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Hearing Cultures

Essays on Sound, Listening,
and Modernity

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But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound, and the Senses

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In the introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, one of the most influential and controversial collections of anthropological writing to have appeared in almost two decades, James Clifford asks an unexpected question: "But what of the ethnographic ear?" (Clifford 1986: 12). Given the context in which it appears, the inquiry about the ear appears to be at odds with the idea—by now enjoying a certain, albeit contested, hegemony within anthropology and the humanities more broadly—that culture is ultimately the result of acts of inscription and that anthropology, because it seeks to decipher the meanings resulting from these inscriptions, is best understood as an act of reading and interpretation. So why bother about the ear?

Clifford's answer seems plausible enough. The impact of critiques of "visualism" advanced by Walter Ong and other scholars of orality on the then emergent interpretive anthropology, he suggests, has made us aware of the need for a "cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances" (1986: 12). In such a poetics, he claims, "the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer's 'voice' pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced."

One knows what has become of this renunciation of the observing eye and distancing rhetoric, and this is not the place for prolonging a debate over the merits of an intended paradigm shift in anthropology that certainly produced more "utterances" but rather few accounts of

actual listening practices. Not that anthropologists have given short shrift to the body and sensory perception. But few are those who have actually approached the senses as more than just another "text" to be read. Among the notable exceptions are David Howes (2003), Nadia Seremetakis (1994), Michael Taussig (1993), and Paul Stoller (1989).¹ In the work of the last two authors, in particular, one gains a clearer sense of the limitations and problems of the "textual" paradigm and of the ways in which attention to the senses might not only yield new and richer kinds of ethnographic data but, perhaps more importantly, also force us to rethink a broad range of theoretical and methodological issues. Thus, Stoller's long experience with Songhay cultural practice has led him to formulate the outlines of what he calls a "sensuous scholarship." Similarly, Taussig's work on the Cuna and their entanglement with the forces of Western domination prompted him to question the estranging and authoritarian uses of mimetic technologies and to mobilize mimesis for a more reflexive, mutually empowering kind of representation. The result is a kind of scholarship in which images and sounds—ours and theirs—adhere more to the skin of things and thereby erode the alterity on which so many of our disciplinary practices rest.

The scarcity of ethnographic accounts of sensory perception stands in marked contrast to a flurry of recent publications from other disciplines bearing on topics as diverse as the role of auscultation, sound in film, and twentieth-century avant-garde verbal arts—to name just a few examples of work by authors not represented in this volume and published since 2000 (Kassabian 2001; Meyer-Kalkus 2000; Sterne 2003). Even in ethnomusicology and musicology—two disciplines that might lay superior claim to sound and auditory perception as their very birthright—a new thinking seems to be taking hold, one that is increasingly drawing attention away from readings—of scores or meanings that are the result of acts of inscription—and focusing it on the materiality of musical communication, issues of sensuality, and the like. But because important work has recently appeared in these two fields (Austern 2002; Baumann and Fujie 1999; Feld 1996; Wegman 1998a), it seemed reasonable in this book to limit the number of essays devoted to music and instead to focus primarily on extramusical sound.

In light of this resurgence of the ear—musically and otherwise inclined—the present collection can offer only a small cross-section of the wide range of topics, methodologies, technologies, historical periods, and geographic areas awaiting further study. Nevertheless, these essays might contribute to an anthropology of the senses in a variety of ways. Most importantly, perhaps, they bring an interdisciplinary

perspective to the debates in which anthropologists interested in overcoming the hegemony of textual analogies have been engaged. Thus, although some of the contributors are anthropologists, for the most part they represent other disciplines, including history, communications studies, literary studies, sociology, and the history of science. Despite this variety of backgrounds, all the authors share a recognition of the need for the cultural and historical contextualization of auditory perception. Generalities, as one often encounters them in the literature on the senses (see Ackerman 1990), have no place in this project of charting the cultural production of sensory perception. Hearing—be it the views of eighteenth-century European medics on sound and healing that Penelope Gouk writes about or the place of the ear within the broader framework of a theory of cross-cultural communication as proposed by Paul Carter—is seen to be culturally variable and subject to the prevailing ideologies and power relations of a given place at a given time.

But the essays in this collection do not simply alert us to the significance of one of the less studied senses or open up uncharted ethnographic terrain. Implied in the title *Hearing Cultures* is the notion that our quest for the ethnographic ear requires more than a metaphorical understanding of ethnography as being in need of more dialogue, more sensitized ears, or a third ear. "Hearing culture" suggests that it is possible to conceptualize new ways of knowing a culture and of gaining a deepened understanding of how the members of a society know each other. It is not only by accumulating a body of interrelated texts, signifiers, and symbols that we get a sense of the relationships and tensions making up a society. The ways in which people relate to each other through the sense of hearing also provide important insights into a wide range of issues confronting societies around the world as they grapple with the massive changes wrought by modernization, technologization, and globalization. In what follows, I outline some of these issues—in an order that does not always follow the sequence of the chapters—beginning with what is arguably the most fundamental: the close and contested relationship between vision and hearing in the West and the significance of this relationship for struggles over the course and direction of modernization in the postcolonial world.

Vision—A Modern Sense?

To assert that modernity is essentially a visual age (Levin 1993) or that bourgeois society rests on technologies of seeing, observation, and surveillance (Lowe 1982) is no longer of much heuristic value. By the

same token, the parallel notion that colonial and postcolonial power relations hinge fundamentally on the "gaze," even though it helped spur the questioning of Western monopolies over knowledge and representation, appears to have generated only more texts and more images. The number of accounts detailing how the West's *sounds* are cast back on it is still shockingly small. Even more striking is the absence from current debates of Third World scholars interested in auditory perception.²

Despite this, it seems problematic to make the reverse proposition that, if we are to explore new possibilities for challenging Western hegemony, it will become necessary to map an alternative economy of the senses in which prominence perforce must be given to the neglected "second sense." Nearly all the contributors to this volume reject such a simplistic perspective. They are skeptical of a countermonopoly of the ear, not only because it makes scientific sense to conceive of the senses as an integrated and flexible network but also, and more importantly, because arguments over the hierarchy of the senses are always also arguments over cultural and political agendas. Thus, when Paul Zumthor in his *Oral Poetry* (1990) hopes for a voice that "is soon in a state to pierce the opacity around us that we take for reality" and praises Africans' verbal prowess, one is tempted to welcome this turn toward the ethnographic ear. Yet if the same author in the same breath sees a "candle that is lit somewhere"—in front of the altar of the spoken word?—we ought to examine this strange juncture of piety and primeval origins more carefully.

Similarly, one wonders about the implications of Marshall McLuhan's early call for a sensory reawakening—for what he called the "man of total awareness"—especially because it appears to have sprung from the desire to stem the return of the twentieth-century subject to what he calls "the Africa within." Do the two projects share the same basic philosophical and political underpinnings? Might it be possible that such efforts at redeeming the ear—whether from within Africa or against it—conceal a deeper-seated conservative impulse, a restorative project, metaphorically and literally Catholic? Are we dealing in these and other antiocular discourses, such as those put forward by McLuhan's fellow antivisual critic and reborn Catholic Paul Virilio, with rather belated attempts at restoring to a new Rome the supreme aural and oral authority to command and to judge? What really is meant by this new center with the presumably more benign, "evangelical" power to spread, *urbi et orbi*, the good news of more wholesome, more communicative times ahead?

Clearly, postcolonial and poststructuralist critiques of modernity at times appear to be couched in nostalgic terms, wishing for the living voice, the cry, and sonic guerilla tactics. Which is why it is crucial to emphasize that it is not enough to denounce vision and replace it with a new sensibility based on the ear. The rejection of a simplistic dichotomy between the eye as the quintessential modern sensory organ and hearing as some kind of pre- or antimodern mode of perception must be replaced by a more nuanced approach like the one adopted in the contributions to this volume. The essays gathered here go a long way toward allowing the ear "an unromanticized place alongside the eye" (Schmidt 2000: 36). Like Steven Connor in his chapter, the other contributors collectively caution against using hearing as a way of "softening the rigor mortis of a social body that we imagine has gone deaf and dumb, blind and numb." The task that the authors set themselves, then, is not to ascertain how modern auditory practices might differ from traditional ones. Rather, they ask how listening has come to play a role in the way people in modernizing societies around the globe deal with themselves as subjects in embodied, sensory, and especially auditory ways. Hearing and associated sonic practices, instead of being sequestered in their own domain, separate from the other senses and defined as some kind of historical residue, for the most part are seen to have worked in complicity with the panopticon, perspectivism, commodity aesthetics, and all the other key visual practices of the modern era we now know so much about.

If the auditory is deeply caught up in the modern project—rather than standing apart from it—and if therefore the ear joins the eye in consolidating the fragile modern self, we must nevertheless also ask the reverse question: How are these modern identities constantly being sonically haunted and—perhaps confirming McLuhan's greatest fear—troubled by a return of the repressed? What do we really know about vocal knowledges that are being forced underground, silenced, or ridiculed as superstitious? Much of recent efforts to retrieve such voices has concentrated on female forms of vocality, primarily in the realm of cinema and opera (Dunn and Jones 1994; Lawrence 1991; Smart 2000), but anthropologists have yet to seriously investigate how other acoustic practices are being drawn into the maelstrom of globalization and modernization and how they often escape, resist, or succumb to the dictates of Western visualism.

Janis Nuckolls's work on sound symbolism in this volume is a pioneering attempt to show how a specific form of sound communication produces "relational knowledge," to use Michel Serres's apt phrase,

and how this type of knowledge is being marginalized as a result of modernization. Through their language, Quechua-speaking Runa living in the upper Amazonian region of Ecuador articulate a "sonically driven disposition" toward what Nuckolls calls "sound alignment." By this she means that Runa model natural processes with sound by imitating the resonant and rhythmic properties of experiential phenomena. By doing so, they foreground the animacy they share with such processes. The chief linguistic vehicles for such sound alignments are ideophones, a broad range of signifiers that do not refer to a signified but are instead related to it by simulation and semblance. These expressions are integral to a style of communication that is embedded in and provides cohesion for social and cultural practices different from those of the industrialized West. They put subjects among things, or, as Nuckolls phrases the matter, they enable Runa to "express a sentiment of common animateness."

An example that is also familiar from other contexts—such as the Renaissance views of sound and magic examined in Gouk's chapter—is a class of Runa myths about genesis. In these narratives, themes of analogy, similarity, and interrelatedness between earthly and celestial realms loom large. Similarly, sound not only figured prominently in the thinking of Renaissance theorists and early modern Englishmen but was the chief medium for enacting transitions from one realm to another.

Ideophones work in many different ways, of course, not all of which Nuckolls discusses. The ones she does examine, however, provide fascinating illustrations of the intertwining of orality and visuality in Runa culture and of how Runa society differs from what Nuckolls calls "technologically complex societies." Ideophones in Runa culture "shoulder a great deal of communicative responsibility," in that they perform many of the functions that would be allocated to visual modes of expression in the West. Their polysemiotic status allows Runa to mobilize ideophonic speech to communicate a wide range of multisensory experiences. Rather than simply restating the semantic content of a verb, for instance—something Westerners would call redundancy—ideophones add a gestural component to relatively soundless phenomena.

This dense social embedding of ideophones comes under immense pressure, however, in the wake of missionization and the intrusion of modern mass media into the fabric of Runa social life, leading to a diminished use of ideophonic speech among young, politically active, and economically ambitious Runa.

Sound, Techniques of the Body, and Technology

Nuckolls's chapter is not the only one in which issues of technological mediation of sound production and auditory perception loom large. The invention of audio technologies has always been met with a good deal of cultural pessimism, which still resonates in current debates over music, technology, global culture, and commoditization. Working toward a more nuanced assessment of the effects of modern technology on sound and auditory perception, several of the contributors interrogate from an ethnographically informed perspective commonly held assumptions about modernity and ask how Western intellectual anxieties about sound technologies play themselves out in non-Western cultural contexts.

In the past, it is true, the role of acoustic technology in the making of modern sensibilities has attracted sustained scholarly attention, with "schizophonia"—Murray Schafer's (1977) term for the separation of sound from its source—being considered the most distinguishing (and at the same time most enthralling and angst-ridden) feature of the modern world's soundscape. But although the vast literature on the telephone, phonograph, radio, and electronic media might lend credence to claims of modernity's being an auditory rather than a visual era, the real problem seems to lie in the technological determinism, scientism, or cultural pessimism in which discussions of audio technologies have bogged us down for so long.

The essays in this book that directly address questions of technological mediation—those by Michael Bull, Steven Connor, and Emily Thompson—in many ways take us beyond these paradigms by locating hitherto overtheorized practices of media consumption in specific cultural settings. For instance, on the basis of extensive interviews with users of portable radios and cassette or compact disc players (Walkmans), Michael Bull seeks to understand the complex nature of proximity, distance, and mobility in media consumption, scrutinizing the common assertion that Walkman users can be seen as postmodern flaneurs. At first sight, Bull's argument resembles that of the Frankfurt-school theorist Walter Benjamin. Bull begins his investigation in the familiar and intertwined terrain of myth and modernity: the story of Odysseus and the Sirens (drawn from Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's interpretation of that myth), a reading of Werner Herzog's film *Fitzcarraldo*, and Sigfried Kracauer's remarks on radio listening in the 1920s. But he gives these "texts" an unexpected twist. They can be understood, he suggests, as part of the cultural "prehistory" of personal

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stereos and, more broadly, as part of the Western project of the appropriation and control of space, place, and the "other" by sonic means.

One space that has come increasingly under pressure in the twentieth century is the "home." Bull recognizes that communication technologies have played an important part in the symbolic construction of "home," but unlike other commentators, he sees these private spaces—and the subjects who inhabit them—as fraught with ambiguity. Thus, Raymond Williams's notion of "mobile privatization" posits an experiencing subject unreflectively appropriating, through acts of private consumption, everything that stands before it. What remains elusive in this model of media-generated distance is the way feelings of omnipotence are just the flip side of relations of dependency. Conversely, the sonic mediation of proximity—defined by Bull as "mediated presence that shrinks space into something manageable and habitable"—in the past has been inadequately conceptualized. Echoing Adorno's notion of "we-ness," he argues that it is hearing, more than any other sense, that appears to perform a "utopian" function in the desire for the proximity and connectedness that is sorely lacking in capitalist society.

Much of this dynamic appears to be prefigured in myth. As Bull characterizes the Siren episode in the story of Odysseus: "As Odysseus listens, tied safely to the mast of his ship, the sirens' song transforms the distance between his ship and the rocks from which they sing. Their song colonizes him, and yet he uses this experience to fulfill his own desire for knowledge. . . . Socially speaking, Odysseus is in his very own soundworld." Similarly, in the more recent, industrial past, radio users have transcended geographical space by communing not with those next to them but with the "distant" voices transmitted though the ether. Herzog's Fitzcarraldo, for his part, aestheticizes the Amazon jungle by blasting Caruso from his phonograph into the forest.

Such historical continuities between gramophone, radio, and Walkman and the way they are embedded in or, in Fitzcarraldo's case, originate from the ecology of urban life have been remarked upon often. Echoing Benjamin, Bull acknowledges that Walkman users share with the flaneur the desire to aestheticize the alienating urban space by "colonizing" it sonically, but at the same time he is aware that Walkman listeners get "more out of the environment, not by interacting with it, but precisely by not interacting with it." Bull reaches this conclusion on the basis of extensive interviews with Walkman users—definitely a novelty in the otherwise highly speculative domain of cultural studies.

Other essays offer a different kind of thinking about sound and technology in which it is not technology that makes music more inhuman but rather music that rubs off on technology in unexpected ways, until technology itself becomes a little more like sound or even music. Thus, Steven Connor's wide-ranging reflections on intersensory perception in the broader dialectics of (Western) culture and (Western) bodies—and the growing sense of unease with the dominance of spectacular modes of consumption and the perceived sensory impoverishment and downright anesthesia within this dialectic—could be read as an attempt to map an unusual landscape of flesh and metal, the human and the inhuman, anatomy and technology. Exploring the linkages between hearing and touch, Connor recovers interconnections that for Western moderns have largely become unconscious but that were much more present to people in previous phases of European history—and, to a certain extent, have always been to some other cultures as well. As the chapters by Bruce Smith and Penelope Gouk also illustrate, early modern Western subjects conceived of the place of the senses within the larger framework of the human body in more connected, networked terms. Little wonder, then, that sounds not only possessed a strange sort of agency of their own but also seemed to form a different kind of aggregate. As they course through the cosmos and the body, sounds maintain a tactile relationship with their source, an "umbilical continuity," as Connor calls it.

Much of this sonic tactility is still embedded in modern audio technology. Key technologies such as the telephone do not so much insert themselves as quasi-neutral interceptors between the perceiving subject and its object but are deeply imbricated within the subject's very fibers. (Another example Connor discusses in this respect is the microphone and the peculiar eroticism it occasions.) Our discourses and popular practices often register this osmosis with a lingering sense of eeriness, a mixture of fear and fascination. Instead of the presumed rationality of such technologies, which is founded on the belief that the isolation and manipulation of each individual sense somehow naturally corresponds to the social compartmentalization in industrial capitalism, there are seemingly unruly intersections between the sense of hearing and a motley array of skin textures, body fluids, and body organs. The juxtaposition of the rational, the disembodied, and the fleshy, organic aspects of audio technology is the reason we attribute a whole string of almost magical effects to the telephone, for instance. For, as Connor points out, despite the telephone's reliance upon the new, clean, dry power of electricity, its tactile nature made it a moist

and dirty medium, and thus we still associate it with sexuality and disease. At the same time, such technologies generate an almost utopian desire and fear of the unified body, subverting the very rationality of a subject thus constituted. There appears not to have materialized, then, even under conditions of modern media of mass communication such as the telephone and the gramophone, the kind of epistemic break Michel Foucault famously saw as occurring in the early seventeenth century, in which “the eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear” (Foucault 1994: 43). Rather, from the angle of magically condensed and commingled body parts adopted by Connor, one might rephrase Foucault by saying, “Teeth are for eating, but not for eating only.”

Another fascinating facet of the hearing-touch linkage explored in Connor’s chapter is the often-made association—presumably going back to Aristotle—of hearing with passivity and affect. Although this was certainly a powerful trope, which over the centuries served a variety of political and cultural projects, from Augustinian piety to Romanticism, Connor astutely sees hearing as operating on both sides of the active-passive, productive-receptive dichotomy. “The one who barks a demand or screams an insult,” says Connor, “is using sound as a weapon to effect his will, but the means whereby this is effected is through an assault on sound itself.” In this, of course, sound is imagined in the same two-sided way as skin: as both that which touches and that which is touched; as both a medium through which we feel and something that is itself subject to touching and assault.

As the preceding discussion shows, it would be naïve to assume that projects such as those represented by the essays in this volume can in any way bypass technology. But auditizing reason without othering it, as Steven Connor calls it in another context (1997: 162), also means that a theory of modern sound technologies as media for modern self-fashioning of necessity will have to illuminate how such “rational” and “primitive” forms of listening are situated in and contingent upon the mirrored and fluctuating power relationships between the metropolis and the colonial frontier, how an acoustic imaginary is never just the product of only one place and time. A good example of this is R. Anderson Sutton’s pioneering study of the soundscape of Indonesia (Sutton 1996), in which he argues that inferior or malfunctioning Western sound technology does not automatically lead to a deterioration of “Third World” musical practices. Rather, overmodulation and distortion may be a premeditated effect meant to reinforce traditional aesthetic norms. All it takes from there is to ask—perhaps a little less

naïvely trusting the “native” capacity for almost naturally upholding difference—how such auditory hijacking techniques might not also mimic Western sound technology at higher decibel levels, as it were, thereby wresting from it some of the power that so much of our media and loudspeakers are all about.

The Sonic Contestation of Identity

The global impact of sound technology and the way in which it became a site for the contestation of cultural meaning attached to sound is also the focus of Emily Thompson's essay. Thompson examines the practices and universalist ideologies of early Hollywood sound engineers, who perceived themselves to be on a technological mission, trying to get the world “in sync” with modern America through synchronous sound technology. By wiring the world for sound, 1920s sound engineers believed that they were installing a conduit to modernization, as Thompson calls it, creating a universal ecumene of viewers/listeners who would enthusiastically abandon their heritage and traditions in favor of some new form of global citizenship centered on uniformity of taste and, above all, appreciation of technological progress.

But early film sound technology also left a complicated legacy in its wake. Through its association with progress and rationality and by constructing (in theory at least) a citizenry of technical experts and technically savvy consumers of audio-visual technologies, the “talkie” played a role in shaping notions of governance far more effective than the imposition of Western standards through discursive reasoning.³ But as Thompson succinctly illustrates, in many places the same technology also became one of the principle means by which this very form of colonial governance was contested.

Charles Hirschkind advances a parallel argument in his chapter. By attending to seemingly marginal cultural phenomena such as regimes of aural sensibility and specific forms of “ethical” listening, Hirschkind proposes to arrive at a better understanding of the complex and often contradictory dynamic of the modern public sphere and new notions of agency, authority, and responsibility in Third World countries. As key components of Islamic practice in Egypt, sermons have undergone significant changes as a result of two major forces shaping modern Egypt: the ideology and structures of the nation-state and mass media. Yet contrary to the assumptions underlying nationalist politics and many reformist and modernization agendas, older practices, languages, and techniques of ethical listening persist that often go against the grain

of nationalist ideology and at other times overlap with the modern state's attempts to construct a modern public sphere. Instead of producing a citizenry of willing listeners ever attuned to the codes and messages emanating from the state, Egypt's political, cultural, and religious landscape is witnessing the tenacious survival of what Hirschkind calls the "embodied listener."

Listening in Islamic dogma has played a different role from listening in the Christian tradition, and these differences are crucial for an understanding of the current debate over pious listening in the modern nation-state. For Muslim theologians and philosophers, the act of listening takes precedence over oration and rhetorical skill, because the beauty and perfection of the divine message—the Qur'an—do not require persuasion. If this message falls on deaf ears, it is because sinful acts have corrupted the Muslim's heart. In other words, correct hearing is not submission to a convincing speaker but a more active disposition required to open human hearts to God's word.

With the rise of Egyptian nationalism in the late nineteenth century, and as a result of the new nation-state's attempt to align religion more closely with the secular-liberal and technocratic discourses central to the state's legitimacy, the religious sermon became redefined as an instrument of state propaganda. Henceforth, such sermons were to imbue Muslim listeners with modern virtues of discipline, individual initiative, cooperation, and obedience to state authority. In this way, the two sides in the preacher-audience equation changed positions. Now the *khatib*, or preacher, assumed a more active role while the audience was stripped of its agency.

Yet as the state increasingly failed to meet the expectations engendered by its own rhetoric, a variety of Islamist counterforces and their dissatisfied constituencies appropriated sermons as a key medium for contestation. Ironically, the models for this counterhegemonic role of listening lay in the realm of nationalist politics and popular culture. Radio broadcasts of Gamel Abd al-Nasser's speeches and weekly concerts by the singer Umm Kulthum provided Egyptian audiences with a lasting legacy of vocal prowess and an ideal template for experiencing aural pleasure and cathartic release. But, says Hirschkind, because the successors of neither Nasser nor Umm Kulthum could match their popular impact, hearing and the human voice were rapidly recuperated by an opposition movement grounded in Islamic institutions.

There is also something deeper at stake in the resurgence of pious listening. The debate over the role of sermons and ethical listening in the modern Egyptian nation-state pits against each other two contrasting

ways of understanding agency and authority. In the first, more traditionalist position, the sonic components of the corpus of sacred and liturgical texts take precedence over their meaning. The opposing—more secular, as it is—view posits that a contemporary reading of the Qur'an "must take as its goal the uncovering of symbolic meanings through an interpretive approach founded upon the same notions of language, history, and context that are applied to contemporary literary texts."

Reenchantment in Sobering Times

Clearly, then, sound, listening practices, and various forms of audio technology have massively intervened in processes of modernization, often complicating simplistic notions of modern selfhood in surprising ways. Instead of just positing a modern sonic self, the essays by Connor, Thompson, Hirschkind, and others sketch the outlines of a somewhat more dialectical process, insecurely poised between the modern and the "primitive," between the rational and the affective, the discursive and the embodied. The tenacity of culture to shape and sometimes even revert the trajectories of modernization that we see at work among Egyptian listeners of religious sermons is of course not something that is embedded in sound or auditory perception alone. Similar processes have been observed in the appropriation and subsequent subversion of Western visual technologies and modes of consumption (e.g., Poole 1997). Thus, hearing and vision might in fact both partake in a vastly reconfigured sensory order in which demands for rational, focused, and goal-oriented forms of apperception are dialectically juxtaposed with allegedly irrational and yet more authentic modes. Following Jonathan Crary's latest work (1999), for instance, we might ask what the auditory parallels are, if any, of a situation in which individuals increasingly have to adjust their perception in paradoxical ways—a situation that demands attentive behavior while at the same time stimulating a more "regressive," distracted, trancelike state. Similarly, what do we make of the strange continuities between supposedly "archaic" and "occult" forms of knowledge and modern constructions of scientific method or modernist understandings of art?

Both of these questions are addressed in Penelope Gouk's and Douglas Kahn's essays. Comparing Renaissance notions of music's effects on the soul with eighteenth-century medical uses of music, Gouk finds a number of unusual linkages between cosmology, music, and the production of knowledge and the ways in which they are socially

mediated. This is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that until about 1800, Europe's enlightened elites saw nothing mysterious in music's supposed potential for curing sick bodies. As Gouk puts it: "Contrary to popular belief that the soul ceased to be important to science after Descartes, medical theorists continued to invoke this entity as a necessary part of understanding the body's workings into the eighteenth century and beyond."

But for Gouk these continuities are far from given. Rather, they were embedded in a specific aural environment that shaped people's inner sense of themselves as well as their relationship to the outer world. Thus, the concept of music's emotional powers, although widespread during antiquity, reemerged only during the late seventeenth century and, according to Gouk, gave rise to a soundscape that eighteenth-century doctors could draw on in explaining music's effects on the human body. At the same time, this soundscape was also constitutive of physiological models, in turn naturalizing as modern, objective, and apparently culturally neutral representations of music and human nature that in reality were the result of specific historical conjunctures. Thus, the flurry of works appearing in the early eighteenth century on medical uses of music—titles such as Richard Browne's *Medicina Musica, or a Mechanical Essay on the Effects of Singing, Musick and Dancing* (1729)—purported to be articulations of scientific truth, because they claimed the effects of music on the body's interior to be explainable in the terms of Newtonian physics.

By adding music to the mix and by extending her earlier work on the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, Gouk enriches our understanding of the deeply fraught period of Western history we call the Enlightenment. The mid-eighteenth-century cultural environment she describes and traces back to Renaissance pursuits is not only generally more diffuse than conventional occularcentric interpretations of the Enlightenment suggest, but music itself, in its articulation with science and medicine, was just one element in a much larger landscape in which sentiment and scientific discovery were consciously fused (Riskin 2002).

Douglas Kahn, in his chapter, brings the story up to the early part of the twentieth century. He is interested in the music of Dane Rudhyar, a relatively forgotten composer of twentieth-century modernism, and its linkages to Eastern forms of spirituality. Rudhyar's peculiar brand of exoticism sprang from a variety of sources and was an attempt to respond to a wide range of pressures under which turn-of-the-twentieth-century Western society and culture had fallen. Foremost among

Rudhyar's intellectual sources was theosophism, with its attempt to reconcile science and religion in times of all-out disenchantment. As for the pressures, advances in acoustical research, musical acoustics, and audiophonic and musical technologies—and rampant commercialization, one might add—were beginning to threaten the very metaphysical foundations of absolute music that avant-garde composers, with few exceptions, sought vigorously to defend. In most cases, it appears, this attempt involved a radical formalism that survived even where the idea of form and of the work of art itself came to be demolished. But there is also ample evidence suggesting that encounters with non-Western musics, while often tearing at the fabric of Western functional harmony, were in reality achieving what Edward Said (1993) has called a "new inclusiveness," providing a sense of closure and revitalization to otherwise exhausted forms. What has been less appreciated in this overall picture is the discourses and compositional practices centering on sound and its physical materiality coming out of a variety of occultist and esoteric movements current in early-twentieth-century Europe and existing alongside—and sometimes against—an aesthetics more narrowly focused on musical sound.

Rudhyar's philosophy, as Kahn makes clear, hinged on a fundamental distinction between the "note" and something Rudhyar called the "Single Tone." The former term denoted what he saw as being at the core of the "discontinued" music of the West: its scales, harmonic progressions, and abrupt changes. As for the latter concept, Rudhyar ostensibly borrowed it from the East—or rather, what he took to be the essence of Asian music. Meaning in Asian music, he believed, traditionally resided within one single tone and not, as in the West, in the relations between tones that are in principle interchangeable because of the emphasis on polyphony and equal temperament.

Paradoxically, though, and through a series of convoluted arguments, Rudhyar equated the Single Tone with the fundamental in a series of harmonics, a move that strongly resonates with Rameau and his theory of the *corps sonore*. But it also ties in closely with the fervent debates of the 1920s over the rational foundations and hence the legitimacy of atonal music. (Even Arnold Schoenberg referred to the series of harmonics, claiming that listeners would eventually become accustomed to the higher partials as the basis for his more dissonant strains.) The result of this mapping of the notion of the Single Tone onto the series of harmonics is a strange conundrum. What was initially thought of as a bulwark against Western musical relationality "becomes a conduit through which [such relationality] is asserted with renewed vigor,

preserving the harmonic basis of Western art music, returning it to an intrinsic spirituality. What was at first rationalized through an implicit 'Eastern' critique of the contemporary 'West' becomes a means through which 'the West' is fortified."

Embodied Knowledge and the Methodology of Sound Research

How, then, does all this translate into viable empirical method? What would an ethnographic ear be like, and what would it hear? At the risk of veering toward some sort of neo-Keplerian belief in universal harmony, I elaborate here briefly on an age-old idea: the idea of the "frozen" speech. This was a common metaphor in the European Middle Ages—with deep roots in antiquity—that organized conceptions of the relationship between speech and text around such opposites as fluid and frozen, liquid and crystal, and soft and hard. The era abounded in fables in which words that had been uttered at one time and then frozen were being thawed out and thus made comprehensible long after their producers had departed from the scene. Although clearly already the product of literacy, the metaphor of the frozen speech perhaps quite unintentionally raises the possibility that sounds might, if not represent life, have a life. What this idea might induce us to reconsider is the impoverishing effect the reification of sound has since had on our ways of thinking about sound. It might behoove us to think about it as an ongoing, free-wheeling flow rather than a finite object—as a reverberation in the "wild blue yonder," to use Smith's evocative image, rather than a score, a record, a page.

In more concrete terms, are there ways of documenting, analyzing, and interpreting sounds as they arise, fade away, and rebound like echoes in a canyon? Are all sounds, once they become encapsulated in some mechanical form, really just strings of *0s* and *1s*, grooves, traces? What about print-through—that strange phenomenon of the reel-to-reel era when one could hear a taped sound several seconds before the tape segment it was on had passed the recording heads—a thawing before the freezing, as it were? What life cycles can a sound go through? Does it have a biography? What role does the body play as a storage device for sounds? Again, literary theorists, historians, and art historians can teach us a great deal about the sometimes messy relationship between sound and image in a variety of ages and cultures. To the medievalist Horst Wenzel (1995), for instance, we owe a radical revision of the so-called oral Middle Ages in which hearing and seeing were

inseparably linked elements of sensory perception, bound together in and through the human body. Scholars of early modern Europe, in particular, have been unrelenting in reexamining the divide between vision and hearing, orality and literacy, that informed scholarship until the 1960s and is associated overwhelmingly with the work of Marshall McLuhan. It is now becoming increasingly clear not only that the boundaries between the spoken and written word were much more fluid than McLuhan imagined but also that they were blurred by a host of factors such as class position, ethnicity, and geographic location.

Some of these issues are the focus of Bruce Smith's chapter. Expanding on an old medieval notion that sounds never fade away but instead reverberate endlessly through space, he analyzes the role of what he calls an acoustical archaeology of early modern England in "un-airing" sounds of the past by means of a careful extrapolation of sounds from a variety of textual genres and practices popular during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Printed play scripts are one such genre, broadside ballads another. Printed broadside ballads were composed, performed, enjoyed, and remembered, but upon closer examination, it turns out, these written records reveal a "sense of aural immediacy." They carry what Smith calls the "bodily force" of the spoken word. Just as Renaissance thinkers saw a world made of contiguities, sympathies, and antipathies, there existed until well into the seventeenth century a palpable connection between written words and the things they signified. Renaissance culture and even the classical age had not yet developed a full theory of representation in the sense that Michel Foucault ascribed to the term. Save a few exceptions influenced by Cartesian thought, signification in many domains of everyday culture—in either written or oral form—did not yet involve the representation of unrelated things in an act of mediation guaranteed by nothing but an autonomous, knowing subject. Consequently, Smith argues, writing functioned more like an index, implying bodily experience rather than signifying it.

Of course all these sonic microworlds did not exist in a vacuum. They were part of a broader soundscape structured, roughly, along three axes: the country, the court, and the city. The countryside, for instance, differed from the court not only in that it contained many more nonverbal sounds but also in that these sounds themselves often carried very different meanings, more intimately connected as they were to agricultural production. The court, by contrast, was a logocentric soundscape, and the city, harboring specific sounds associated with the crafts, stood somewhere in the middle. To reconstruct these acoustic

ecological systems required a recombining of the archival record. Maps, site plans, legal documents, travelers' accounts, surviving structures, and landscape features all provided clues about the sonic environments that different sets of people inhabited and constructed for themselves.

In line with this, Smith argues, an acoustic archaeology of early modern England also requires a rethinking of our modern concepts of hearing. But even as he recognizes the danger of romanticizing the protocols of listening prevalent in 1600—protocols that were essentially based on a “whole-body experience”—Smith argues for a “historical phenomenology,” a methodology that “insists on the embodiedness of all knowledge and yet recognizes the cultural differences that shape that knowledge.” An early modern example of this kind of knowledge is the use of middle voice, now completely absent from modern-day English. It is in phrases such as “methinks” that the object, although seen as different, exists not quite apart from the subject.

What kinds of ears do we need, then, to pick up all these sounds adrift, these echoes, reverberations, hums, and murmurs outside or in between the carefully bounded precincts of orderly verbal communication and music? Do we hear past music, as Douglas Kahn urges us in his *Water, Noise, Meat* (1999), past the historical insignificance assigned to noise that is? And what about the completely different kind of hearing advocated by the French-Hungarian researcher Peter Szendy (2001)? Having grown up with the experience of listening as an obligation, a submission to the work, the Law, he feels a desire to escape from this auditory one-way street by opening it up to a twofold process of hearing another person listen. One area where this seems to be possible, surprisingly, is in musical arrangements. Arrangers, Szendy says, sign their listening into the work of another. Arrangements then are no longer second-class citizens in a world of original musical works but rather key elements in Szendy's concept of ears that hear each other hear.

Szendy's approach resonates strongly with Paul Carter's reflections, in his chapter for this volume, on sound as knowledge and interaction in three interrelated domains: cross-cultural encounters, communicational strategies in contemporary migrant communities, and the theory and practice of performance. Noting that sound knowledge is antiperspectival, immersive, and looped in the feedback between listening and speaking, Carter seeks to home in on the ambiguity inherent in communicative events. Cross-cultural encounters and the discourses of migrancy, for instance, are performances in which people attempt to create shared auditory spaces in which sounds constantly reanimate

themselves in a potentially never-ending feedback loop. The same goes for acting and actors, for whom an essential ambiguity of communication obtains in which, in a sense, the one who speaks is already spoken for.

Carter's call for a cross-cultural auditory practice foregrounding ambiguity and doubling-up also resonates with a long-standing interest among anthropologists in social action as performance. Associated with the work of Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, James Fernandez, Don Handelman, Andrew Apter, Johannes Fabian, Margaret Drewal, and many others, this tradition has been important in shifting attention away from societies as closed systems and toward more fluid notions of process, negotiation, and improvisation underlying social interaction. Fabian's *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire* (1990) is an excellent example of how, in a performative ethnography, the ethnographer ceases to be a mere questioner and instead becomes a provider of occasions for acting. In Fabian's opinion, the emphasis on the performative makes it possible to interrogate the notions that sociality predates concrete enactment and that social actors are guided by a common script of shared values. Thus it allows for a theory of ethnographic knowledge production in which such knowledge is not contingent upon the transfer of (somehow preexisting) messages via signs, symbols, or codes (Fabian 1990: 11). In this sense, such a performative approach is especially useful for studying situations without equilibrium or without a homogeneous, shared culture embodying undisputed values and norms.

The similarities of Fabian's views to what Carter, quoting Roy Wagner, calls "echolocation" are striking. Like Fabian's performative ethnography, echolocation refuses to submit to the Western concept of communication as an instrument or a goal-directed technique. As a communicative scene that defers the moment of final semiosis for the sole purpose of keeping the lines of communication open, echolocation—or perhaps "echolocution"—might be best understood as a way of creating contexts not by naming or denoting them but by filling a vacuum with sound. In this sense, echolocation/echolocution is not so much presemiotic as perisemiotic.

The lack of perfect semiosis makes the unscriptedness of such ambiguous moments valuable for anthropologists and other researchers interested in a world cultural situation in which constantly shifting contact zones are not the exception but the rule. But to be able to fully immerse themselves in such situations, Carter warns in critiquing both

the title of this book and some of anthropology's colonial (and, more often than not, also postcolonial) legacies, anthropologists must reconsider the detached registration that marks so many of anthropology's core practices. What they need to rehearse more vigorously is new forms of listening. Rather than simply "hearing cultures," Carter envisages forms of auditory engagement in which "the ground rules are not established."

Ultimately, then, it is the kind of dialogic and participatory knowledge advocated by Paul Carter, Bruce Smith, and other students of the senses such as Michael Taussig and Paul Stoller that an ethnographic ear seeks to capture. Technology, modernization, and commercialization, as the essays presented here argue forcefully, are not necessarily to be taken as either anathema to or the end of such knowledge. By the same token, audio-centered forms of social practice cannot in themselves be construed as alternatives to relations of power thought to be anchored in vision, surveillance, and mass-mediated forms of visual production and consumption.

Notes

1. See also Seeger 1981, Geurts 2002, Classen 1993, and Keifenheim 2000. For an excellent overview of the literature on the senses, see Classen 1997.
2. See, however, for the Japanese context, Inoue 2003.
3. For another example, see Mrazek 2002. The author discusses, among other things, the role of cinema and radio in Indonesia.