world beyond our bodily perceptions. This dual movement, reflexive and dialogic, allows auditory arts, to awaken these sensibilities that might move one beyond prescribed social strictures by creating imaginary breaks. These auditory sequences perform complex relations of people among each other and in their political compositions since, “Sounds are both discrete and interconnected” (Brooks 221). The willingness to listen openly and without rigid expectation unveils a model of understanding the person and the *polis*. In their awareness of their own experimentalism, they also adopted a rigorous social awareness that critiqued a hegemony that sustained itself through commercialism. Sound’s plastic mobility assists in this change of consciousness, performing the dialogic and creating correspondence. With Olson and Cage, listening can open the subject from a contained entity to one that can appreciate the everyday and perhaps reimage one’s ontology as imbricated within and resonating throughout one’s world. Olson and Cage’s experimentalism, then, seeks an aesthetic openness in service of a socio-political shift, one that no longer cedes control to bureaucracy while advocating full participation and full dialogue within one’s community.

For Olson, language and listening become the provenance of the poet who must attend to these connections, the one who animates language as something living, moving beyond billboard, escaping the neon. A community emerges from intricate, dialectical tensions between particular and universal. These tensions are accessed via auditory

expression, one that the poet taps and refines, elevating the dynamism of the *polis* into a poetic, auditory phenomenon, a community of shared, but never uniform, speech and listening acts. While Olson would often deride Cage's chance operations or experimentations, their experiences at Black Mountain College affirm that experimentation must move beyond academic staleness and strict delineation, and their prose works indicate an uncanny resonance in how they value listening as quotidian yet ripe with potential. Both affirm that listening is of paramount importance, and that if our ideas of form, content, art, indeed human being are of any consequence, then the way we express and listen to those channels of communication become equally important. The auditory instantiates itself as a mobile plane of art and existence, and listening is our mode of access—one enriched by the compositions of Cage and the poetic projections of Olson.



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