Next issue: OFF THE GRID

Grids govern our landscapes and cityscapes, our paintings and grocery lists, our maps and our borders, both walled and imaginary. They get us our energy and water, they fuel our online social lives, and structure the ways we perceive and move through space. On the one hand, the grid is a representational mode, one of rendering the world under a Euclidean regime of points, lines, and areas. On the other, it is the material infrastructure of utilities, transit routes and architecture. In an increasingly networked control society, data, numbers, and figures are in a constant feedback loop with material reality. Across this material-physical and the cultural-technical — between instantiations of the grid as artistic practice and as the "stuff you can kick" (Lisa Parks 2015) — we find a mess of politics and ideology, corporate and common interest.

For this issue, we encourage thinking 'Off the Grid' — calling for papers that envision and/or enact within, outside, through or against systems of perception, matter, energy and space. Papers might explore perspectives against logics that distribute power across concepts and cables, design and tarmac, techniques and technologies. This might mean engaging with what Shannon Mattern calls the "ether and ore" of contemporary urban and rural societies (2017), or it could involve tracing (dis)order in less concrete structures of visuality, spatiality and discourse. Is there a connection between a landscape gridded with pipelines and by modern scientific cartography? Or perhaps a shared logic between a grid of fiber-optics and the data societies it facilitates?

To what extent is the grid by its very operation an instrument of national or corporate power — or can it be appropriated for the commons?

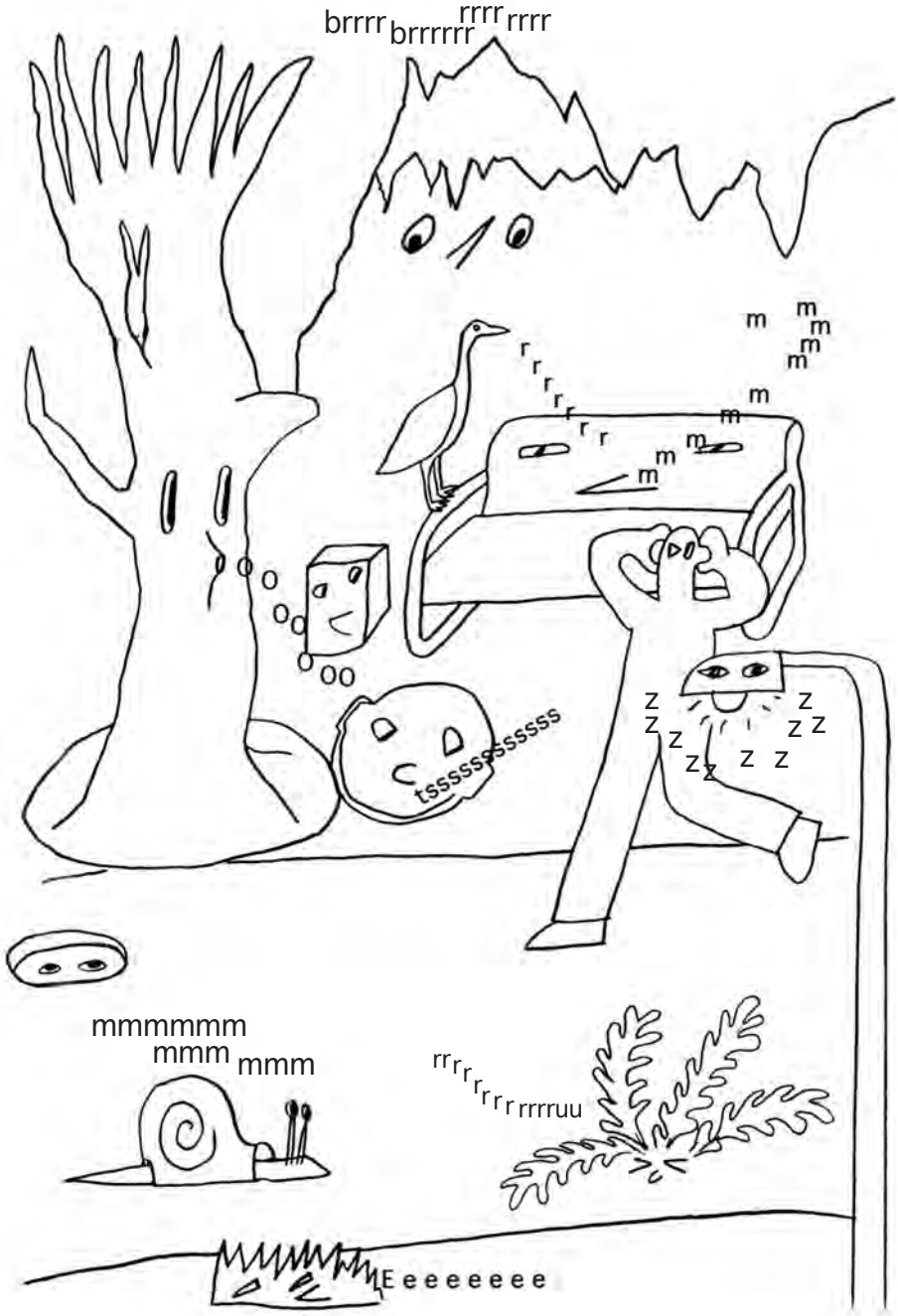
Ultimately, going 'Off the Grid' might be considered a romantic, futile gesture; a slantwise shift across preordained perspectives; an impossible step outside ideology; or an urgent tactic of resistance. If Western modernity and the grid go hand in hand – as suggested by Rosalind Krauss' account of modern art's gravitation towards "flattened, geometricized, ordered" forms (1985) – then what would it mean to challenge, repurpose or reject it? Does the concept still help us to understand the world, or limit expression within it?

AUTUMN, 2019

1.1 SOAPbox PRACTICES OF LISTENING

1.1 issue Soapbox
PRACTICES OF LISTENING

For the first issue of Soapbox, a graduate journal for cultural analysis, we invited young researchers to submit proposals that explore listening as a critical practice. With this topic, we bring together accounts of listening as both a method and object of analysis, including everyday practices and new modes of research that articulate who or what can listen and who or what can be heard.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PRACTICES OF LISTENING

Foreword

In the keynote speech at the 2015 *What Now?* symposium, artist and audio investigator Lawrence Abu Hamdan argued that we have entered a new era of listening. Hamdan identifies a fundamental shift in forensic listening: the recording and storing of police interviews is being replaced by algorythmic tracking of incriminating keywords uttered online. All speech becomes liable, everywhere and at any time. While we may have always been talking, the conditions of listening are changing. We contend that this is consequential not only for the shape discourse takes, but also for the ways in which we relate to ourselves and the world. The essays gathered here in this first issue of *Soapbox* take seriously the idea that perhaps it is less what we say that affects our social and political condition, than the various ways in which what we call PRACTICES OF LISTENING take place.

It is not only forensics that has undergone a transformation. New practices of listening come at us from all sides, complicating rules, relations, and expectations set in place by the old. Whether it is through emerging forms of political activism, odd weather patterns, or the cacophony of digitally distributed voices, everywhere directing attention becomes a political act. The authors contributing to this issue depart from the premise that this act is not so much a matter of individual choice, but rather one of infrastructural distribution

of listening channels — one that amplifies voices from certain directions and mutes those from others. This acoustic architecture reproduces socio-economic structures, for example, by shaping the rights to silence or the rights to make noise in urban environments. It affects relationships among bodies in assemblage, between human and nature, the organic and inorganic, and or across temporalities and territories. In short, this issue unites scholarship on listening across species, senses, processes, and patterns and through our sonic worlds. As such, the present conception of listening is not only about voices from minority groups in certain political climates, rather it is about the specific practices, techniques, and policies of listening that sustain or prevent these voices.

The papers in this issue aim to explore listening as a relation that tethers the listener to the listened to in unexpected ways. This issue then sits uncomfortably between sound studies, on the one hand, and what is often called the sensory turn in the humanities, on the other. While it would be antithetical to the spirit of both fields to attribute the issue to either, terms and concepts from both projects remain an important throughline that binds together the conceptual field that spans these papers, marked by a growing mistrust of ocularcentrism and the patriarchal or anthropocentric modes of representation that depend on it. Yet it is not a preference for the ear over the eye that motivates the authors in the present issue to study critical listening. Sound emerges

not always as an object of inquiry itself, but more often than not as a recurring language to investigate topics beyond the sonic. This also means that there is less focus on the hermeneutics of the senses than on the social and political relations that are produced by particular structures of amplification. In short, it is our intention to question the relationship between speaking and listening, shifting the focus from the spoken word to the listened word. Yet, what can a theory drawn from the aural do to reconsider how this attention is directed and the social relationships that depend on it?

So why then practices of listening? Why not a politics of the voice? Is it a new phrase for an old thing or an old phrase for a new thing? Perhaps it is the idea of listening as a commonplace notion that prevents us from practicing it. Or the idea that the ability to voice is more empowering than the ability to listen. The practices of listening addressed here are many and varied. Themes range from public and urban protest and decolonial epistemology, to philosophical considerations of listening and the relationship between concepts and objects, self and world that they produce. Still, there are many throughlines to be found. We repeatedly encounter listening as a state of ACTIVE RECEPTIVITY — not a passive and distant experience but rather an active, caring, or analytical encounter. A practice of listening here means *doing* listening. A state of attentiveness that engages and co-emerges with the interlocutor. At other times, the practice of listening moves through and

beyond a state of 'letting speak' into a MATERIAL RELATION. In this issue you will encounter sonic reverberations felt throughout the body, sonic utterances that unite bodies, or sonic events that materializes testimonies across temporalities.

Mieke Bal's contribution to this issue reinvigorates her notion of 'letting the object speak back' through a brief discussion of her video installation *Nothing is Missing*. This installation shows unedited and uninterrupted audiovisual clips of migrant women talking to an invisible interlocutor about their experiences of their children leaving them. Letting them speak, that is, giving these women a stage unpolluted by the analyst's conceptual interference or expectations, is for Bal emblematic of cultural analysis: a methodology that treats objects of analysis not as mute but as interlocutors. Yet, this notion of listening as 'letting speak' is both continuous and in friction with Andrea Avidad's conception of the practice of listening as SIGNIFICANCE-IN-FORMATION. In her article she draws out the relationship between listener and sound as one in which meaning is created by the interplay between both. Sonic communication, then, is characterised
by the withholding of information by the listened-to. Sound invites the listener to actively try to grasp at what is given them, in this process co-producing or co-imagining the artwork. Rather than letting the object speak, in the case of sound specifically, the object and

listener can only speak together. For Rolando Vázquez too, the practice of listening is a "mode of relation". In this issue's interview, Vázquez emphasises that in decolonial critique the practice of listening is essential as a way of denaturalising the modern apparatus' amplification of colonial discourse. More than simply listening to suppressed voices, we must emphasise and unearth the positionality of the dominant modern colonial world order by actively relating to the outside of our epistemic and aesthetic frameworks.

Niall Martin mediates upon the entangled relations of listening, writing, and our perception of culture in the aftermath of nuclear events. Thinking through the material traces, containment and waste of the Chernobyl disaster, Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997) reconceptualises the Chernobyl disaster as an event that alters the nature of testimony, namely by challenging the lost sonic source of an event that is simultaneously in the past and yet to come. The article explores how this material, non-linear perception of temporality produces a perception of speech and inscription as NOISILY ENTANGLED. Eeke van der Wal also takes a materialist approach to listening, this time through technological mediation. Through an analysis of the relation between the speech recognition software Dragon NaturallySpeaking and herself as user, she argues in this paper for an understanding of listening as an active determinant in the relation between listener and speaker, instead of a conception that

merely infers the act of receiving and obeying. Rather than focusing on meanings, Van der Wal demonstrates how Dragon attunes to — or listens for — the materiality of speech through its recognition of phonetic speech structures, in an attempt to move away from an anthropocentric understanding of listening.

Both Erica Moukarzel and Duygu Erbil focus on sound and protest. Erbil's article focuses on noise-making tactics used in the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. Demonstrating an EARWITNESSING analytic, Erbil writes against accounts of those demonstrations in which certain images or texts are claimed to represent certain ideologies or groups of people. As a practice of listening to — rather than speaking for — earwitnessing these modes of resistance means attuning instead to their noisiness, outlining a "voice of the people" that is not *representative* but rather *performative* of assembly. Whereas Erbil writes about the limits of representation itself, Moukarzel outlines the difference between sonic and visual representations of protest. In her essay she contends that the unstable relationship between sound and image in two media clips of the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad El Hariri addressing a group of protesters creates a challenge for interpretation. She contends that the framing potential of sound should be taken seriously in media coverage because it can both enhance or misconstrue the visual element. Emilio Aguilar also writes about the relationship between the sonic and the visual. Yet what

is important for him is the way in which the video "Peace for Triple Piano" represents a musical canon as an audiovisual canon. The temporal interference this results in Aguilar relates to Michel Serres' concept of the quasi-object to arrive at the construction of a quasi-audience in the audiovisual representation of music in his object.

This issue has been a joint effort involving the hard work of many of our friends, colleagues, and teachers. Before urging you to start reading, we want to thank the authors for the time and energy they spent writing and editing their essays. Sissel Møller and Stepan Lipatov, final-year students in Graphic Design at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, have developed the complete design of the journal, for which we are immensely grateful. We would also like to thank the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis, the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, the Amsterdam University Fund, and the Arts & Culture and Literary Studies departments of the University of Amsterdam. Without their financial support, this project could not have been realised. On behalf of the editorial board, it is with great pride that we present the first issue of *Soapbox* on the Practices of Listening.

Laura Pannekoek and Zoë Dankert
editors-in-chief

Andrea Avidad

To the Boundary of the Known World: Acousmatic Listening and Imagination in Derek Jarman's *Blue*

abstract This article argues that ACOUSMATIC LISTENING may enkindle imaginative modes which gesture towards potentiality: what might be. Departing from Pierre Schaeffer's

conceptualization of acousmatic sound as autonomous sound object or ideal objectivity, it emphasizes the cognitive and epistemological dimensions of this modality of listening. It follows sound scholar Brian Kane's theory of ACOUSMATICITY: the underdetermination of material source and causal event by sonic effect. One audio-visual artwork —Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993)— is analyzed as calling for a practice of acousmatic listening which includes the perception of unseen sounds and the imaginative production of sonic bodies. The article proposes that *Blue* has many different degrees of acousmaticity. Such richness of acousmaticity allows the piece to invoke a POETICS OF PROXIMITY: an (im)possible touch of incommensurable events, spaces, and temporalities, through and as sound. *Blue*'s acousmatic sounds, voices, and

noises make a suggestion that can go in many different directions, depending on the listener's imaginative capacities.

Perhaps it is a commonplace to start by speaking about the hegemony of the eye: about the ways in which an excessive reliance on the ocular enables inattention to the fullness of experience. After all, the twentieth century witnessed a rich production of anti-ocularcentric discourses that denounced the seamless operations of peephole metaphysics.(1) Yet, the idealization of vision continues to overshadow — if not completely nullify — the richness of other sensory modes, along with the possibilities they offer us to relate, to know, and to think the world.

In an attempt to explore alternative relationalities between self and world, I want to foreground listening as a practice that may enkindle imaginative modes which gesture towards potentiality: what might be. By navigating the capacity of sound to activate imagination, I aim to highlight what can be understood as a kind of tool to think new horizons beyond the given.

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(1) For an extensive review of "ocularcentrism" Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought.*

I watch and listen to English artist Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), an audio-visual piece comprised of a seventy-six minute projection of a blue screen overlaid with a sound collage of Jarman's experiences related to living—or dying—with AIDS. While the optic plane stubbornly remains a deep ultramarine blue, the sonic world layers noises, voices, silences, sounds, and music, so as to sculpt an unpredictable aural universe which demands acts of imagination from the listener. *Blue* activates the perceptual and imaginative modes of experience by separating eye and ear, by never visualizing what the ear hears. Jarman's audiovisual artwork requires a practice of ACOUSMATIC LISTENING; the sources and causes of perceived sounds remaining unseen, the listener is invited to imaginatively complete what the ear could only suggest.

Failure

The screen fails right in front of my eyes, on purpose. *Blue*'s blue screen references nothing but its own failure to make something visible within its frame. To be sure, from a strict phenomenological point of view, I see a framed blue light which, indeed, is a visible image. Film scholar and philosopher Vivian Sobchack summarizes this point very well: "watching *Blue*, we are not looking at a non-image, at 'nothing'; rather, and more precisely, we are looking at an image of 'no "thing"'" (197). But, despite the bluntness of the blue optic plane, the screen deliberately fails. And,

by doing so, it interrupts the reign of the eye over other sensory registers.

The screen fails by emptying out the frame, fully and exclusively becoming blue ether. Paradoxically, such depletion of the frame also saturates it: chromatic fullness impregnates my eyes. Did I see a greenish tonality? A yellowish one? They appear and disappear, untraceable; tones are born in the organ of sight. Are these subtle color changes a trick played by my perceptual apparatus? The enduring intensity of the blue light affects my eyes. My entire body is enmeshed, embraced by color, by changing color.

The screen fails to objectify and to represent a world consistent with human understanding and to human need. It fails as a cultural practice that represents and explains through representing. It fails to reproduce an image that makes the world an object for consumption. *Blue* disturbs the technologies—cultural and social practices—that standardize the image as an image-*of*, that which makes evident what manifests and displays for the eye.

The screen fails because by doing so it can become an arena for an event—an event that structures a virtual time and a virtual space: time freed from the arrangements of chronological linearity; space as moving color.

The screen fails to disclose the sources and causes of the fleeting sounds which accompany it. The screen is independent of sound, and in return,

sound is emancipated from the projected screen. As a result of this rupture, a practice of acousmatic listening begins.

Imagination

Conventionally, ACOUSMATIC describes sounds whose source remains unseen. Acousmatic: audible but invisible. Understood in this way, the acousmatic experience of sound often materializes in everyday life — when one listens to a podcast, music on a computer, or the radio, for instance. Modern audio technology, with its capacity to record, store, and reproduce sound, creates more and more acousmatic situations, which then become normalized in daily life.

However, the origin of acousmatic listening predates the birth and development of modern forms of audio technology by millennia. The acousmatic setting has a much older genesis — as ancient as the school of Pythagoras. Etymologically, the term refers to a sect of Pythagorean disciples, "the *akousmatikoi* — literally the 'listeners' or 'auditors' — who, as the legend has it, heard the philosopher lecture from behind a curtain or veil" (Kane 4). In this context, the veil functioned as a pedagogical tool that aimed to draw attention toward the meaning of Pythagoras's discourse by drawing attention away from his physical appearance. In other words, the cognitive dimension of experience was modulated by separating eye and ear.

The word was taken up again in the twentieth century by French composer Pierre Schaeffer, who gave a canonical account of acousmatic sound in his *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966). The basic tenet of the Schaefferian tradition is that the acousmatic situation is favorable for a reduced mode of listening *(l'écoute reduite)* — a mode of attending aesthetically to sounds by disregarding their worldly sources and causes. Put differently, reduced listening isolates the ear so as to provide PURE AUDITION (Kane 148), understood as a modality of experiencing sound without visual interference and without contextual meaning. Schaeffer writes: "Often surprised, often uncertain, we discover that much of what we thought we were hearing was in reality only seen, and explained, by the context" (91). This realization points to the ways in which the experience of hearing itself is affected, shaped, and interpreted by the preeminence of vision at the expense of the other senses, as well as by the operations of symbolic meaning. In order to get to the 'essence' of sound, Schaeffer aims to reduce sounds to the sphere of hearing alone: sound without visual attachments, sound without external significations — sound for and by itself. This aesthetic orientation draws an *ontological* line that separates sounds from physical sources and causes.

Yet the acousmatic situation by itself does not banish indexical listening, for a listener can still ascertain the physical source and/or causal event of

a perceived sound, even when she is deprived of the visual means to fully identify the sonic origins. As I type these words, I hear my dog sneeze. I do not see her perform the action for she is outside my field of vision. However, I do not experience this canine sternutation as an autonomous aesthetic object with no worldly ties. I can easily determine that the *ACHOO!* is a product of my dog's nasal mucosa being irritated by some foreign particle which caused her to expel air through her nose. In short, the *ACHOO!*, viz., the sonic effect, can be quickly reunited with its source and cause: a barking mammal who happens to be sneezing in that particular moment.

But what happens when the determination of the source and cause becomes difficult, if not impossible, and the listener cannot simply ontologically sever what she hears from that which may have caused the sound? In other words, what does the experience of acousmatic sound entail when a sonic effect cannot be linked to, nor detached from, physical sources and causal events? What is at work when the listener senses the *trace* of an unknown sonic source that cannot be expunged from the auditory experience?

Philosopher and sound scholar Brian Kane posits in his book *Sound Unseen* a model in which acousmatic sound can be understood in terms of "the *spacing* of source, cause, and effect, without simply permitting their separation"(149). Drawing his theory from unorthodox sources such as Franz

Kafka's tale *The Burrow* and Jacques Derrida's account of ESPACEMENT, Kane contends that "acousmatic sound is neither entity nor sound object nor effect nor source nor cause. It flickers into being only with spacing, with the simultaneous difference and relation of auditory effect, cause and source"(260). Put another way, a sound *is* acousmatic when it is haunted by the shadow of its enigmatic source and cause, "a shadow it cannot escape because without it, the acousmaticity of a sound simply dissipates"(148). Kane's theory assesses the division between the visual and the aural as a kind of sensory substrate in which the acousmatic situation is grounded. But that which determines this experiential mode is what he terms ACOUSMATICITY, the extent or degree to which a sound's source or cause can be determined. This theorization of the acousmatic situation emphasizes the *cognitive* and *epistemological* dimensions of listening: what does the mind do when it attempts to apprehend the world it inhabits by listening to that world's undeterminable sounds?

Crucial to Kane's theory is the "imaginative projection" which the acousmatic situation elicits (8). Kane writes: "one central, replicated feature of acousmatic listening appears to be that underdetermination of the sonic source encourages imaginative supplementation"(9). For how long can a listener survive the uncertainty provoked by a sourceless sound? Scholar of the senses Steve Connor remarks that "human beings in many different cultural settings find the experience of

a sourceless sound uncomfortable, and the experience of a sourceless voice intolerable" (35). Such discomfort provokes the projection of what Connor calls the "vocalic body," that is, "the idea — which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine or hallucination — of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice" (35). The listener provides an imaginary body, a body-in-invention, to the autonomous voice. Kane expands Connor's theory to encompass not just the voice but acousmatic sound in general: "acousmatic sounds encourage the imaginative production of a *sonic body*" (8).

Blue's sonic world envelops the listener, who in her powerlessness to visualize the sources and causes of the enigmatic sonic events, can only attempt to compensate the indeterminate force of the sounds by imagining the (im)possible world that seems to be lost, so to speak, in the blue ether of the screen. *Blue* forces me to operate in a subjunctive mode in which I can only imaginatively weave potential universes. Even though the relation of sound to image remains identical throughout its duration, Jarman's audio-visual piece has many different degrees of acousmaticity. That is to say, regardless of the blue screen's refusal to make anything visible to the eye but its own blueness — in spite of the screen covering *all* material sources of *all* heard sounds — some of *Blue*'s

sounds have a greater spacing of source, cause, and effect than others.

It is precisely such richness of acousmaticity in *Blue*'s sonic universe that allows Jarman to thread what I want to call a POETICS OF PROXIMITY. Layered sonic materials bring into contact remote spaces, as well as discontinuous blocks of time which fold the chronological continuum. Yet Jarman's aesthetics admit its own limitations, for the (im)possible nearness it attempts to entwine *through* and *as* sound can only be that: an impossible touch that fades away as soon as the sounds die. To illustrate, at the beginning of the piece, a speaker utters:

> I am sitting with some friends in this café drinking coffee served by young refugees from Bosnia.
>
> The war rages across the newspapers and through the ruined streets of Sarajevo.
>
> Tania said your clothes are on back to front and inside out. Since there were only two of us there I took them off and put them right then and there. I am always here before the doors open.

> What need of so much news from
> abroad while all that concerns either
> life or death is all transacting and at
> work within me.

The sourceless voice is layered by a multiplicity of sounds. As soon as the 'café' is mentioned, familiar sounds, whose source can be (hypothetically) traced back to a coffee shop, verify the situation just described. In other words, even though the café cannot be seen, it can be heard, as tiny coffee spoons touch white porcelain plates, and as a cacophony of voices reverberate in the background. But, how do I know these details? How do I *actually* know that the metallic spoons touch the china plates? I don't. Yet I supply these sonic bodies; I imaginatively project these containers for the particular environment I do not have visual access to. Now, as soon as the 'Bosnian refugees' are mentioned, a rather strange, unfamiliar sound resonates. It could be the sound of an explosion. It could be the sound of thunder. Once the detonation-like sound fades away, the voice speaks about the war in Bosnia, while the sounds that belong to the coffee shop regain their presence.

What is that indeterminable sound? Is it an attempt to materialize through and as sound the invisible trauma that is engraved in the bodies displaced by the internecine conflict in the Balkans? Is this a gesture to give sonority to that which is silently imprinted in the

exiled bodies who now serve coffee somewhere else? Is it an effort to give Sarajevo a voice? Philosopher Don Ihde tells us that "we may miss the voices of things because they are often, left by themselves, mute or *silent"* (190). Is Jarman trying to give an active voice to that which I cannot hear? How would the virus that destroyed Jarman's body have sounded?

The sound ecology that sculpts this episode layers sonic materials so as to knit a poetics of proximity that brings together discontinuous spaces and events: Sarajevo, Jarman's failing body— "all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within me". Furthermore, if we take the voice of the bodiless and faceless speaker to be a sort of container through which the other sounds circulate, then the explosion-like sound is taking place *within* this VOICE-BODY. In other words, death is indeed circulating and transacting within the vocalic body in my own present; this event (re)occurs every time I listen to the piece. The temporal distance between Jarman's (past) time and my own time is reduced. We both meet in a complex temporality that gathers all temporalities at once.

The sound's high degree of acousmaticity enkindles a type of imaginative supplementation that allows me to move through a series of hypotheses which tie together incommensurable events, sites, and temporalities. Such binding of disparate happenings by way of acousmatic sound activating imaginative production can be considered an instance

of Foucauldian HETEROTOPIAS. Foucault writes of these counter-sites that they are "enacted utopias that juxtapose several places that are foreign to one another in one single site" (22, 27). By providing sonic bodies to Sarajevo, the café, and the bodiless voice — as well as by looking at the smooth space of the screen — I occupy a virtual space which connects sites that are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (9). Certainly, the mentioning of the Bosnian refugees and of Sarajevo has acted like a magnet that attracts the sound to its own field of signification. Therefore, language does exert an influence in the way I treat the peculiar acousmatic sound. But, once again, since I cannot fully ascertain the causal context of this mysterious sound, given its high degree of acousmaticity, I cannot completely determine this sound as *belonging* to Sarajevo. In other words, the sound is inhabited by an uncertainty that cannot be entirely resolved. Furthermore, given the fragmented narrative that accompanies the acousmatic sounds, *Blue*'s labyrinthine world is one in which I, as a listener, cannot wholly know the extent to which sounds are faithful to the sources that language suggests.

Jarman's writing is not tied down to representation. It produces what is not already recognizable; it is a language becoming sound that is open to mutation. In some cases, language names an absence which requires the listener to imaginatively hear sounds which are not given. For instance, a voice whispers:

I fill this room with the echo of many voices
Who passed time here
Voices unlocked from the blue of the long
dried paint
The sun comes and floods this empty room
I call it my room
My room
My room has welcomed many summers
Embraced laughter and tears
Can it fill itself with your laughter?
Each word a sunbeam
Glancing in the light
This is the song of my room
David, Howard, Graham,
David, Paul, Terry, Graham
Blue stretches, yawns, and is awake
Blue, blue

Even though the speaker refers to 'the echo of many voices,' to 'laughter and tears,' and to the 'song' of his room, in no moment do these sounds actually resonate. In other words, those sounds are heard as absences which I, as a listener, must supply via auditory imagination. Thus, I must engage in the unlocking of those absent voices, in the materialization of tears as sounds, and in the creation of an unavailable song by imaginatively hearing them.

The interplay between sound and language, sensation and association, affect and idea, enables the

incessant birth and rebirth of meaning; signification is not fully given to the listener. *Blue* demands that its perceiver actively produce and endow sonic bodies with a SIGNIFICANCE-IN-FORMATION that can only begin to emerge as she experiences the artwork. In this sense, *Blue* does not impose an enclosed meaning; it does not give the whole. On the contrary, it operates as an event that asks me to listen and to dream, to listen and to create. I am an agent that completes the artwork, albeit always partially and limitedly.

Jarman's audio-visual piece calls for a practice of acousmatic listening which includes the perception of unseen sounds and the imaginative production of sonic bodies—a form of listening that involves the co-presence of the perceptual and imaginative modalities of experience. Those sounds that present a higher degree of acousmaticity may materialize a productive difference within themselves, one that threatens their own selfsameness. Such sounds ask for acts of imagination which are in excess of perception. This point can be better understood by listening to an episode in which a speaker says:

> I'm walking along the beach in a howling gale
> Another year is passing
> In the roaring waters
> I hear the voices of dead friends
> Love is life that lasts forever.

My heart's memory turns to you
David. Howard. Graham. Terry. Paul.

At the very beginning of this episode, the words are embraced by sounds of sea waves, whose foaming tails have a velvety texture, as well as by soft wind whistles which quickly become vigorous moans which then become noise. What begins as a sound that references the movement of the wind turns into a sort of primitive moan, which then transforms into dissonant noise, as if a radio signal had been lost. Despite the actual origins of these sounds, they are experienced as one sound, whose self-alteration produces multiple sonic sensations that are drastically different. They are experienced as if the same source and/or cause had provoked a sonic effect which is actually *various* sonic effects. The more I attempt to settle the sound's causal object, the more I nurture the productive force of this sound to beget new senses. Put differently, there is non-selfsameness within selfsameness, for it is the *same* sound which produces an irreducible alterity that throws the sound's self-identity into question. This self-changing sound complicates the determination of a delineated physical source and causal event, for what kind of body (source) and action (cause) could be producing this mutating sound? What kind of body-in-flux could emit this *wind-becoming-moans-becoming-noise*? This sonic effect is experienced as a sound that changes qualitatively — as one sound which is many sounds. Any attempt to

ascribe a source becomes tremendously complex, yet engrossing, for the listener. *Blue*'s sonic events demand imaginative acts that posit a world which is in excess of our own.

Jarman's piece also complicates the recognition of a selfsame-speaking human subject. As queer theorist Jacques Khalip remarks, *Blue* "refuses to fold back into any kind of unified perspective or signature"(83). Even though *Blue* is deeply personal—as Jarman's writing discloses intimate details about the illness—the artwork's formal structure, use of voice, and use of the *I* shatter the dichotomy of the individual/collective, and of the self/other.

The intoxicating blueness of the screen is interrupted by voices which always use the *I* so as to narrate disconnected events. Without the possibility of visualizing the self-referential subject who speaks, the distinction between one speaker and another becomes impossible. The likeness of these voices further complicates any attempt to recognize unique subjects; none of the voices reveal a singular speaking subject that can be identified via the unique character of his vocal enunciation. As Khalip emphasizes, in listening to *Blue*, "one should not be listening to the grain of the voice, as Barthes might suggest, but to the sound of one's dispossession from oneself"(96). *Blue* dilutes the materiality of the voice—a kind of bodily expression that bypasses the semantic sphere—so as to preserve a resolute anonymity, an

impenetrable impersonality that refuses the recognition of any subject. Mirroring the refusal of the screen to visualize the particular, the voices who share the *I* do not reveal a unique self; voice does not reveal a knowable entity. By contrast, as Khalip summarizes, in *Blue*, "the act of speaking for someone means attending to the nonvocality of their sound — the 'taking place' of their sound within our own, without fetishizing voice as a sign of sound's humanistic modulation into 'authenticity'" (97). The act of speaking for someone invokes a poetics of proximity in which the 'uniqueness' of the self, the edifice of subject, is shadowed by "the disturbance of violent relatedness" (Nancy xiii), by a shared intimacy which proves to be the very foundational possibility for any 'self'. As Jean-Luc Nancy remarks: "Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence" (3). *Blue* refuses to operate under a logic of recognition through which the other becomes *other*. This rejection of representing determined identities, of identification altogether, is materialized in the blue optic plane, and in the use of the acousmatic voice: a voice(s) purposely failing to disclose its (their) source(s); a voice(s) whose utterance of the *I* does not complete a self-reference but makes an open reference. Through this abandonment of oneself, the voice(s) constitutes an irreducible plurality in which *I* is not prior to *we*.

But Jarman's piece moves beyond a mere refusal: it *affirms* the primacy of a lived relation by calling for a practice of acousmatic listening in which, I, as a perceiver, must imagine potentialities that move in unforeseeable directions. I am asked to wander from the particular embodiment of the artwork without actually leaving it. I am affected by my imaginative acts: I experience my own self, and enter into a self-relation, by projecting and by THINKING-FEELING these (im)possible worlds which fleet as soon as the sounds, voices, and noises disappear.(2) I *hear* myself as I complete Jarman's poetics of proximity through my acts of imagination. Ihde remarks that "imaginative acts also implicate the 'self'. As 'my' imaginings, particularly those that I present to myself at will, the sense of an 'inner self-presence' entices the very notion of a 'self'"(120). *Blue*'s sonic world enables a lived self-relation, a 'self-touch' that constitutes the heart of its poetics of proximity.

Possibilities

In order to talk about acousmatic listening and imagination, I started by referring to the eye and to the failure of *Blue*'s blue screen. Despite the 'undesirable' aspects commonly associated with

(2) I borrow this term from Brian Massumi. *See Semblance and Event,* p.53

failure — lack, omission, collapse, non-performance — I suggested that, by welcoming such failure, the spectator becomes a *listener*. The ear comes to be a key player in our relation to the external world and in our own self-relation. Thus, the abandonment of vision is nothing but a productive movement that allows the body to navigate the world by using a sensory mode which remains largely overlooked. In this sense, Jarman's artwork affirms universes of possibilities that have to be listened to, that have to be discovered by attuning to the sounds and voices of its enigmatic world. This is a difficult request. Deprived of representational and explanatory images, facing the intoxicating blueness of the screen, I must listen to sounds, voices, and noises which also resist complete identification, which are occupied by an absence which cannot be ignored. I must engage in a practice of acousmatic listening.

Following Kane's model of acousmatic sound and acousmaticity — a theory that emphasizes the cognitive and epistemological dimensions of listening, and the spacing between sonic source, cause, and effect — I argued that Jarman's *Blue* has many different degrees of acousmaticity. This richness of acousmaticity allows the piece to invoke a poetics of proximity: an (im)possible touch of incommensurable events, spaces, and temporalities, *through* and *as* sound. Significantly, such poetics of proximity require the listener to complete them with acts of imagination.

Blue's acousmatic sounds, voices, and noises make a suggestion that can go in many different directions, depending on the listener's imaginative capacities. *Blue* does not give a whole. Contrarily, the piece hints at possible readings of its sonic universe. But, again, since the piece needs the listener to *complete* it, albeit always partially, there are as many possible readings as listeners. There are as many versions of *Blue* as there are listeners who give themselves into a lived relation with *Blue*'s aural world.

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Eeke van der Wal

Dragon NaturallySpeaking: Being Listened to and the Subservience of Speech

abstract Through an analysis of the relation between the speech recognition software Dragon NaturallySpeaking and myself, as user, I argue in this paper for an understanding of listening as an active determinant in the relation between listener and speaker, instead

of a conception that merely infers the act of receiving and obeying. I observe that although the software is marketed as a technology that would obey by listening to the user's commands, my experience with the software points to another direction.

As a computer operating subject, I am dependent on Dragon's recognition of speech. Drawing on Hegel's MASTER-SLAVE DIALECTIC, this paper argues that Dragon is an active participant in the relation between user and technology, rather than a mere tool. Following Karen Barad, I highlight the material-discursiveness of speech. Rather than focusing on meanings, Dragon attunes to — or listens for — the materiality of speech through its recognition of phonetic speech structures. As such, the article moves away from an anthropocentric understanding of listening.

Approximately two years ago, I incurred a repetitive stress injury due to excessive computer use, and it was then that I encountered Dragon. As a result of the injury, I am unable to type on the computer keyboard for a long period of time without pain, and to recover I have to unburden my arms, neck and shoulders by drastically reducing the amount of time spent (typing) behind a computer. In this digitalized and highly computerised 21st century, these circumstances are less than ideal. Dragon, however, offered me a solution.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking is a speech recognition software for the computer which allows the computer to be driven by the user's voice. On the website of *Nuance*, the company which sells this software, Dragon is presented as a tool for writing that enacts the same function as the computer keyboard: "Dragon lets users create and edit documents, send emails, and search the web through speech," making the work behind the computer "virtually hands-free." This software program is introduced as an invaluable piece of technology or tool for the writing and computer-using human subject — in particular for those who might otherwise be unable to use a computer due to (physical) disabilities such as arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, or repetitive strain injuries like my own. It is this intriguing marketing narrative through which Dragon becomes understood as the tool or technology that listens and adheres to the user's speech, as made apparent by quotes on the *Nuance*

website such as "control your computer by voice with speed and accuracy," "let Dragon work for you," and "say commands and your computer obeys." Dragon is, thus, presented as a listening and obeying technology, therewith positing the speaking user in an undisputed position of control.

A conception of listening to speech in which listening merely infers the act of receiving and obeying emphasizes the importance of speaking at the expense of listening (Fiumara 31; Lipari, "Rhetoric's other" 228). Departing from Hegel's MASTER-SLAVE DIALECTIC, I instead set out to illustrate how Dragon's ability to recognise speech through the act of listening disputes the conception of an independent subject who is able to 'control' the computer through speech. Instead, listening becomes the key concept and practice through which Dragon mediates speech, which is essential for the successful operationalisation of the computer. Moving away from the implicitly anthropocentric understanding of listening, whereby listening tends to be understood in relation to human consciousness and aurality, i.e. hearing through the ear (Gallagher et al. 619), I here adhere instead to an expanded conception in which listening attends to any and every kind of kinetic oscillation that occurs between humans, animals, technologies, materials and environment (Gallagher et al. 620). Thence, I here attune to the disparate and dynamic relation between listener and speaker, between Dragon and myself, analysing how

Dragon's ability to listen mediates speech, and by extension the operationalisation of the computer, therewith governing its own coming into existence as subservient software technology.

On Being Recognised

Ironically, any expectation of myself as an independent user in control was always already an impossibility, as it is only through Dragon that I can at present actualize my desire and potential to work with a computer. Nevertheless, this dubious presumption was reiterated in my own, somewhat naïve, expectations of engaging with the software. It was my implicit expectation that, after purchasing Dragon, the process of writing and working with a computer could be resumed without further ado—as the website promised: "your voice is ready for work." The reality of working with Dragon, however, reveals that my voice was never 'ready' to work; instead, our relation is much more reciprocal, complex and frustrating. Firstly, Dragon is able to recognise pre-programmed commands that allow the user to operate the computer, which means that the user has to get acquainted with these commands first in order to be (en)able(d) to control the computer. *I, however, did not know beforehand that in English "()" are called* '*parentheses*' *and I had to learn that Dragon responds to commands such as "open parenthesis," "close parenthesis," "open quote," "comma," "full stop," "new line," etc.* Secondly, Dragon attunes and responds to the speaker's voice and

intonation, which allows for Dragon to distinguish between utterances that are supposed to effectuate a command and utterances that are to be translated into text on screen. The user has to therefore learn when, for instance, the utterance 'enter' results in Dragon performing the function of 'enter' as the enter-key on a keyboard would, and when the same utterance effectuates the written word 'enter' on screen. As such, Dragon dictates the way in which I speak and compose my spoken sentences, as the spoken version of the italicized sentence above illustrates. This sentence was produced as a result of the utterance: "I *comma* however *comma* did not know beforehand that in English *open quote open parenthesis close parenthesis close quote* are called *open single quote* parentheses close *single quote* and I had to learn that Dragon responds to commands such as *open quote* open parenthesis *close quote comma open* quote close *parenthesis close quote comma* open quote *open quote close quote comma* open quote comma *close quote comma open quote* full stop *close quote comma open quote* new line *close quote comma* etcetera *choose option one full stop*." [(1)] In the experience of working with the speech recognition software, this presumed unilateral relation between myself as the independent user (who speaks and is in control) and Dragon as my executive software who listens and obeys then becomes unsubstantiated, as Dragon imposes onto the user certain preconditions through which it can operate. The fallacy of a self-conscious human being who is in control has already been heavily

scrutinized and criticized. Perhaps the most noteworthy example of this is to be found in Hegel's famous passage 'Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel builds his argument on the presumption that a self-conscious being can only be by virtue of another, as "[s]elf-consciousness is in and for itself through the fact that it exists in and for itself for another. That is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel 111), i.e. in being recognised (Williams 64). For Hegel, any desire for freedom or independence is then inherently aporetic: only in being recognised by an other as independent, can one uphold the fantasy of, or desire for, absolute independence (Williams 70). Any objective claim to freedom or independence by the domineering party is therefore incorrect, as the actualization of an independent self-consciousness is only possible in the relation with the other. In other words, one needs the other in order to experience independence, and

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(1) Dragon often provides multiple options for textual representations of words. The utterance "etcetera," for instance, could either be translated by Dragon into its textual representation in its entirety or is its abbreviated form, "etc." Dragon provided these two options and I chose option 1 (by saying "choose option one") which corresponded with the abbreviation of the word. The italicized words indicate the commands that Dragon distinguishes from text, through its ability to recognise the speaker's speech-intonation.

therefore the dominant and ostensibly independent SELF remains dependent on its relation with its subservient other (Kamal 461-464).

While Hegel analyses this complex relation of mutual dependence between two (human) self-consciousnesses, I infer here that a similar, complex relation of mutual dependence becomes discernible in the encounter between Dragon and myself. In order to focus on this particular relation, I adhere to a posthumanist perspective, which decentres the human, and thence the predominance of human agency—"the 'man' as alleged 'measure of things'" (Braidotti 637). As Donna Haraway infers in her 1991 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto":

> It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. Insofar as we know ourselves in both formal discourse […] and in daily practice […] we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic (177-178).

Building on this posthumanist perspective, Dragon is no longer simply a tool or technology to be used by its user, but instead becomes an active participant in this relation.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking is a speech recognition software; thence Dragon recognises speech. This software technology thus operates through the act of recognition. For Hegel, recognition is the subordinate, but vital, theme in his work on the phenomenology of SPIRIT. Although he does not carefully define this concept, it functions as the operative concept by which he works out the main thematic concept of spirit or GEIST (Williams 59). For Hegel, it is only in being recognised by an other that a self-consciousness can come into being (111). While I initially conceived of Dragon as a subordinate and obedient OTHER, it becomes apparent that in the reality of working with the software, Dragon's ability to recognise me (or, more specifically, my speech,) brings about, and thus determines, this relation in which I take up the role as computer-controlling subject. My speech can only actualise my desire and potential to operate a computer if it is recognised in such a manner that it effectuates a further response on the computer. Dragon's ability to recognise speech is thus a prerequisite if I want to realise my desire to operate a computer.

At the same time, however, the interaction with Dragon exposes and subsequently nullifies any fantasy of being an independent subject who is in control, firstly

as it dictates how I speak. When Dragon recognises my speech, it becomes recognisable again for myself in the form of text on screen or commands for the computer after translations. Whenever the utterances correspond with my intended message or command, I come to recognise them as mine. There are, however, frequent occurrences of mistranslation or misrecognition. As an example of this, my dictation "a modern proletarian industrial novel" resulted in the textual translation "a mortar proletarian industry novel." It is these moments of misrecognition that expose that Dragon's practice of recognising interferes with speech and mediates the way in which my speech becomes understood and translated.

Thence, Dragon performs a similar function to Hegel's opposing or other self-consciousness, despite its inhuman and inorganic body, due to its ability zto recognise. It is Dragon's ability to recognise that simultaneously makes possible and negates the desire for control and independence that I, as the writing subject, aspire to. I come to realise that I can only actualise my potential as writing subject in *being recognised*, or more precisely, in being recognised *correctly* — an observation that I will address more extensively later. As shown above, however, recognition also entails mediation (Hegel 115), and therefore the act of recognising is in and of itself agential. It is this understanding that solicits further inquiry as to how Dragon's ability to recognise speech is effectuated and how it, as a consequence, affects the process of operating a computer.

Listening through recognition

Let me note explicitly that Dragon's ability to recognise concerns the recognition of audible speech, meaning that Dragon is programmed to recognise sounds that make up the speech of a particular language in which it is operative.[2] Spoken words enter the system through the computer microphone or the microphone on the headset. These auditory sounds that enter the microphone generate an analogue output signal that is indicative of the spoken words entering it. Subsequently, the analogue speech signal is converted into a sequence of digital values (i.e. commands or text on screen) that are representative of the microphone output signal (Baker et al., "Speech Recognition Systems").[3] However, not all sound signals result in the execution of text or commands for the computer: Dragon also perceives sounds that it does not recognise, such as sneezes, sighs, laughter, grunts and background noises. Such sounds result in the appearance of a pop-up box saying "please say that again," therewith informing the user that the sounds it detects are not recognised.

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(2) Dragon is a language-specific software. It can be purchased for and used in multiple languages, but when using Dragon, it can only function within the particular language selected. A user who has purchased Dragon for two (or more) languages can therefore either work within one language profile or within the other, but the languages cannot be used interchangeably within one profile.

What, however, does it mean to recognise? Linguistically, the word ‘re-cognition’ is composed of the prefix ‘re-’, signalling ‘anew’ or ‘again’ (“re-, prefix”), and the word ‘cognise’, meaning to know or become conscious of something (“cognize”). The vital element of the word recognition, however, lies in the first syllable which harks back to something prior. In a moment of recognition this prior awareness evokes an understanding. Recognition, then, indicates that something known is identified or understood again. “The knowledge that results from recognition is therefore not the same as the discovery of something new: it arises rather from a renewed reckoning with a potentiality that lies within oneself” (Ghosh 4-5). Dragon’s ability to recognise speech can therefore only come about by virtue of its pre-existing awareness or pre-programmed knowledge of that which it recognises — speech.

Dragon is then able to distinguish between sounds that it already knows and sounds that it does not know. Although it perceives any sound that enters the microphone, it attunes to those sounds that

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(3) For more information about the technological workings of Dragon NaturallySpeaking I refer to patent US4783803A, “Speech recognition apparatus and method” and patent US5754972A, “Speech recognition system for languages with compound words,” both invented by James K. Baker and assigned by Dragon Systems Inc.

it recognises as audible speech, which effectuates a further response on the computer. Dragon thus hears sounds but LISTENS to speech, which according to Lisbeth Lipari indicates the act of "hearing attentively; to give ear; to pay attention" ("Listening, Thinking, Being" 349), whereas hearing generally refers to the more passive form of receiving and perceiving sounds (Gallagher 622; Lipari, "Listening, Thinking, Being" 37). What remains indispensable in Dragon's practice of listening is, however, that listening here connotes a type of recognition. That is to say that when Dragon listens to speech, Dragon listens to (or listens for) something that it already understands or knows as speech. As Heidegger infers in his 1927 book *Being and Time*: "Only he who already understands can listen" (208). Consequently, Dragon's ability to listen requires a pre-existing knowledge or understanding of that which it listens to.

Listening to and Re-cognising Speech

As inferred above, Dragon is designed and programmed to know and recognise audible speech. Dragon operates by matching the acoustic description of the words that it is programmed to recognise against the audible signal that is generated by the utterance of the word (Baker et. al., "Speech recognition apparatus"). It is able to do so because it is programmed to recognise phonemes—the distinct units of a sound of a particular language such as *P*, *B*, *D* and *T*—and is trained to understand these

phonemes in relation to one another. Dragon is also programmed to understand "phonemes in context," meaning that phonemes are understood in relation to the particular vowels, the duration of the utterance of these vowels, the number of syllables in the utterance, the emphasis placed on certain vowels, etc. (Bamberg and Gillick 163). Like Dragon, humans can also distinguish audible speech from other sounds, as they are able to perceive the systemic variation of fine phonetic detail of spoken utterances (Hawkins 374). Most human speakers and listeners are, however, not consciously aware of these phonetic sound structures. As Bamberg and Gillick point out, most humans are not aware of the fact that "the vowels in 'will' and 'kick' are identical according to dictionary pronunciations, [but] are as different in their spectral characteristics as the vowels in 'not' and 'nut', or that the vowel in 'size' has more than twice the duration of the same vowel in 'seismograph'" (163).

What becomes apparent then is that both Dragon and I can perceive and recognise speech. Yet, while we both perceive the same audible speech sounds, Dragon recognises speech through its acoustic phonetics, whereas I, with my untrained ear, cannot consciously identify its phonetic structures. This discrepancy can be understood by drawing on the work of Sarah Hawkins. In her article "Roles and Representations of Systemic Fine Phonetic Detail in Speech Understanding" she argues that, for humans, speech is intended to convey a message. Speech, therefore, cannot be reduced

to merely the audible. Instead, speech "perform[s] multiple roles, providing strictly linguistic information, as well as non-linguistic information and paralinguistic information" (373) — think, for instance, of intonation and pauses, but also gestures and the (social) context that might induce and support audible speech. For the human listener, speech thus becomes recognised and consciously understood through derivative and indexical meanings or messages that are attached to particular (speech) sounds. The *understanding of speech* is therefore, at least for the human listener, inextricably linked to language, semiotics and meanings (Hawkins 374), whereas Dragon understands speech through what might be considered the materiality of speech: the soundwaves that become perceptible as phonetic speech sounds.

The theoretical distinction and prioritization of language over matter has, however, been thoroughly debated and criticized by Karen Barad in her 2007 book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. As she reasons:

> it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing' — even materiality — is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. […] There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter ("Posthumanist Performativity" 802).

But why is it that language and meaning have been deemed so much more trustworthy than matter? As Donna Haraway similarly wonders, do we not find ourselves in both discourse and in daily practice (178); in both imagination and material reality (150)? To overcome this bias of the lingual over matter, and vice versa, Barad proposes a profound ontological and epistemological shift, reasoning that 'things' come into being through entangled, material-discursive practices. Thence, matter and meaning are mutually articulated and inextricably fused together — they constitute one another (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 4).

From such a material-discursive perspective, speech can then be understood as an entangled phenomenon which is no longer monopolized by its lingual meanings. Instead, speech consists of an entanglement of both lingual meanings, acoustic phonetics and numerous other constituents that I do not touch upon here. This explains why Dragon and I can both recognise speech, while understanding it differently. Whereas I, as human user, attune to and so foreground the speech through its semiotics and lingual meanings, Dragon listens to different constituents of speech. Thus, speech might come to matter differently for Dragon than for me, even though we perceive the same sounds and speak of the same phenomenon.

Listening that Speaks

Dragon's ability to listen to speech affects what speech does. Firstly, it confines speech to its aural spectrum, whereas humans might recognise speech through a vast array of sensory preceptors, including both the audible and visual (Lipari, "Rhetoric's other" 230). Secondly, speech becomes understood primarily as phonetic speech structures. It becomes apparent that my speech here no longer serves to "convey a message" in the lingual sense that Hawkins speaks of (374). Therefore, the derivative and indexical meanings of speech, which are traditionally imbued with agency, become the adjunctive rather than primary constituent of speech in the relation between me and Dragon.

This discrepancy between Dragon's understanding of speech and my own, occasionally results in misunderstandings and mistranslations of my speech. Distinct words, phrases or sentences might be confused by Dragon as they are phonetically similar (e.g. 'bird' instead of 'word', or 'attribute it' instead of 'attributed') or when the lingual meanings of words — which Dragon attempts to identify by analysing phonemes in context, so understanding the utterance in relation to its auditory context (i.e. duration and location of utterances of vowels, number of syllables, emphasis placed on certain vowels, etc.) — are misinterpreted (e.g. 'to' instead of 'too' or 'two').[4] It is then notable that even though my speech or saying precedes the said, which is effectuated on

the computer, Dragon's method of recognising speech through its phonetic structures interferes with what I was saying, at times to the extent that the said might no longer correspond with what I was saying. As such, Dragon's listening subordinates my speech to what Lipari calls "a kind of listening that speaks" ("Listening Otherwise" 45).

Even though my speech then dictates the commands for the computer, the agency of speech can no longer be "aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 826). Instead, Dragon's practice of listening is characterised by the mediation through which the relation between Dragon and I is established (Bodie and Crick 112). Dragon thus *speaks*, so to say, through listening and as such subordinates my speech. Consequently, the agency of listening can be found in what it *does* (Srader 96; Stuart 64): in other words, what it does and does not allow for. As Gallagher et al. posit, listening also concerns the responsiveness of (nonhuman and human) bodies encountering sounds

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(4) Dragon NaturallySpeaking is able to 'learn' in the interaction with its user. Dragon thus learns from mistakes: if certain words are frequently interchanged (e.g. 'attribute it' instead of 'attributed'), it is able to identify this pattern. Dragon will translate the utterance into the other, phonetically similar word when it recognises that the user frequently dictates correction commands regarding that particular utterance.

(620). Dragon listens to (or for) speech in order to effectuate a response on the computer. Although Dragon's ability to listen, then, does not effectuate a common understanding of speech, our common ground resides in the successful operationalisation of the computer.

Although I have focused primarily on Dragon's ability to recognise the speech of a particular language, the successful operationalisation depends on multiple constituents of speech. Dragon is, therefore, also (en)able(d) to attune to the voice of its user. Every new user is required to make a user profile, whereby s/he provides Dragon with different information, such as age and the country where the user is from. This information allows Dragon to better attune to its speaker's voice. Dragon is, for instance, able to specify the pitch and tone of people from a specific age group, based on all the data that Dragon has collected over the past twenty years ("Dragon NaturallySpeaking"). Dragon also has a number of built in language accents, which are algorithms that attempt to emulate those types of speech (Lenke). The user is asked to "[h]elp Dragon understand how you pronounce words" and can then choose between a limited selection of accents: 'standard', 'Australian accented English', 'Indian accented English' or 'Southeast Asian accented English'. Finally, the user has to do a mandatory tutorial during which Dragon gets acquainted with and attuned to the user's actual voice and speech patterns.

As such, Dragon is able to listen to the speech of its particular user. By drawing on and adding to its existing knowledge of speech, Dragon is (en)able(d) to better predict the acoustic realisation of spoken utterances and to actualise the user's intention that is vocalized through speech. Realising that listening creates relationships and shapes the content of the encounter also changes the user's relationship to and utilization of speech (Srader 95). In relation to Dragon, my speech no longer serves me to express myself or to be understood. Instead, my speech has to be recognised 'correctly' by Dragon in order to actualize my potential to operate a computer. As Tyler Reigeluth infers, a relation to one's self is always simultaneously a relation to others, by which the subject becomes object for another and inversely (247).

Thus, while I initially conceived of Dragon as my tool for writing, it is my speech that has become the object of Dragon's listening. I come to recognise myself as *being* listened to. In this relation, my speech is only effective and successful if it is recognised by Dragon in the way that I intend. Listening to speech is, however, essentially selective, as any listener of speech is determinative of how speech comes to matter. As set out above, Dragon's listening decentres the importance of semiotics and lingual meanings from the act of speaking, therewith effecting and mediating the way in which my speech is put into operation. The act of listening is, therefore, not merely an act

of simply receiving and obeying: listening *does*. It is this *doing* of listening that is then greatly determinative of the relation between listener and speaker — between Dragon and I — and which consequently prevents the listening party from being discarded as a mere obedient subordinate.

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Niall Martin

Radiant Language and Entangled Listening in Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer*

abstract Niall Martin mediates on the noisily entangled relations of listening, writing, and our perception of culture in the aftermath of nuclear events. Thinking through the material traces, containment, and waste of the Chernobyl disaster, Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997) opens up a reconceptualization of the Chernobyl

disaster as an event that alters the nature of testimony, challenging the LOST SONIC SOURCE of an event that is simultaneously in the past and yet to come. Chernobyl Prayer's more than human perspective explores the exclusion zone as a sonic space in which radiation becomes audible through the silence of other species. In this way, sound extends itself to that which is present as well as absent. This reading of *Chernobyl Prayer* rethinks our understanding of sound as species-specific and in doing so acknowledges the displaced position of the auditor.

Besides being an oral history of the 1987 Chernobyl disaster, Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997) constitutes an extended meditation on the implications of the explosion in the Soviet nuclear power plant for the practices of listening involved in writing oral history and a post-nuclear world more generally. Some

of those implications are evident in her interview with a returnee to the Chernobyl exclusion zone, who tells Alexievich:

> A reporter came to interview me. I could see he was thirsty. I brought him a mug of water, but he took his own water out of a bag. Mineral water. He was embarrassed, started making excuses. Needless to say our interview went nowhere. I couldn't be open with him. I'm not a robot or a computer or a lump of metal! He thought he could sit there drinking his mineral water, being afraid even to touch my mug, and I was supposed to pour out my heart to him, let him into my soul. (232-233)

Listening in this context, it is clear, is an activity intimately entangled with questions of risk, fear, and trust. It is not simply an orientation to the sonic so much as an exposure to the sonic that has the potential to produce a physiological alteration within the listener.

In thus situating a post-nuclear listening practice within a suddenly palpable environment of risk, Alexievich's text invites us to reconceptualise the relationship between speech and writing. Rather than writing as lending permanence to something seen as ephemeral — the traditional model of oral history — after Chernobyl, writing as a listening practice becomes entangled within a wider problematic

of containment and waste. Thus, although the idea of exposure is literal in the example above, Alexievich's text also attends carefully to Chernobyl's more conceptual implications for oral history as a listening practice. For Alexievich, Chernobyl must be seen as "the beginning of a new history: it offers not only knowledge but also prescience, because it challenges our old ideas about ourselves and the world" (24). It is a new history because it inaugurates a new temporality. As one of her informants puts it, "Chernobyl is not over, it has only just started" (Alexievich 263). This is true in two senses: the radioactive material released in the explosion will last 200,000 years—there is no post-Chernobyl culture in this sense—and at the same time we are powerless to develop a culture that can accommodate that fact.

The violence arising from this conjunction of anthropogenic power and powerlessness is evident in the testimony of Chernobyl's victims, who find themselves ejected from the community of the normatively human precisely because there is no culture for dealing with the testimony of Chernobyl. The tone of this violence is set in the opening monologue when the widow of a fireman recalls how she was told by a nurse that she must no longer think of her husband as her husband but as "a highly contaminated radioactive object" (Alexievich 16). This imperative is repeated endlessly throughout the text: this is not your home, your orchard, your cow, your cat,

your table, your door — it is a highly contaminated radioactive object. The violence implicit in this demand extends to all those exposed to radiation who, as subjects of biopolitical observation, become in one way or another a problem of containment — of waste.

Susan Squier is helpful in conceptualizing the peculiar nature of this testimony as waste when she suggests that while "language helps structure our sense of possibilities," it is the influence of "material conditions [that] shape and reshape what we can put into words" (57). To imagine the post-Chernobyl culture, as the testimony demands, effectively entails thinking how the material event of Chernobyl enters into the language in which its testimony is delivered. It entails thinking Chernobyl as an event which alters the nature of testimony and with it the relation of speech and inscription. Specifically, it challenges the model of writing as the material inscription of a 'lost' sonic source, in speaking of an event which is both in the past and yet still to come, and which thus refuses ideas of a linear futurity. *Chernobyl Prayer* encourages us to see speech and inscription as noisily entangled in the same material conditions of possibility.

Paul Hegarty, commenting on Henri Bergson's description of sound as offering the prospect of sequence and of narrative, suggests that we might think of sound as the "privileged site of encounter between event and sense," for "sound offers the prospect of sequence ... a narrative to which it belongs

or interrupts" (16). Yet, *Chernobyl Prayer* reveals this is only possible if we also privilege the perspective of a normatively human subject. That encounter takes a different form when the perspective of the normatively human is displaced and we adopt, for example, what Stacy Alaimo terms the perspective of the MORE THAN HUMAN (12). From this materialist perspective, inscription appears not as the loss of the sonic but as its persistence—its trace as waste.

It is this more than human perspective which resonates with the testimony in *Chernobyl Prayer*. The rhetoric of loss that informs the relation between the sonic and its inscription in oral history—insofar as it perpetuates the ideas of separation and containment addressed to the victims of Chernobyl—seems wholly inappropriate for thinking the relationship of sound and mark within their testimony. Or, to put it in Squier's terms, the language spoken in *Chernobyl Prayer* testifies to a materiality which is in conflict with inherited ideas of the normative, which preclude any attempt to discover sense within its horror.

In fact, *Chernobyl Prayer*, in its depiction of the exclusion zone as a sonic space, itself provides some idea of what a more than human listening might comprise. Because radiation cannot be detected by a bodily sensory apparatus, it effectively inducts us into a world that we cannot know as humans. Radiation cannot be heard but is nevertheless audible in the silence of other species attuned to its presence. Hence,

anecdotes abound of HEARING the radiation in the sudden silence of other species — bees, wasps, birds, may-bugs — who announced the explosion long before the official news.

In effect, the zone produces an awareness of entangled listening as extended listening and of the inadequacy of a species-specific relation to sound. This is not simply a case of augmenting human senses with those of other species. Rather, it alters the nature of sound itself. The sonic event is no longer simply the site of the privileged encounter between event and sense but becomes an encounter with something that is both present and absent. However, in those silences we also hear our displacement from the position of auditor: as species we hear what our environment hears — and, in listening for silences in that environment, we hear our own displaced position as auditors within the Anthropocene.

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Emilio Aguilar

Immersed in Multiplicity: Subjective Time in a Time Crystal

abstract In this paper I look at “Peace for Triple Piano”, a video which represents a musical canon both in sound and image. I call this peculiar form, whose structure is endowed with symmetry in both time and space together, an AUDIOVISUAL CANON. Such a structure is what in physics is known as a TIME CRYSTAL. I argue that this time crystal creates a temporal interference

because, in this video, objects relate simultaneously to each other beyond the boundaries of what we commonly perceive as presence. Through a reading of Michel Serres, I propose a model to integrate this multiplicity of time based on hearing as opposed to listening. Finally, through Serres's concept of QUASI-OBJECT, I argue that this video, by making its audience integrate multiple networks, constructs a QUASI-AUDIENCE.

How would we perceive a space in which different temporalities overlap with each other and how would this affect our perception of time? The mathematicians and artists ViHart and Henry Segerman create such a virtual space in the music video "Peace for Triple Piano" (henceforth PfTP), where they visually represent a canon—an imitative compositional technique used in music. I call this peculiar form an AUDIOVISUAL CANON, the structure of which is endowed with symmetry in both time and space together. In this audiovisual canon, different present moments are

perceived as equally present, and this produces what I call a TEMPORAL INTERFERENCE. This paper will analyze this temporal interference in relation to questions of subjectivity. Drawing on Michel Serres, I propose a relational model of understanding subject and object based on the sense of hearing, one that attempts to integrate the multiplicity present in PfTP. I distinguish between hearing and listening to argue that, while listening is a practice in which the roles of subject and object are stable, hearing complicates this divide as it is inherently relational. This way of perceiving relationally brings me to the concept of the QUASI-OBJECT to argue that this audiovisual canon, by providing instructions on how it is to be navigated, turns the viewer-listener into its object, thus constructing what I call a QUASI-AUDIENCE.

This video performs a well-known canon—albeit of unknown origin—whose text is taken from the Roman Catholic Mass: "Dona Nobis Pacem" (Latin for "Give us peace"). A canon consists of one melody that is sung by multiple voices, each starting at a different moment, in such a way that all voices overlap in time, creating a harmony. This canon consists of three phrases and each phrase lasts twenty seconds. The video starts with the first phrase of the melody. When this voice arrives at the second phrase, another voice starts singing the melody from the beginning, overlapping with the first. This process repeats once again, adding a third voice. In other words, when the

three voices are singing, all three phrases are sounding simultaneously.

The first time I played this video, I encountered ViHart in a room, picking up some sheet music from a music-stand and sitting at what looks like two halves of a piano. She begins to sing and play the piano (fig. 1). I recognize that the round lines of the roof are signs of a distorted perspective; the shape of her hand reveals that the image I am seeing is not rectilinear but curvilinear. This image looks like part of a sphere projected onto two dimensions; in that case, the two halves of the keyboard are, actually, part of the same piano. This manipulation of perspective makes me feel self-reflexive about the way I make sense of these images: what kind of space is this?

Then, another person, Henry Segerman, appears in the frame. He comes in from the right side at the same time that ViHart gives him the sheet music and exits the frame, also from the right. Segerman hands the music back to her. Although I do not see ViHart, I can hear her from my right headphone, singing and playing some high keys on a piano. Wearing headphones makes me particularly sensitive to these technological manipulations: these sounds provide me with spatial information and, in turn, make me question the way I process this information. I ask myself whether there is another piano in the room. Then, I see her come back into the frame, hand a hammer to Segerman and sit back at the piano. She gives a sign and Segerman

uses the hammer to strike a triangle (fig. 2). This is the beginning of the canon's second phrase.

When ViHart starts singing the second phrase, I also hear the beginning of the first phrase, this time coming from the right headphone rather than from both. The second phrase is the only one in which the triangle is played. After Segerman hangs up the triangle he walks anticlockwise, leaves the hammer on the piano and walks out of the frame before the third phrase starts. I see ViHart in the video singing the third phrase, the lowest of all, at the same time that I hear the second phrase coming from my right headphone and the first one coming from my left headphone. My headphones continue to give me spatial information and I wonder what kind of space these sounds are creating.

A few seconds after the third phrase starts, I see ViHart entering the frame from the left side. But, wait a minute—I now see two ViHarts present in the video (fig. 3). The ViHart that just entered the frame places the sheet music on the music stand, plays some high keys on the piano, then takes the hammer that Segerman left and leaves the frame again. The ViHart that is still sitting on the stool takes the sheet music the other ViHart just left. At this moment, the canon and its choreography start all over again. How can this double presence of ViHart be explained? We should recall that ViHart left the frame during the first phrase. What we see now seems to correspond to the audio of that first phrase. This double presence is thus evidence

that this canon is not simply performed in sound, but also, somehow, in images. What technique makes this possible? And what kind of virtual spacetime is this technique creating?

The Multiple Presence of Objects

It was the strangeness of seeing two different presences of ViHart in the same frame that made me realize that there was more to see in this video: I discovered then that I was looking at a so-called 360° video. In a 360° video, we are able to drag the image of the video to look around the room where the video was made. When doing this we realize that by turning 360° we go around this room not once but three times. In other words, we need turn only 120° to go around the room once. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to each of these rooms as a sector. When turning from one sector to the next, we notice that each sector shows one different temporal version of the melody: in each sector the events are shifted twenty seconds in time, just like the different phrases of a canon. It becomes clear now that this video indeed visually performs the overlapping temporalities of this canon's musical form. The video technique used here creates what I call an audiovisual canon: a canon both in sound and image.

I perceive this space from an axis around which I rotate and, given the temporal difference between the sectors, I move not only in space but also in time.

The authors of this video explain in "The Making of 'Peace for Triple Piano'" that a structure with such characteristics is known in physics as a TIME CRYSTAL (Segerman). This is a structure which has a pattern that repeats itself in time and space *together*—in contrast to normal crystals which are structured in three-dimensional patterns that unfold only in space. The concept of the time crystal was first theorized in 2012 by Nobel Prize winner Franck Wilczek. Since then, experimental realizations of time crystals have been developed in two different laboratories in the Universities of Maryland and Harvard(1). PfTP uses this model to create an audiovisual technique that seeks to visually represent the overlapping temporalities of a musical canon. Strictly speaking, the time crystal is formed when the video enters a loop—between 01:00 and 03:00. During the loop, the video's structure results in a pattern endowed with symmetry in both time and space together. The time crystal contains three temporal versions of the footage of the events that took place outside the camera—what I will call room-

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(1) Here time crystal refers to a physical system and not to the concept of CRYSTAL OF TIME introduced by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema II: The Time Image* as a metaphor to theorize techniques used in cinema. For Deleuze, a crystal of time is an image that takes the viewer out of the actual world by presenting "two sides, actual and virtual at the same time" (69). This type of image condenses aspects of time by including both the actual (present) and the virtual (non-present) in it.

events—which repeat in a loop every minute. In other words, the room-events take place multiple times in this crystal at different moments and places. To navigate between these events, we can move in space, by dragging the image, and in time, by using the video progress bar. In this time crystal, space, and time are structured in such a way that, at any given sector in the video, the sector on the right shows the events that took place twenty seconds back in time, and the sector on the left shows the events that are about to take place, twenty seconds forward in time. This means that if we turn one sector to the right and go forward twenty seconds, we travel to another point in the crystal where we can see the same events taking place. The operations that allow us to move between equivalent moments in both time and space are called symmetries. Other symmetries are: moving two sectors to the right and going forward forty seconds; or moving one sector to the left and going backwards 20 seconds. In both cases we move towards the same event, or an equivalent one.(2) The set of operations used to navigate between equivalent events is called in mathematics a Symmetry group. This is another way of saying that the relation

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(2) The same thing would be true if we were to navigate the sheet music of this canon, having the three melodies written one under the other, and the edges of the page connected, forming a tube—the horizontal axis representing time and the vertical space.

between the events in this video has a precise group structure, an observation I will return to later.

Going around the sphere, I discover that while some objects are present three times, others are present twice, and the sheet music is present only once. I will refer to each of these as object-impressions. I prefer this term over impression of an object because the latter fails to account for the fact that impressions are not independent from the object itself, nor should they be reduced to it. We should also not consider object-impressions to be copies, because a copy implies the existence of an original, and in a time crystal all impressions are equally real and present. I also discover that while some objects (like ViHart and the triangle) stay in the same sector, others (like the sheet music, the hammer and Segerman) are able to travel from one sector to the next, either clockwise or anticlockwise. The fact that some objects move in between sectors makes me perceive this sphere not simply as three repeated versions of the same room-event but on a different level, as a unity in itself. In other words, we can say that we perceive these images as belonging to two distinct realities or networks. On one level, we perceive the time-crystal-events — the sphere as one system with its own characteristics — while on a different level, we recognize that the three sectors are different temporal versions of the room-events that took place in the particular room where this video was made. Therefore, this video shows a multiplicity of networks.

The question now is how we perceive this multiplicity. In the following frame, ViHart meets and looks in the direction of ViHart (fig. 4). ViHart-impressions are the only object-impressions in PfTP that are seen together in the same frame. Despite the fact that I see two of them, I know that they are two different temporal versions of the same ViHart-object. Nevertheless, they coexist, they show up together, they interact, they play the same piano, they even acknowledge each other. One is already included in the time of the other. Despite their time difference, they are equally present. They are the same and yet they differ. I call this an interference: a difference that strikes against, a noise in the channel of my perception. I will soon return to noise, but for now I define it as that which is perceived but which resists signification: noise is what must be filtered out in order to clearly perceive an object. It is what stands in between us and the object of our perception. In the case of this frame, the presence of the different ViHart-impressions stands between me and my sense of time, and it is in this way that I consider it to be an interference. How is it possible that in this time crystal we are able to perceive something as both one and more than one at the same time?

Subjective Time in a Time Crystal

This video is structured as a timecrystal. That is, a structure whose symmetries take place both in time

and space together. As mentioned above, the relation between these symmetries creates a group structure which is perceived by the viewer-listener as a multiplicity. In a time crystal, space and time behave in similar ways, and this leads to experiencing the present-moment as somehow shared between three different moments. All three present-moments share a place in the present-moment of the viewer-listener, who therefore perceives three different moments (objects) as equally present (as one). In other words, in this time crystal we are able to perceive an object as several impressions and still be able to make up for the fact that each impression, although complete in itself, is also part of a unity. Consequently, time perception becomes a matter of *relation*—of how things affect each other in the moment, rather than a matter of *being*—of the origin of things.

This time crystal I am trying to inhabit resists my understanding, interferes with my perception and makes me drift from the question of origins to the question of relations. Through a reading of Michel Serres, I propose that the sense of hearing is more apt than vision for the task of finding relations. In *Genesis*, first published in 1982, Serres writes: "I hear without clear frontiers, without divining an isolated source, hearing is better at integrating than analyzing, the ear knows how to lose track"(7). According to him, hearing involves much more than only the ears; it actually involves the whole body: all of the skin. That is to say

that hearing implies an immersion in a temporal space. It includes not only the object of our perception but also the network where we relate to that object. As a model, the sense of hearing is opposed to that of vision, through which the subject perceives a world from a point of view where they are not included. When we think, we become virtual and infinite; when we hear, we become embodied and finite. When we hear, we are immersed in spacetime. Once we start hearing the space around us, we realize that, in our perception, there is always background noise. For Serres, background noise is "the ground of our perception, absolutely uninterrupted, it is our perennial sustenance, the element of the software of all our logic" (7). Noise moves beyond the most important ontological divides: it "settles in subjects as well as in objects, in hearing as well as in space, in the observers as well as in the observed" (Serres 13). As I mentioned above, noise is an obstacle to perception, but it is also the condition of its possibility. Perception starts when the subject differentiates an object from the background noise—each object being one possibility out of the multiple, one possibility out of the set of all possible things. As soon as a phenomenon appears, it leaves the background noise so as to be perceived. Therefore, noise cannot be a phenomenon: "noise is not a matter of phenomenology, so it is a matter of being itself" (Serres 13).

Serres concludes the introduction of *Genesis* by saying that the "multiple had been thought, perhaps,

but it hadn't been sounded"(8). If we think multiplicity as pure difference, it follows that in multiplicity we cannot perceive or differentiate particular objects as the source of sound. Indeed, for Serres, multiplicity sounds to us like background noise. The fact that noise moves beyond the separation between subjects and objects means that noise is produced by both the object and the subject. In other words, noise is also the "trace of the observer"(61). The condition for being a subject, an observer, is that the s/he must make "less noise than the noise transmitted by the object observed"(61). Serres thus defines cognition as the "subtraction of the noise received and of the noise made by the subject"(61). If noise is also the trace of the observer, then hearing is a model of understanding that takes into account the noise that we, as subjects, produce in our relations. If pure multiplicity sounds like background noise, could time also be sounded? And if so, what would it sound like? Serres writes that he is:

> Well aware that time has no unity, no moment, no instant, no beginning, no end […] For all the times that I've been able to tell, all of them were unities. I am now attempting to rethink time as a pure multiplicity(6).

He is invested in thinking the multiple as such, "without arresting it through unity"(6). Since the form of PfTP emerges from a musical form, it follows that integrating

its temporal complexity should be comparable to the process of listening to a canon. That is to say that if we are to integrate the overlapping temporalities of this video without reducing them to one linear temporal channel, we should first learn how to integrate the different voices that sing this canon. As explained above, this canon consists of one melody that sounds three times, each version occupying a different temporal space. When listening to a canon, two different processes can be discerned. On the one hand, one tries to remember the melody so that every time that there is a new beginning, one can recognize it by recollecting the melody from memory. When this happens, the melody which comes to the fore sounds as if it were more present than the rest. On the other hand, one can perceive how the different temporal versions of the melody relate to each other at any moment; that is, one can listen for relations. In the former case, one is searching for origins, while in the latter one is drawing lateral connections.

Listening as a model of understanding implies the subject paying attention to the object that sounds; the roles of subject and object are thus stable. Hearing, on the other hand, is a model in which the subject is affected by the sounding object, meaning that the object is also an agent. This complicates the divide between subject and object. Hearing, as a relational model of understanding, includes not only the sounds/noises of the environment but also the position

of—and the sounds/noises produced by—the person perceiving. In hearing, our perception of time is affected by sounds/noises coming from a multiplicity of objects/subjects. As such, hearing as a model of understanding allows us to integrate a multiplicity of temporalities, turning what was once interference into information. As a result of this model, a relational object arises that is "multiple in space and mobile in time"(91). This new object has far-reaching consequences for how we understand the objective and the subjective.

Serres refers to a new kind of object that, instead of being a unity distinct in itself, gains significance in its capacity to order social relations. This QUASI-OBJECT is an object that is "more a contract than a thing, it is more a matter of the horde than of the world"(88). If social relations are understood as contracts, objects, Serres argues, are precisely what stabilizes those relations between subjects. As an example, Serres takes a ball around which players move: the ball maintains a "nucleus of organization"(87-88), which is to say that its meaning is not located in the ball itself—in its essence or distinctness as a ball—but within the relational network formed around it. A quasi-object is thus an object that organizes our social interactions through its capacity to designate us subjects.

In *The Parasite*, first published in 1980, Serres writes: that a quasi-object designates a subject "who, without it, would not be a subject"(225). It becomes clear that subject and object are not ontological categories;

instead, they are roles designated by a relation. Participation, for Serres, is the act of making the quasi-object circulate in the network of relations where it functions: "playing is nothing else but making oneself the attribute of the ball as a substance" (226). A QUASI-SUBJECT is thus a subject who is capable of abandoning their individuality — their determination as subject — to become a constitutive part of a network. When this happens, "being is abolished for the relation" (228). The opposite of a quasi-object is an object "outside the realm of relationships" (*Genesis* 90), which is the object that science strives for. Nevertheless, Serres argues, the fact that the objects of science have become "fetishes to be worshiped" implies that they actually already belong to the realm of social relationships (*Genesis* 91).

Just as PfTP shows two distinct networks or realities, one can consider this video through the concept of a quasi-object in at least two different levels of determination. On one level, PfTP can be seen as a model that visually represents the multiple relations that take place simultaneously in a given network between subjects and objects. For instance, the hammer and the sheet music can be identified as quasi-objects because they organize the way that ViHart and Segerman relate to each other. As in the example of playing ball, where the body of the players becomes the object of the ball rather than the other way around, when ViHart and Segerman pass

these objects around, they become the attributes of those objects at the service of the performance. On a different level, PfTP is itself an object located within a historical and social context which determines the way people relate to each other. At the time of writing, this video had been viewed 156,377 times on YouTube. Many viewer-listeners write in the comments how much time it took them to discover the complexities of this video, its time crystal structure and its multiple networks. I argue that when we start integrating this complexity, moving in between different levels of determination, we ourselves become quasi-subjects. It is as though this video turns its viewer-listeners into its object, changing position with its subjects. The video constructs a kind of audience; the moment we start integrating the different levels of determination at work in PfTP, we thus become a QUASI-AUDIENCE.

Taking into account the fact that quasi-objects determine us as subjects, it follows that we become determinate when we think of ourselves as part of a network. For instance, it is not the same experience for us as subjects to think of this video in general—as any video—as it is for us to consider it as a particular video available on YouTube, uploaded on 26 February 2018, with a certain number of views and comments. In the first case, one's singularity is not displaced, while in the second case one becomes part of a network, determinate, a number, one out of hundreds of thousands of people. In other words, the less

determinate that I am, the less I include myself in the networks of relationships in which I engage and the more I behave as a point of origin for the things that I perceive — as is the case in vision. In contrast, when I think of myself as a relation, I am able to include myself in the networks in which I function: I become a quasi-subject – as is the case in hearing as a model of understanding. Therefore, in order to integrate the multiple networks taking place in PfTP, we must first be able to interchange positions with our objects so as to become the object of our objects. Then, through the quasi-objects, one is able to move in between different levels of determination — between the time-crystal-events and the room-events — in order to draw connections between the networks.

In order to demonstrate this, I ask why is it that in the sphere we find two hammers and only one piece of sheet music at all times? If I am to conceive of this question as a quasi-subject, I must first observe the way the quasi-sheet-music and the quasi-hammer relate to their networks. Since PfTP is a visual representation of a canon, I start by asking the sheet music: what part of the melody of this canon are you hearing? Then I follow the sheet music around the sphere to hear what it hears. I learn that the sheet music is present only during the first phrase of the canon, which means that it is traveling from the first phrase in one sector to the first phrase in the next sector to the right. This indicates that at the level of

the room-events, it takes twenty seconds for the sheet music to return to its place by turning around the piano clockwise. At the level of the time crystal, it takes three phrases for it to go around the sphere. This means that, at this level, the sheet music manages to somehow skip the second and third phrase. In contrast, the hammer is present twice in the whole sphere. When observing the hammer, I learn that it takes two phrases for it to move from one sector to the next one on the left. This also means that, at the room-event-level, it takes two phrases for the hammer to return to its place by turning around the piano anticlockwise. The hammer hears two phrases in total, the second phrase (in which it is being used to play the triangle), the first half of the third phrase (when it rests on the piano), and the second half of the first phrase (when it is taken by ViHart, and also the few seconds when the hammer and the sheet music are closest to each other). Therefore, at the time-crystal-level, the hammer manages to skip the second half of the third phrase and the first half of the first. It takes two phrases for it to go around the piano (or to the next sector) and six phrases to go around the sphere (or around the piano three times). In this way, I am moving in between levels of determination — from the time crystal to the events outside the camera — to draw connections between the networks. The more connections I am able to draw, the more I am able to integrate the different networks. Since different

networks or realities emerge at the same time from the images in the screen, I conclude that these are actually quasi-images. Quasi-images are a way of thinking different visual realities that are in constant relation to each other.

If I am able to perceive different temporal relations in PfTP emerging from quasi-images, it must be because time is not simply linear. Serres writes: "The customary, I hardly dare call it ordinary or basic, experience of time is that it, at times, is composed of instants, and that, at times, it flows by, devoid of units"(*Genesis* 115). PfTP uses symmetry in both time and space to create a kind of temporal interference in the viewer-listener, which exposes the fact that time, before being composed of instants, is a noisy multiplicity.

> Time is not, as a rule, a line, although it may become one, and then start selecting, sorting, eliminating, getting all at once bushier and bushier with bifurcations: another time on top of time, appears; time, nonlinear, is, most often, a sheet or a field. (*Genesis* 115)

Time, although sometimes one, is never simply one. This makes me reflect on my own subjective time: I realize that my sense of presentness depends on a networks of relations in which I am included, and that, in turn, I am able to move in between different

networks which designate me a subject. The actual world already has a virtual organization attached to it by social interactions: subjects relate to each other through objects that slow down those same interactions. The account of these interactions is another way of speaking about history. In a similar vein, Serres argues that it is the object that "makes our history slow" (*Genesis* 87). Every time we recognize an object, we do so from a particular network which gives us a level of social determination and a sense of time. This means that objects are always taking part in our social interactions, and in turn, it is our social history that determines the way we recognize those objects. In PfTP, the symmetric structure formed between time and space that interferes with our intelligibility (when two temporal versions of the same object relate to each other) is the same structure that prevents us from investing in perceiving one impression as more real or present than another. Through *hearing* relations as a model of integrating multiplicity, we come to perceive this interference as a multiplicity of temporalities.

Conclusion: Ontological Reflections

"Peace for Triple Piano" performs what I have called an audiovisual canon, that which creates multiplicity in time and space. In order to integrate such multiplicity, I have presented a model of understanding based on the sense of hearing. Serres argues that hearing is

better for integrating this multiplicity than vision because sound affects the whole body. I have argued further that hearing differs from listening in that the latter reproduces stable subject/object relationships. Through the concept of the quasi-object, I argue that time arises from a noisy relation which cannot itself be reduced to either subjectivity or objectivity. This is because perception necessarily takes place in a time which is itself part of a sociohistorical reality. Only by ignoring the noise that emerges from the multiplicity of networks where time takes place — by ignoring the noisy complexity of the relational networks in which we participate — can we come to perceive of an object as completely external to our position/place as historical subjects. PfTP posits that the networks in which we are included designate us as subjects and give us a sense of time. This video, by asking its audience to integrate a multiplicity of networks, constructs a kind of audience that I have called a quasi-audience — that is, an audience that exceeds the categories of subject and object.

We relate to our environment by dividing its multiplicity into unities — into objects. Although this is a necessary practice, it also brings with it a kind of noise which makes us somehow deaf to the fact that the objects of our perception are never simply external to our social realm. This is a way of reducing the alterity of the non-living, of imposing control over everything that we consider as not us. In short, this is a practice of

making boundaries. Encountering historical (quasi-) objects requires an ethical practice. I want to point out that, from my reading of a non-historical and non-political object like PfTP, ethical questions also arise. Through the reading of this audiovisual canon, I argue that if we are to perceive multiplicity, we need to start including our own spacetime in our perception in such a way that we can question the position and the time from which we perceive. According to Serres, what we perceive as our subjectivity — the I — is never really a singularity: "The I is nobody in particular, it is […] an open and translucent welcome of a multiplicity of thoughts, it is therefore the possible" (*Genesis* 31). To gain determination by thinking in relations instead of in origins is an ethical gesture, that of abandoning one's individuality to temporally become more than oneself.

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fig. 1

ViHart playing the piano with sheet music in hand, screenshot from ViHart, "Peace for Triple Piano." *YouTube*, 26 February 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcRW3FMuttY, 0:06.

fig. 2

Segerman striking the triangle, screenshot from ViHart, "Peace for Triple Piano." *YouTube*, 26 February 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcRW3FMuttY, 0:29.

fig. 3

Two ViHarts, screenshot from ViHart, "Peace for Triple Piano." *YouTube*, 26 February 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcRW3FMuttY, 0:58.

fig. 4

ViHart looking at ViHart, screenshot from ViHart, "Peace for Triple Piano." *YouTube*, 26 February 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcRW3FMuttY, 3:05.

Stepan Lipatov and Sissel Møller

On How to Pry Beyond the Image Frame with CC (Closed Captions)

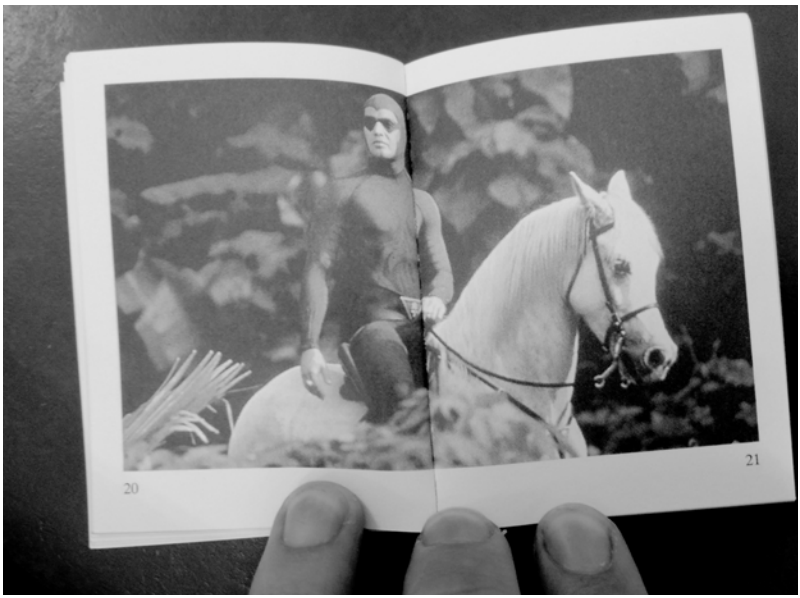
abstract Text and image—understood separately—are the bread and butter of graphic design. However, typography, when well executed, can also turn text to image. Rejecting this distinction, therefore, paves the way to forms of

listening without sound. Take for example Egyptian hieroglyphs. As a predecessor of the Latin alphabet, they reanimate the seemingly abstract shapes of more familiar letters. As simple attempts to illustrate a word or a sound, the hieroglyphs stare back at us as monkeys, houses and other objects or concepts. Similarly, Japanese kanji's hieroglyph for 'exit' (出) appears to literally crawl away from us. The two previously sovereign concepts of image and text, then, appear to merge or blur across a spectrum, or — in graphic design terms — a 'gradient', with text on one end and image on the other. With this in mind, for this first issue of Soapbox, we have prepared a collection of images with borrowed captions, the combination inspired by closed captioning (CC): the transcription of non-speech sounds in television for

hearing impaired people. In our opinion, this phenomenon is interesting not only because of the image and text relation, but also because of how it transforms sound to text. Despite seeming alien to graphic design, sound does often enter into typography. Take for example concrete poetry, in which typesetting takes precedence over verbal significance. There, readers discover the sound of silence found in the white space between letters and words. When reading concrete poetry, we begin to listen with our eyes, as when we look at the crawling hieroglyph. Text and image in that sense connect strongly to meaning and mouthing—which brings us back to listening. There are plenty of poets and typographers who have discovered the playfulness of sound within typography. Emily Dickinson's

idiosyncratic punctuation — the famous dashes — seem bold and surprising in her manuscripts, and her bold spacing — breaking — off — sentences — make perfect sense in the logic of metal typesetting. (Interestingly, in Russian the dash was originally called a 'silence', referring directly to its verbal function in speech.) These typographical techniques give her poems an additional lyricism when read aloud. Even though her focus is on how it would be heard and read, Dickinson is today a typographic inspiration for the graphic designer. Inspired by the language of hieroglyphs, poets, and non-speech sounds, we, as graphic designers, lay the foundations for a practice of listening using only image and text. The combination of visual and textual elements deliver an audible experience

in this collection and results in an interesting dimensional effect. We enjoy imagining that a caption describing a sound with no present source in the image rewrites the narrative of the scene and induces in the reader some kind of 'visual listening practice', perhaps as the shortest route to the deciphering of the scene.



[music stops]

[indistinct chatter]

[applause continues]

[engine powering down]

[screaming like a sissy]

[laughs]

[breathes heavily]

[mouthing words]

[inaudible]

[people laughing in the distance]

[speaking german]

[silence]

[dog barking loudly]

[whimsical, ambling melody continues]

biography Sissel Vejby Møller (1994) and Stepan Lipatov (1989) are both graduating students at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. As graphic designers they experiment with the language between text and image.

Erica Moukarzel

One Megaphone and Two Thousand Bottles: Listening to Frames of a Mistransmitted Protest

abstract This essay de-listens to the dominant voice of a politician addressing 2000 protesters through a comparison of depictions by two media channels. It positions the image of the politician's power in the loudness of his voice, so easily broadcasted on TV screens across

the nation, as it upstages and speaks over the main subject of the story: the protesters' precarious position. By translating their voices—expressions of their precarity—into visible objects, the essay works to balance out the power play of the protest, equalizing the voices in the space and showing how they made themselves heard on a visual scale. It uses the concept of THE FRAME to dive into the vulnerabilities of the singular politician and the plural alliance in the space of protest, playing with their depictions to restore power and voice to those whose voice the image corrupted.

During a protest against a tax hike proposed by the Lebanese government in March 2017, a black jeep with tinted windows pulled up to Riad al-Solh square and out stepped Prime Minister Saad el Hariri, armed with a megaphone. During this attempt to appease the demonstration and ostensibly to start

a dialogue with the protesters, he was met with a shower of insults and empty plastic bottles. Although spoken through the megaphone, his address could barely be heard, even at the front of the nearly 2000 protesters. Caught and televised by the few media outlets that managed to gain access to the Prime Minister by pushing past riot police and reaching their microphones through his servicemen, his speech did, however, reach a wider audience on television screens across the nation. After no more than two minutes, Hariri retreated from the square, heavily protected by his bodyguards — leaving the crowd angrier and more animated than before his arrival.

What I am interested in in this paper is the friction between the different portrayals of this protest in the media, and how they shift our understanding of the events. Between two videos of Hariri's speech, taken from separate news channels, *Al Jadeed* and *Future TV*, there is a split in perception of the events; what is seen and heard in one does not align with the other. In both videos, the dynamics of sound and sight are altered. Where sounds made by protesters are a means to express and draw attention to the movement on the ground — such as in the Occupy protests, whose protest sounds James Deaville analyzes in "The Envoicing of Protest: Occupying Television News through Sound and Music." They are rendered visual in the media, flattened by the transmission from sound to sight. The sound

is mistransmitted, even lost completely, in their predominantly visual media portrayal.

This paper examines the moment this mistransmission happens, when the space of protest becomes contested by Hariri's arrival, and how the significance of this moment alters through the lens of each video. It is a question of who gets to appear sonorously—whose voice becomes louder, more visible—within the space of protest, and how that sonic appearance was mediated visually in the media. To examine the protest, I have chosen to focus on these videos specifically because *Future TV* provides the widest frame of the events, with the camera positioned in and inhibited by the crowd, while *Al Jadeed's* captures the longest recording of Hariri's speech, in a tighter, more focused frame. To understand the protest and how sound prosthetics or equipment can work to facilitate the silencing of certain voices over the enhancement of others, I examine the framing of the videos, drawing from Derrida's concept of THE FRAME, and put them in dialogue with each other to think through what is revealed in the tension between sound and image.

I begin this paper by looking through a lens of PRECARITY and PRECARIZATION as defined by Judith Butler and Isabell Lorey, respectively, to theorize the reasons for and developments of the protest. Analyzing the visual and sonic framing of the *Al Jadeed* video, and a torrent of empty plastic bottles thrown by the

protesters, I will explore the dynamics of voices made dominant, and how these bottles are significant in de-listening to Hariri's dominant voice—and shifting these dynamics. I will then zoom out to look at the space of protest as captured by *Future TV*. Through this video I explore what I suggest is an exchange in vulnerability, in which the power of the alliance of protesters prevents Hariri from entering the SPACE OF APPEARANCE as Butler understands the concept, through Hannah Arendt. In relation to this vulnerability, I examine the Prime Minister's attempt to enter into dialogue with the protesters, showing how his power necessarily forecloses an equal dialogue. Going on to focus on the microphone and megaphone as visual markers of the recording and projection of sound in the *Al Jadeed* frame, I will probe the gap between the mediated speech and the protesters' voices, to ask whether this space can be bridged.

Backstory: A Tipping Point for Precarity

To understand the protest, the reasons behind it must first be considered. At the point this event took place, the protests against a proposed tax hike had been going on for four days. As part of Lebanon's first national budget since 2005, a one percent VAT increase on sales—to total eleven percent overall—would raise public sector employees' wages (Cusack), conceding to what they had been demanding

for years. The new taxes, however, would also push a more contingent part of the population below the poverty line.

Precarization is a concept that describes the condition imposed by the tax hike: the making-precarious of the Lebanese population, especially those hovering above the poverty line, by a dominant class in government. In her book, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Isabell Lorey argues that "precarization is a steering technique of the minimum at the threshold of a social vulnerability that is still just tolerable"(66). She points to Maurizio Lazzarato's concept of a minimum, a threshold between total insecurity and minimal safeguarding, across which a "rupture in social peace" threatens to take hold (qtd. in Lorey, *State* 65). This threshold normalizes precarization, which becomes "a mode of existence across all groups and classes" (Lorey, "Governmental Precarization"). Neoliberal governing thrives on keeping inequalities intact, both between the precarious and the governing forces and within the precarious themselves (Lorey 66, *State*; Puar 172). The protest was an attempt to resist the further precarization of an already precarious group. For this group, whose position just above the poverty line had been barely tolerable prior to the proposed increase, a mere one percent was enough to incite what Lazzarato refers to as a "rupture in social peace" (qtd. in Lorey, *State* 65). Crossing the threshold of

the minimum shows the extent of precarity in Lebanon, where what seems a nearly negligible change is enough for people to rush to the square.

The government "[kept] inequalities intact… within the precarious themselves" on two levels (Lorey, *State* 66): first by raising the wages of one demographic — the public sector employees — and then by universally increasing the tax for the whole population, making a large majority worse off. In other words, by re-setting the threshold, the government reduced the precarity of one sector of employees while turning a blind eye to those who would be negatively affected by the changes. However, the protesters did not succumb to the 'steering technique' of precarization which aimed to turn hierarchically precarized sectors of the population on each other. Instead, their criticism was directed towards the one percent increase, and not who it would be funding. In this, they remained aware of the public sector employees' precarity. The upending of this balance demonstrated that the institution was "structured in such a way that certain populations become disposable" (Butler qtd. in Puar 168). It created the space for collective resistance where voices unite against their precarization, driving the protesters to express their anger, both vocally and using plastic bottles, overpowering Hariri in the square. Perhaps then, Lazzarato's minimum, when acted upon politically, has the potential to subvert who gets to be heard, to give voice to the voiceless. Butler maintains:

"when people take to the streets together, they form something of a body politic, and even if that body politic does not speak in a single voice […] it still forms, asserting its presence as a plural and obdurate bodily life" (qtd. in Puar 168). Their denouncement spoke in a united, precarious voice and laid bare the government's squandering and corruption, and how its intentions to re-precarize the people would offset the balance of their almost unbearable minimum, making their contingency intolerable.

Between Two Frames: Failed Transmission

In this section I will turn to Jacques Derrida's theory of the frame to consider how this concept can help us understand how framing media depictions can function to push bodies and voices out of sight and hearing. Drawing from Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, K. Malcolm Richards argues that "frames serve as limits or borders" (33). Derrida speaks of frames in the context of paintings, separating work from wall. However, his theory is also applicable to the framing of media. Derrida's concept positions the frame simultaneously outside a work and inseparable from it, as well as from the contextuality of both work and viewer (Richards 34). Richards writes: "in framing the world, we choose what to include in our constructed image and what to exclude... at the same time, however, the subject herself or himself is also already framed"

(34). Each video functions as a frame of the actual event, but the boundary of this frame is not immediately apparent. "By not noticing [frames], we become comfortable within them," argues Richards (36). In putting the videos in dialogue with each other, their borders can be perceived and the function of their frames revealed. They record the same event, yet the way each is framed and portrayed gives it new political significance. These frames are therefore political; they select and enhance what we see and hear.

The *Al Jadeed* video crops the crowd from the viewer's sight and makes the politician the centerpiece. The frame narrows the focus compared to the wider—and more chaotic—shot of *Future TV*, sharpening both the image and sound of Hariri's address at the expense of leaving out half the people in the scene. The discrepancies between the two videos are most evident, however, through the difference in sound, with only *Al Jadeed* capturing Hariri's address to the crowd. There is therefore a sonic layer to framing that challenges and functions independently from its visual counterpart. We must listen to the frames, not as a complement to what we see, but to contest it. From the inconsistencies that arise in comparing the two videos aurally and visually, I take the *Future TV* clip, filmed from afar, to be the perspective closest to that of the crowd, and *Al Jadeed's*, capturing Hariri's speech from up-close, to be its mediated counterpart. While this choice may set the *Future TV* clip as a neutral (and consequently

apolitical) frame, it is countered by a tension: *Future TV* is the mouthpiece of Hariri's political party, yet the content of the chosen frame fortuitously tells the protesters' side of the story, not his.

My intent for this analysis is not to set Hariri's appearance on the scene as a media stunt or a show, but rather to understand the more intricate power dynamics revealed in the difference between the two depictions. The frictional border of these frames produces a glitch in our perception of the events. In "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times," Lauren Berlant defines the GLITCH as: "a troubled transmission," that which reveals "an infrastructural failure" (393). Following Berlant, I understand the glitch as a momentary communication breakdown, where the overlap of two instances that should run in succession reveals resistances between them, a hiccup that makes the story sketchy. The dialoguing of sounds in the clips I have chosen to analyze assumes the role of breaking down this failed transmission. However, the visual prosthetics of sound, such as the megaphone and microphones, help this glitch to go by unnoticed. This tension of sound versus image allows for impositions and crossovers between the two frames, by making oneself heard as opposed to being listened to.

Up Close: Disposable Precarious Voices

The video by *Al Jadeed* shows Hariri up close, outside his car with the megaphone (see fig. 1). The frame is tight and unstable, full of bustling journalists and servicemen, Hariri and his bodyguards huddled together. The bodyguards ask people to back away, as the journalists' microphones make their way through the guards, towards Hariri, to capture his speech. One bodyguard carries a briefcase overhead, using it as a shield from a sudden torrent of plastic bottles. Hariri then says:

> I want to say that I hear your voices. And I know that you are in pain. And I know that, just as you are in pain, we promised, and I want to say we are always transparent with you. And *inshallah* (1) this Cabinet, along with the president, will always be on your side, and by the people, and the pain of the people. It's true, resources are squandered in this country, it's true there is corruption, but we are going to fight it. I came here to tell you that we aim to end this kind of corruption and this kind of spending, *inshallah*.

daaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaadaaaaa

(1) "God willing" hopefully.

> And *inshallah* we will continue this path with you. (Al Jadeed 00:24-01:18) [2]

In this video, with its focus on capturing the Prime Minister's words, the protesters are visually absent, cut out by tight framing which echoes the protective border around Hariri formed by his entourage. Hariri seems isolated from the protest, and from the shared 'pain of the people'. The protestors' rallying cries are background noise, and the video's frame hinders a wider visualization of the space he is in. This sonic and visual framing contradicts the content of his speech: his claim of transparency is challenged by the removal of the protesting bodies and his assurance to 'hear your voices' rings untrue as the individual voices of the crowd are reduced to an anonymous collective murmur.

The frame retains the illusion of Hariri as main subject of the protest until the torrent of bottles begins to rattle the picture and those in it. The sounds of the empty plastic bottles announce their arrival as they begin to land around Hariri, interrupting his speech. The camera begins to shake and loses sight of him. His bodyguards move to cover his head as he looks up and stops speaking to adjust himself, before resuming what he has to say. These interruptions

popopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopopop

(2) My translation.

happen twice before he ends his speech, answers a few questions from the journalists, and leaves.

In interrupting Hariri's speech, the bottles function as the only sign of acknowledgment of the protesters, besides the 'you' he addresses outside of the frame. They become an extension of the rallying cries, transmitted not only sonically, but also in visual form, directed at the Prime Minister. They demand attention is paid to the presence of the protesters, even though they visually fall outside the frame. Though their voices are unclear and rendered almost mute by the video's framing, they are transmitted through the disposable material of empty plastic bottles, embodying the protesters' united precarious voice both sonically and visually. The framing of this video re-enforces the silencing of these voices by the institution that Hariri represents. They become surplus both to the government and to the depiction of the protest, rendering their lives disposable (Butler qtd. in Puar 168).

In "Precarity Talk," the virtual roundtable initiated by Jasbir Puar, Butler states: "when the bodies of those deemed disposable assemble in public view, they are saying, 'We have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life; we have not become the glaring absence that structures your public life'" (Puar 168). As extensions of the protesters' voices, the bottles similarly refuse to slip quietly into the shadows. By physically shaking the frame, and forcing

those within it to respond, they challenge the removal of the protesters from what is seen and heard. Entering the otherwise stable and tight frame, as well as the protected space of the politician, they do not 'slip quietly', but cascade loudly, disruptively, demanding that attention is paid to the 'glaring absence' of the protesters on screen and their precarious lives off screen. The disposability of the bottles, embodying the lives made disposable by the tax hike, becomes a weapon against Hariri's seeming impermeability, an image which begins to fail with the faltering of this frame.

Analyzing the media's treatment of sounds made by protesters during the Occupy Wall Street protests, James Deaville states, "those of us who affirm the efficacy of sound nevertheless believe that it possesses the power to resonate beyond any attempts to dismiss or distort its messages" ("The Envoicing"). He claims that protests are more likely to make the evening news if they are louder and more violent, concluding that the media is more likely to exploit the story of the protest for such failures than to broadcast it to support the movement. With *Al Jadeed's* frame, the protesters' violent reaction to Hariri could have easily been framed as a refusal of the dialogue that could have solved their issue. However, where the politician's speech claimed dialogue, its visual transmission inhibited the crowd from having a voice in this dialogue. To counter this interruption,

their voices needed to be seen—here in their image as bottles—in order to be heard and to make his image, his frame, surrender to their sound, challenging the way we see the image. However, this perception can only become clear by looking at the wider frame portraying the protesters' side of the protest: the *Future TV* clip.

From Afar: Vulnerabilities in the Space of Appearance

The second video frame, aired by *Future TV*, reduces Hariri's speech, so loud and clear from the first video, to a nearly inaudible murmur. This video, differently positioned so as to look towards Hariri from the crowd, also depicts what is left outside the *Al Jadeed* frame. We see the Prime Minister speak into the megaphone, assumed in the first depiction to project his voice, yet from this position his address cannot be heard above the mass of 2000 people now visible within the frame. When the jeep arrives, the protesters stir and chant "alshaʿb yurid ʾisqaṭ alniẓam",(3) "yasqut, yasqut ḥuqm elʾazʿar" (4) and "ḥarameh" (5) as Hariri comes out of

tttccchiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnnng

(3) "The people want the downfall of the regime," popular rallying cry of the Arab Spring.

(4) "End, end, the rule of thugs." Often also inverted to the similar-sounding "*yasqut yasqut ḥuqm elʿaskar*" or "end, end, the military rule," also heard in this video. Lebanon is not a military state, yet the latter version of this chant is used in light of violence from riot police as a retaliation and biting reminder of un-democratic behavior by the state.

(5) "Thief"

the car. The bottles fly haphazardly towards him and the camera operator struggles to zoom in at the right spot while banners and flags block the way. We hear him say "Hariri does not show anymore, [the protesters] are blocking him from us" (02:45).[6] By the time the video zooms back out, Hariri is already walking away. Though relatively close to Hariri, the camera, from its position in the crowd, captures only the noise of the protest.

The discrepancies between the videos reveal that the megaphone we see Hariri using did not serve its function of enhancement, its relative loudness succumbing to the volume of the protesters' combined voices. The image of the megaphone in the *Al Jadeed* clip only gave the illusion of amplification: in fact it was the microphone held by the reporter that captured Hariri's speech and rendered it audible. The sound prosthetics of the video are therefore shown to be imperative in creating the sonic illusion of Hariri's loud, and therefore heard, voice. The microphone worked to select certain voices to be heard over others, framing Hariri's voice as resounding over the protest chants. In its selection of which voices are amplified, the microphone also functions as a tool of framing, altering the perception of events, and the structure of who has a voice—and ultimately who has power. The working

(6) My translation.

of image and microphone in the *Al Jadeed* video is shown by this second depiction to serve as megaphones to project his image and speech.

With his address stripped of its volume, Hariri's dominant image could not be perpetuated as it was (momentarily) in the narrow frame of *Al Jadeed*. In stark contrast to the clear depiction of his speech in the previous video, he is left murmuring to the animated crowd: a singular voice against the many. This broader frame of the protest, which comes closest to what the protesters experienced, suggests that the bottles — the visually-transmitted precarious voices of the protesters — are a reaction to the Prime Minister's physical infringement of the space they had created, rather than the contents of his attempted dialogue, the words of which were inaudible. The chants respond to Hariri as Prime Minister ("*ḥarameh*") and the institution or system he represents ("*alshaʿb yurid ʾisqaṭ alniẓam,*" "*yasqut, yasqut ḥuqm elʾazʿar*").

Here, the figure of the Prime Minister, positioned as powerful and dominant by his central placement visually and sonically in the *Al Jadeed* framing, is rendered vulnerable in the face of the power of the crowd's voices and bottles, as well as to its potential reactions to the opening of a dialogue. In her article "Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitions, and Street Politics," Butler defines bodily vulnerability as the body's exposure to potential harm. Like precariousness, vulnerability is based on a shared condition, but the

concept emphasizes the bodily; it is constructed from our embodiment, that which is "beyond us yet part of us" (114). Butler does not reduce vulnerability exclusively to our injurability, but rather defines it as a "function of openness, that is, of being open to a world that is not fully known or predicable" (114). "Being open" also means open to other bodies, which is why embodiment is always already social; she explains: "bodies are not self-enclosed entities. They are always in some sense outside themselves" (114-115). Bodily exposure means that every body depends on other bodies and networks of support, which can be human or non-human, including animals, technology, and material supports for assembly (103).

When discussing material supports for assemblies, Butler uses Hannah Arendt's notion of SPACE OF APPEARANCE; a space that "comes into being at the moment of political action," with infrastructure and architecture indispensable to its formation (101). The assembled bodies claim and produce a public that constitutes the space of appearance, mutually supported/supporting, sustained by/sustaining the action, which cannot happen without the materiality of the space as a foundation. Butler argues that "the 'true' space [of appearance] then lies 'between the people' which means that as much as any action takes place somewhere located, it also establishes a space which belongs properly to alliance itself" ("Bodies in Alliance" 1-2). Through the perspective offered by the *Future TV*

video, this space for alliance is shown to reside in the square itself and is echoed in this video's frame. Disputing his centrality and dominance in the *Al Jadeed* frame, this video reduces Hariri to near invisibility. Hariri's professed invitation for dialogue is extinguished and the power dynamics of who is heard shift in the drowning out of his voice. The power structure reinforced by the narrow frame and the protesters' precarity heard and seen in the *Al Jadeed* video is therefore reversed. The frame instead shows how this expression of precarity and the invitation for dialogue exposed Hariri's vulnerability to those calling him 'thief' and throwing plastic bottles.

While the protesters' vulnerability is open for all to see, Hariri maintains the image of a protected politician in the *Al Jadeed* video, his vulnerability exposed only momentarily by the shaking frame and the frantic reaction of his accompaniment to a threat that comes from outside of it, from the space within the *Future TV* video. The bodyguards who surround him give the illusion of invulnerability at first, which sets his voice apart from the ones in protest and outside the border of the space of appearance. Even with these fortifications, however, he does not make an impact in the space of appearance shown by *Future TV* and does not participate 'between the people'. Instead Hariri is overshadowed by the demonstrators; the chants of the allied bodies, extended by the bottles, interrupt his speech, making him seem fragile and

vulnerable. In contrast to his seeming impenetrability, his vulnerability is exposed by stepping into a space created by bodies whose survival is threatened.

The frame of the *Future TV* video undermines the structures of power put in place by the tax hike and Hariri's position in the governing elite, showing how the protesters' vocal power for change is magnified in the square, on the street, and in the face of politicians who do not respond to their demands. Where his political power is much more impactful than theirs, when impacted by the protesters' bottles—voices made image—the playing field is leveled; he is made to feel their equal, without a prominent voice, drowned out by the noise of others, and echoed visually by the *Future TV* frame. He too is vulnerable by being susceptible to harm and to the unpredictable reaction of the crowd, whose expression of precarity makes him confronted by his vulnerability. However, this confrontation is fleeting: he leaves the image of his vulnerability behind in that space of assembly, in that moment of not being caught by *Future TV*, restoring the power structures shown in *Al Jadeed's* video.

The attempted dialogue is closed when he walks away from the protest, where he makes himself invulnerable again, supported by the mediated image of *Al Jadeed* that set him up as such. Butler writes: "the one who achieves this impermeability erases—that is, expunges and externalizes—all trace of a memory of vulnerability, effectively seeking to control

the contemporary feelings of *unmanageable vulnerability*" ("Bodily Vulnerability" 112). Taken from this perspective of unmanageable vulnerability, Hariri's statement in his speech — "that we are going to fight [this corruption]" (7) (*Al Jadeed*, 00:50-00:54) — is exposed not as the commencement of a dialogue that recognizes precarity, but as an expression of political power. The dialogue, then, had always been on his terms: Hariri wanted to speak as orator rather than start a negotiation for a middle ground between the two parties. The protest itself was an open dialogue, a space for vocal pluralities, to come together and speak (Puar 168). The conversation Hariri aimed for entailed no such plurality. He meant to console rather than truly take in and listen to the protesters' demands. Listening is, in this way, attached to vulnerability. To listen, one must be open to vocal pluralities, and submit to the potential vulnerability that commencing a dialogue involves. By imposing himself on the conversation, Hariri's address reveals itself to be more oratorial than dialogic, reproducing the power structures on which precarization relies, rather than showing any attempt to truly hear or feel the 'pain of the people' (*Al Jadeed*, 00:45-49).

The upstaging of the politician seems to be an effect of the space of appearance itself. Hariri is

skkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrrskkkrrr

(7) My translation.

not allowed 'between the people' forming the space, as the institution he represents is the reason for their assembly. A singular body alone cannot establish the space of appearance; it "happens only 'between' bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's," grounded in the plurality of action (Butler, "Bodies in Alliance" 4). The between is political, a space emerging, "between those who act together," according to Arendt; it cannot be isolated from plural action, it exists because of it (Butler 4-5). Hariri's appearance in the protest was a political act insofar as he represents a political institution and performs a speech that did not audibly resound in the protest, but rather in the media, where he can be framed as powerful — politically, visually, and oratorially. In the square, the alliance of bodies and voices appears as part of the space of appearance, yet Hariri's body did not enter this plurality. The *Future TV* video shows that in the protesters' space of appearance, Hariri's voice does not appear, is not heard over the sound of rallying cries. Visually, the frame is unable to catch him clearly as he stands behind riot police and is encircled by his servicemen, coming in and out of view behind the waving banners and flags.

In the *Future TV* clip, the camera operator is struggling to keep the frame on Hariri. He states that he cannot see the politician, that he is blocked from sight by the protesters. There is, however, no

mention of how the sound of the Prime Minister's speech does not reach them. While the visual field here is limited, it remains as though they were trying to make up for not hearing him by having him be seen. The protesters' loudness is not what prevents any aspect of his presence to translate on screen, and neither is Hariri's murmur; the main focus is on how to make his appearance seen, not heard. In the space of appearance, there is a prioritizing of what can be seen over what can be heard, yet the space of appearance is not only visual in its bodily-ness. It is a combination of protesters' being-seen, as well as their being-heard, their voices, that creates the political presence we call 'the space of appearance'. It is a space where their voices have as much impact as the mass of bodies, enhanced by the between. Their loudness asserts their presence and magnifies the protesters' message, just as the megaphone did to Harari's voice in the *Al Jadeed* video (fig. 2).

Conclusion: A Word on Sound and Image

In this paper, I have considered how through media the dynamics of listening in protest are mediated by both sonic and visual frames. Putting the videos of *Al Jadeed* and *Future TV* in dialogue enables the viewer to listen to both Hariri and the protesters, rather than one or the other, exposing the discrepancies in the mediated images. Doing so shows the shortcomings

of framing a protest as narrowly as *Al Jadeed's* frame does, where the proximity of the microphone to Hariri's megaphone was the main reason his voice — and subsequently his address — took on such importance. In contrast, the *Future TV* video enables the viewer to de-listen to the politician's voice, demonstrating the power of their allied bodies and voices in the space of appearance.

In the *Al Jadeed* representation of events, the precarious protesters crossed the threshold of the frame centered on Hariri, and made their voices step into center stage by disrupting what was in view, by becoming visible themselves. As the *Al Jadeed* frame aimed to retain its visuality, the bottles, shaking the otherwise stable and authoritative frame and those in it, became the visual extensions of the protesters' voices, demanding their presence be noticed. Meanwhile, Hariri's position of invulnerability was undone in the perspective from *the ground*, as embodied in *Future TV* video, where the allied bodies' precariousness in their refusal to allow him to appear in the between of their bodies gave rise to the space of appearance. In this space, the distribution of who is heard was reversed: Hariri was unable to listen when approaching dialogue from his position in the political hierarchy; the protesters have to make him listen. It was only momentary, though, for upon his retreat from the square and the mediation of his speech, his image was restored and he was no longer vulnerable in opposition to the protesters.

In that light, this essay could have easily been about media ethics and manipulation. Yet I chose to work with frames due to the potential nuances, the moments where the frame is challenged, as a visual element that is perpetuated. It must be noted that our focus on vision makes us take political moments and display choices within the media at face-value. We do not, for example, see the elbow of the riot policeman at the edge of the *Al Jadeed* frame; we are quick to judge the bottles as an attack or rejection rather than a reclamation of the space of appearance that was interrupted or interfered with; we do not question the megaphone's ability to amplify.

What the microphone and megaphone show in comparison is that sound, too, can be framed or filtered. Yet its framing allows us to question image, to break its privileging in political space where both bodies' visibility and audibility create what Butler, after Arendt, calls the space of appearance. The sounds we receive — the sounds we must attentively listen to — can often be indicators of images we have taken for granted or voices that have been silenced. In this instance, they are symptomatic of how the protesters' space of appearance was infringed upon by the projection of a certain image of the Prime Minister, but also showed how this space was maintained by the assembled bodies. The friction between sound in the videos revealed both the sham image of the megaphone, which did not project Hariri's voice, and

how the microphone of the *Al Jadeed* video led to a megaphonic perpetuation of the tight frame. Being attentive to the ways each frame functions, both sonically and visually, we can use the videos to challenge assumed power structures, and see how the unified precarious voices and bottles inverted who is rendered vulnerable, and who can be heard.

biography Erica Moukarzel (1993) is a Lebanese writer and researcher based in Amsterdam. Her work centers on the intersection of cultural memory and urban space, aiming to weave gaps left by past spatial divisions using long forgotten memories and stories. She recently obtained a Research Master's in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam and currently works as Curatorial Assistant at the Oude Kerk.

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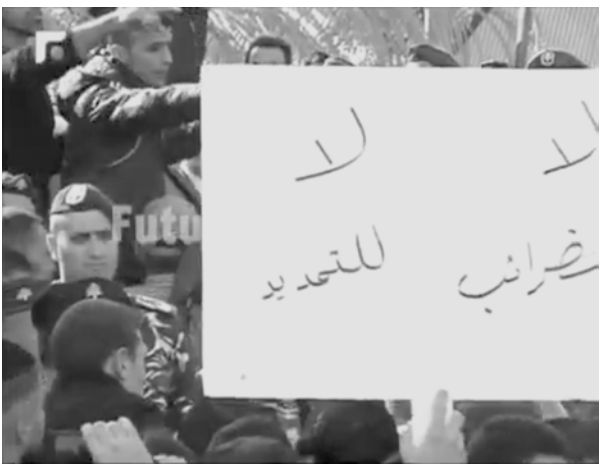
fig. 1

Screenshot of the Al Jadeed video. The caption says "arrival of Prime Minister Saad el Hariri to Riad el Solh [Square]."

fig. 2



A banner blocks Hariri from the Future TV camera, it says (R-L) "no to taxes, no to the [parliamentary] extension."

Decolonial Listening

An Interview with Rolando Vázquez

abstract How do practices of decolonial listening help us move towards a more ethical relation to the world and to others? In his work and teaching, Rolando Vázquez has been developing practices of decolonial thinking and listening that seek to form relational worlds beyond the hegemonic framework of Western modernity. In this interview —what better way of talking about practices of listening—we talk about

the required humbling of modernity, about the (im)possiblities of listening to those who have been silenced and about the necessity of thinking in dialogue with others.

Soapbox (Zoë Dankert): In "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity: *Buen Vivir*, Relationality and the Task of Listening" (2012), you outline the importance of listening for decolonial critique. What is decolonial listening to you and how can we practice it?

Rolando Vázquez: For us, listening refers to a mode of relation that belongs to the decolonial or that gets activated through the decolonial. To answer your question, we first need to understand what the decolonial is about and understand what we mean by listening. We say that there is no modernity without coloniality and that there is no coloniality without modernity. There is no history of Western civilization without the history of suppression of other worlds, and this suppression continues to this day. The colonial difference is the border that gets established by this modern/colonial order and which separates what is seen, what is heard, and what is dignified from what is racialized, negated, erased, exploited, and extracted.

Coloniality is about that erasure and modernity is the forceful affirmation of the dominant world. When we look at historical reality through the tools of the modern we become deaf and incapable of listening to other worlds.

The task of listening is the task of bridging the colonial difference and it requires several things. It requires, first, what I call the humbling of modernity. If you assume that your view is the only view, or the universal value, or the contemporary view, or the view that is in fashion, or the latest view, then you cannot be in the disposition of listening or be capable of listening to what goes beyond your framework of understanding. So, in this sense, listening becomes an enormous challenge: how to humble your position, how to uncover your position when you have only learned to think and experience the real from inside the West? How can you receive and relate to realities and ways of thinking that do not belong to your framework of intelligibility? This is what I call decolonial listening. For me, it is a principle of decolonial critique, whereas critique in the West celebrates reflexivity and metatheoretical reflections, the decolonial critique is about relating to the outside of your epistemic and aesthetic framework so that all your categories, your systems of thought, your senses become located, become humbled and open to real interactions and a growing with other worlds.

SB: Thinking of examples of practices of listening reminds me of your article "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing Design" (2017). Now that we stand face to face with the Anthropocene, how can listening help us move towards a different relation to the earth?

RV: I think we still need to be clear that the Anthropocene is a product of anthropocentrism, and anthropocentrism is one of the central axes of modernity, of the Western model of civilization. This is to say that, for us, the Anthropocene is inseparable from modernity. In a sense, the work of decolonial aesthesis and decolonial thought is the work of listening to what has been silenced. Extreme — often genocidal — colonial violences produce a sort of absolute silence. When species are extinct or when languages are extinct, you are confronted with the loss of paths into the future, that is, the loss of those trajectories that have been cut down. This is a silencing that is sometimes impossible to undo. That violence, especially in this extreme of extermination, produces a silence that makes it for us impossible to relate back to what precedes us and to bring it into the present so as to produce alternative futures. This is one of the ethical challenges of the decolonial and also where the limit of what we can do is located. When confronted with all those regions that have been silenced, the task of listening becomes the task of giving back a place in the present, of hosting

and emplacing what has been eradicated. The silencing of coloniality is ongoing and happens now through, for example, racial discrimination and enslavement.

Decolonial aesthesis is about the recovery of memories that have been silenced and that are not part of our awareness of the world. It is about enabling them to take place again through embodiment and experience. It is the possibility of undoing that displacement from history, to redefine what can become history and what can become world.

The task of listening in that sense connects to the task of justice and healing but it does not ignore the limits of what remains unbridgeable. The history of slavery is still very much alive in embodied memories, arts, poetics, communities, and food. The same goes for the genocide of the first nations of the Americas for example, but others are irretrievably lost together with languages, landscapes, species. These losses reduce the possibility of alternatives and of futurity. For us, futurity is not about innovation, but about activating the trajectories that have been erased; the heritages of humanity that have been deprived of their world and of historical existence.

We have been learning about listening as a different way of worlding the world from the philosophy of the Tojolabales, Maya peoples from Chiapas in Mexico. Carlos Lenkersdorf made a dictionary of Tojolabal with them, and also wrote about the centrality of listening in Tojolabal philosophy. For the Tojolabal,

it is nonsensical to think of a spoken word without a listened word. There is always a relationship between speaking and listening, between enunciation and reception, this principle of relationality and complementarity goes for all basic relations in life, like eating and dressing, as well as gender. This is an approach that new materialism for example lacks. They are trying to give agency to objects and materiality, but that agency is still very derivative of an anthropocentric view.

SB: Could you elaborate on how new materialism reproduces anthropocentrism?

RV: Not to all authors but, for me, generally speaking, what new materialism does is that it grounds itself in a horizon of thought that is constrained or defined by immanence, radical immanence—a limited interpretation of Deleuze as well, in my view, because it obviates the Bergsonian Deleuze and his notion of virtuality. The focus on immanence reaffirms materiality and spatiality as sites of the real. This is, in my view, yet another expression of metaphysics of modernity what Heidegger would call the metaphysics of presence. It is a thinking where materiality becomes the total horizon of intelligibility, the ground of certainty. New materialism is very interesting in many of its expressions but the problem for me is that it eliminates time which is in excess of materiality, from

the thought of the real. The questions that we address in decolonial practice belongs not only to space and the question of land and earth but also to time; we are engaged with the suffering of the past. You won't find the memories of enslavement in the immanence of the archive. The issue of justice in relation to the colonial wound is an issue that requires the understanding of time beyond what is made present. For us, the question of justice cannot be addressed from an immanent perspective. Furthermore, the question of coloniality brings us to the question of that which has been rendered out of place in historical reality. This displacement, this erasure of other worlds is precisely a matter of what has been, to put it this way, out of the field of immanence. Thus, we are concerned with what is often outside of immanence.

The vogue of new materialism tends, in my view—and I understand that this is not their intention—to erase the question of justice from academia, from the arts, and from thinking. In this way, it has become functional for the neoliberal system that wants to vacate the question of justice from critical thinking and from research and creativity. Obviously, new materialism has a right to exist and their research is very interesting but the way in which they have been taking a dominant position has functioned to reduce the question of justice in the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. For the questions the decolonial asks, immanence is not sufficient. You need to

understand time, and in particular precedence, because we are dealing with what has happened.

SB: Thinking about the relation between listening and the information overload we deal with on a daily basis, and simultaneously about those histories that we do not have access to because they are silenced or exterminated, I wonder how do we ethically select the voices, subjects, or materials that we want to listen to?

RV: What I see happening, and what you can see clearly with the elections in the USA and Brazil, is that Google, Facebook, etcetera and their information overload produce enclosures — epistemic, aesthetic, experiential — governed by algorithms. You can only search, look and receive what you have been profiled to. This is one of the greatest dangers for the sustainment of any form of open political life. Furthermore, the colonial divide is extremely reinforced by these enclosures.

For *Going Glocal*, a program I coordinate at University College Roosevelt, I bring students to Oaxaca in Mexico, to first nation's areas that are very rich in communal life. You can see that going out of those enclosures is a shocking experience for most students. They learn so much about the reality of the world which they could not learn in billions of pages accessible through Google.

Another important element I would like to stress is the importance of sustaining conditions for

thinking. The algorithmic organization of information is making those conditions impossible. Thinking implies a different temporality that is in relation to others. Particularly thinking as listening implies a reception of worlds of meaning. Thinking in relation to questions of justice is becoming more and more rare because of these enclosures. This relates to Ivan Illich's (1973) analysis of the second watershed of technology which is when technology becomes counterproductive. The car could be a very fast technology, but when you live in a city full of cars, it becomes the slowest place on earth. We experience the same dynamic with information: we have access to all possible information, but actually, we are growing completely disinformed and isolated.

When you have the possibility of thinking with others, that is, in co-presence or in dialogue, you can use the tools of technology. This is why I would defend the power of relational thinking, of talking with others, of visiting other people in other places and engage in meaningful conversations. I think that conversations are one of the things that are being suppressed today.

biography Rolando Vázquez is associate professor of Sociology at University College Roosevelt and Utrecht University. Together with Walter Mignolo, he has coordinated the Decolonial Summer School at UCR since 2010. Vázquez belongs to the movement of Decolonial Thought and Aesthesis and, in 2016, wrote with Gloria Wekker et. al. the report of the Diversity Commission of the University of Amsterdam.

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Duygu Erbil

Earwitnessing the Assembly: Listening to the Voice of the People in the Gezi Park Protests

abstract This paper investigates practices seen and heard during the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey, highlighting how an assembly constituted itself through the sonification of opposition. As an alternative to representationalist

accounts of the poetics of these protests, this analysis models a practice of EARWITNESSING: attuning to the demonstrations' sonics and noise to hear the voice of THE PEOPLE. Consequently, it is argued that an ASSEMBLY was formed performatively—one that exceeded the creative class milieu that has been the focus of much recent writing. Unlike analyses that focus on the visual, this earwitnessing approaches the memory of activism to articulate an under-theorized form of critical listening. Attentive to the cultural memory in activism, earwitnessing means listening to betweenness—that relational space where bodies enact interdependency.

Introduction

In summer 2013, residents of Istanbul, whose habitat had been transforming into a collection of gated communities, found themselves resisting this gentrification together with their neighbors, culminating in the Gezi Park protests. Without a centralized organizational structure, the protesters ranged from environmentalists to the members of workers' unions, from Turkish nationalists to Kurds, from stereotypically masculine soccer fans to feminist and LGBT groups, and from Armenians to anti-capitalist Muslims. The protests raised the question of who constitutes THE PEOPLE on the streets. Working from within the framework of identity politics and political representationalism, most commentaries provided textual analyses of the mediations of the Gezi protests and the protestors' remediations of past activism. Critical readings applied Bakhtinian theory, glorifying humor and celebration as heteroglossic resistance — declaring the Gezi protests a carnival. This led sociologists to suggest it was a creative-class or a middle-class movement and permitted the dismissing of the unrest as petit bourgeois (Boratav). However, these approaches have overlooked the performativity of the ASSEMBLY of the people — an assembly that does not represent but constitutes itself against the prevalence of police violence and state imposed precarity. In "Twenty-Four Notes on the Uses of the Word People", Alain Badiou outlines a positive sense of the word people, which this paper takes as a

starting point: the assembly formed against the official state through exclusion from a legitimised people (30). Focusing on the humorous rhetoric generated online and offline as the representative concretization of activism, these analyses fail to capture the sense in which the Gezi protests were a PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE. This resistance I define as an event of assembly that exceeded the poetics of heteroglossia and reached towards the relational constitution of a people through performative enactment: bodies acting together in relation to each other, without a presupposed unity or harmony.

In order to emphasize the Gezi Park assembly as a performative enactment, a self-constitution of the PEOPLE that does not represent a unitary identity, the study of activism could benefit from a memory studies approach. Within this field, the mediation of past events is not constituted of fixed, representative monuments, but rather understands a dynamic and continuous performance of active and present remembering. Mediation as an act of remembering, as a performative mnemonic practice accompanied with embodied mnemonic practices, disengages the representationalist approaches to cultural memory. In order to emphasize the performativity of cultural memory, this paper centralizes the nonrepresentative, embodied practice of performative memory and its function in the protests. Testing the limitations of textual analyses that focus on the politics and poetics

of representation, this paper highlights a key practice within the Gezi Park protests which is not reducible to such a framework — the banging together of pots and pans. As a limit-case for a representationalist analysis, these demonstrations exemplify how collective noise-making demands an attunement to cultural memory and its performative self-constitution. The pots and pans demonstrations were performances that enabled the people to take over the streets without actually being on the streets, thus broadening what can be understood as an assembly in the first place. The non-semantic nature of banging pots and pans always already precludes any attempt to decode it. Rather, collective noise-making is an embodied act, sonifying the assembly that makes up the people — as a broader coalition than can be explained in terms of group identity. It enables us to account for the voices of the people that have not and cannot be represented.

Earwitnessing activism, a critical practice of listening to protest sound, enables the study of memory in and of activism to account for this self-constituted assembly — the people's voice. In spite of my experience on site during and after the Gezi protests, this paper will primarily focus on the acoustemological analysis of Meri Kytö and E. Şirin Özgün in *Sonic Resistance: Gezi Park Protests and the Political Soundscape of Istanbul* (2016) in order to demonstrate that critical listening does not necessarily require witnessing the sounds on site. For this paper, earwitnessing will be

understood as an active and critical engagement with sound rather than a practice of decoding what sound represents. Notably, Kytö and Özgün were not on the streets themselves but did earwitness the audiovisual material (77). They did not, however, reduce the sounds to representative entities that enunciate the people's demands, but instead listened to the people and the plurality of ways in which they sonified their opposition. Ultimately, this paper takes a meta-critical approach: earwitnessing Gezi Park to mark the limitations of representationalist approaches to the memory of activism.

Memory and Activism: The Centrality of Mediated Memory and the Politics of Representation

The transcultural phenomenon of contemporary protest movements calls for memory studies approaches that recognize the role of social remembering in activism, approaches that capture hope in collective memory by analyzing the constitution of a people. However, many such attempts have done so primarily by studying mediations and remediations of these protests by the creative class. Framed by a Bakhtinian celebration of humor, most research describes the aesthetic dimension of imagining communities via studying artistic representations of activism. In other words, current studies of memory of activism frame the creative class as the eyewitness, describing practices in a space of representation.[1] However, such approaches neglect

what takes place on the streets, in what Hannah Arendt calls THE SPACE OF APPEARANCE, and that the creative class represents only one dimension of the people on the streets (qtd. in Aydınlı 2). Conversely, in order to capture the performativity of mediation, it is crucial to situate the artistic representation of protest movements within the sphere of civic memory instead of exclusively analyzing the message of a text or image.

An emerging turn in memory studies emphasizes this interplay between social movements and their mediations and remediations. Moving slowly away from a focus on trauma, such approaches are marked by an interest in hope, attempting to capture a more future-oriented and optimistic collective memory that serves for the transmission of positive affect (Rigney 2018). Although the image-and-narrative-centric tradition of memory studies has managed to make sense of the direct link between traumatic events and their representation, the element of agency in activism complicates the direct relationship between the event and its mediation. Understood this way, activists' mediations of collective movements do not *represent* these events as they are in reality, but rather build utopian narratives to transmit hope. The carnivalesque aesthetics of activism is a strategic combination of social imagination and social remembering. As Seçil Deren van

wrrrooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooommmm

(1) See Werbner et al., Katriel and Reading, Yalçıntaş.

het Hof argues, the mediation of activism is a "rhetorical weapon" that "serve[s] to hearten the protesters to stay" in the streets and attracts others (36). It serves as a "common reference system" that creates a sense of unity among people who do not share a common identity (44).

Conversely, works such as *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*, by Werbner et al., focus on the representation of social movements in the twenty-first century. Stopping short at those events' carnivalesque nature, these observations isolate the mediated memories produced by the creative class, thereby ignoring the fact that social movements are often marked by violence and resistance, rather than fun and humor. Humorous mediations of and in these protest movements do not represent all the embodied experiences of activism but are instead created by the activists as a strategy for resistance.

Analyses of protest movements through the resistance of the creative class are ultimately reductive and exclude activists who do not operate within that discourse. Osman Orsal's iconic photograph "Lady in Red", for example, does not capture the initial working-class component of the Gezi assembly for whom Gezi was the extension of International Workers' Day protests. By understanding such a photo instead as a rhetorical weapon inviting the middle class to the streets, one must also recognize the conjointly fictional and tactical dimensions of mediated memory

in activism. In "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing", Ann Rigney explains that the amorphous character of fiction assures flexibility to create a "good story," which renders it enjoyable for audiences "without a prior interest in the topic" and therefore endows memory with a "cultural staying power" (347). In this light, literature and other arts serve as tools for "oppositional memory … a counter-memorial and critical force" (348). When understood in terms of activist memory, Rigney's statement that "[a]rtistic works are not just artifacts, but also agents" gains additional significance (349). Memory of activism that consequently serves as an agent in activism is performative — a good story to mobilize people. In "Social Movements and Memory", Ron Eyerman elaborates on this agential dynamic between activism and cultural memory: "[e]ssential to any social movement is the formation of a collective identity, a means of constituting a we and informing the world what that represents" (79). This constitution of a we — in other words, imagining a community — necessarily functions through historical reflection; it requires a "meaningful reference to the past" (79). Reminding us how both collective action and social movements are "empowered through historical reference" (79), Eyerman gives some examples of the strategic use of historical symbolism and founding narratives, such as the figure of Harvey Milk for the gay rights movement

or Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. for the civil rights movement, within the framework of "memory as social remembering" (Misztal qtd. in Eyerman 83). This aspect of collective memory as a reference system that constitutes a people refers to the function of memory in activism, and it can also account for the self-constitution of the assembly without central leadership. "Social movements make strategic use of the past and they are important social forces in carrying the past into the future" (83), yet the tactical use of memory and mediation in activism by the creative class cannot fully account for the memory of the assembly that is constituted by real bodies with embodied social remembrance.

Moreover, many accounts neglect the sonic aspects of such demonstrations. Against the dominant focus on representation via images and narratives in memory studies, an emphasis on sound that captures both the representational aspects of music and the performative aspects of noise can offer a fresh way to approach collective memory and also the grounds to compare mediated and performative memory. As Eyerman notes, social movements "employ protest repertoires inherited from past movements," including singing, as constitutive of social solidarity: "[t]hey march, chant, sing songs and bear placards" (80). Sound-making embodies mediated memory, since it serves as oral literature in (traditional) music or chanting, and as performative memory insofar as it reaches the point

of non-representational sound-making. It not only mobilizes people but also implies a performance of social harmony within a movement. It is individually somatic but also enables collective, rhythmic action inasmuch as it recalls past struggles in solidarity. Analyzing the difference between representational and non-representational modes of sound-making — their different functions as, respectively, the common reference system and the sonification of the self-constitution of an assembly — offers the potential to bring out the voice of the people.

Gezi Park Language: Representation and its Extras

When one tries to listen to the voice of the people, to listen to the streets, what come to mind are slogans — written words — on placards, posters, or on the walls. However, one must ask if written words are truly representative — whether they capture the cacophony of the assembly. The assembly does not represent the people; it appears as the people without a shared language. Mediating a message through language functions through the exclusion of other messages, as well as other languages, in decentered assemblies like Gezi. When you focus on communication strategies that belong to a certain group identity, such as the creative class in isolation, you cannot hear the voice of the people.

"Kahrolsun bağzı şeyler," which can be translated as "down with some of the things"(Yalçıntaş 11), or "god damn some-things"— written with an intentional

typo — was one of the most striking graffiti slogans in the Gezi Park protests (Aydınlı 6).[2] For some, it was a marker of the apolitical nature of the young protesters in Gezi Park. For others, such as Anıl Doğan, it signified the non-uniformity of the reasons that led the people to the streets. In her article "The Gezi Movement and the Politics of Being-there: Offline and Online Participation", Sinem Aydınlı argues that this slogan "implies an opposition not only to the government but also to traditional slogans and represents the protesters' new approach to communication strategies of the opposed groups" (6). She writes that:

> For instance, graffiti such as "Slogan buladım" [I could not find a slogan] and "Ne yazacağımı bulamadım ama anarşi falan işte" [I could not find what to write but something like anarchy] again implied a new sense of political appearance through the *language* in that they broke the mould of old communication practices even among the opposed groups. (6)

Taking her cue from Arendt's concept of the space of appearance — "the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make

(2) All translations are author's own.

their appearance explicitly" (qtd. in Aydınlı 2) — Aydınlı argues that this apolitical language is a communication strategy that *enables* opposing groups to appear together on the streets (6). This kind of semantic representation reveals a poetics of humor, irony and satire in the Gezi Park protests.

However, this is not a new rhetoric but rather inherent in Turkish cultures of opposition. In "Political Potential of Sarcasm: Cynicism in Civil Resentment", van het Hof explains this specific oppositional culture as follows: "not taking any sides, not directly opposing the ruler, but surviving by means of a cunning mockery and by finding the most absurd gaps in the ruling logic" (31). This trend of opposition does not participate in the power struggle directly but is a coping mechanism manifest in creative narratives. Van het Hof traces the culture of political humor and satire in Turkish and Ottoman culture back to the seventeenth century, arguing that "the element of humour in the Gezi events must be evaluated through continuities in Turkish political culture" (33). Following Altuğ Yalçıntaş, the editor of *Creativity and Humour in Occupy Movements: Intellectual Disobedience in Turkey and Beyond*, van het Hof acknowledges — as mentioned above — that the Gezi Park protests were led by "the creative class," which used humor as "a rhetorical weapon" (36), "a common reference system" that operated as the regulator of the activist community (44). "The moment you get a joke," she argues, "you are in the community of the activists" (35).

Not everyone in the streets was a satirist, but it was the creative class that instrumentalized humor as a way to imagine a community. Humor in this case does not capture the politics of activism but rather a trend in the poetics of the assembly that functioned as a mobilizing strategy: "intellectual activists [were] concerned about the aesthetics of the protests instead of about gaining political power when they hit the streets" (Van het Hof 23). Humor in Gezi Park emerged from the cultural memory of Turkey but only captured a limited section of the people rather than the memory of activism as the self-constituted power struggle of an assembly.

Although I strongly agree with Yalçıntaş and Van het Hof's analyses of the creative class as the driving force of the Gezi mobilization for the middle-class, I find it equally important to find a way to understand the Gezi assembly which also includes others. What about the people who wouldn't get the bilingual jokes referring to *Game of Thrones* or *Star Wars*? What about those who didn't have access to Twitter or Facebook? Moreover, how can such an account acknowledge the corporeal relationality of the assembly—that which exceeds the camera frame and the boundaries of language? As I proposed earlier, a non-representationalist approach to the voice of the people can provide a better sense of this broader assembly. A supplementary approach to performative memory can account for the assembly as a performed

unity — without a presupposed identity that supposedly represents the people. This move is not to dismiss the performativity of mediation. Rather, it should be understood as a strategic move against textual analyses that attempt to fix the protests by extracting from them a unitary message.

Central to such a counter-analysis is the concept of PERFORMATIVE MEMORY. By this, I refer to the cultural coding of the body and how it behaves. Performative memory situates bodies as the containers and makers
of meaning. In the introduction to "Performance, Embodiment and Cultural Memory", Colin Counsell reminds us that "[b]y the mid twentieth century there was already a theorised understanding of the body as a vehicle for extant cultural meaning, its forms and actions a mnemonics of what had gone before" (1). By situating the material body as both the subject of remembering and the embodiment of cultural memory, Counsell argues for understanding performing bodies as "somatic forms that function as mnemonics of cultural memory" (9). Thus, a shift of focus from mediated to performative memory emphasizes the social writing of bodies over what those bodies have written.

Moreover, this shift requires attention to noise. This performative self-constitution is the act of an assembly that cohabits a space and marks it with resistance by appearing together. Performative memory accounts for how this wider people marks each individual

body and the bodies of others when they are allied on the streets. Therefore, to listen to the voice of the people as more than a representationalist identity, one should also listen to the NOISE of the assembly. Noise, in Sean Cubitt's account, is the excluded element in every form of representation and, as such, critiques the supposed harmony of assembly by accounting for those who it excludes. It also demonstrates the performed unity that does not depend on harmonious words or sounds but rather on the very material reality of acting together, in relation and in response to each other, without exclusion. If noise is a manifestation of corporeal relationality and an orchestration of somatic resistance, then earwitnessing that noise can attune to more than identity. Ultimately, an earwitnessing account can make apparent the difference between collective memory's different functions in relation to activism — both its politics of appearance *and* politics of representation. In other words, a limit-case study of sonic resistance during the Gezi Park protests can draw attention to the different functions of mediated and performative memories, especially the differences in what they capture. By positioning sound as an epistemological tool, earwitnessing can break the routine of representationalist textual analysis. It can account for the differences in sound-making on the part of the creative class and the people.

Acoustemology and the Soundscape of Gezi: Noise over Speech

The double meaning inherent in representationalism also highlights the political stakes inherent in listening to activist sonics. In other words, a representationalist take on the voice of the people parallels blind confidence in representative democracy. Such an emphasis on the importance of freedom of speech runs through the dominant political discourse of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. But logocentric tendencies also underlie the synthesis of egalitarianism and liberalism — particularly in the American definition of democracy — situating speech as the core agent of democratic politics.

However, as Judith Butler explains in *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,* democracy as a political form and popular sovereignty as a principle — taken for granted as the result of democracy — are not necessarily the same thing (2). Butler draws attention to the fact that democracy can easily turn into "a strategic discursive term" that regulates what governments approve or disapprove of through soft power, rather than referring to the performance of self-constitution (2). This means that an "orchestrated collective of the people" can easily be called "antidemocratic, even terrorist" (2-3). Therefore, Butler proposes to redirect our attention from the tricky realm of words and the politics of representation to the performative aspect of the politics of appearance.

Instead of the speech act, Butler proposes to focus on the BODIES THAT SPEAK, "which means that when the body speaks politically, it is not only in vocal or written language" (83). By situating the body as the primary political agent rather than through its representations or speech, she theorizes bodily performance and the politics of appearance as the core principle of street politics. In other words, she focuses not on politicians and their words but instead on the politics of the people: bodies that are "exposed" to the unequal economy of precarity (148). The people do not share an identity but are situated within the corporeal relationality inherent in inhabiting a body and cohabiting a space. Butler reconfigures Arendt's space of appearance as the space between bodies; THE BETWEEN is "a spatial figure for a relation that both binds and differentiates" (77). Arendt's space of *appearance*, Butler argues, is preconditioned by an "intersubjective facing off" that exceeds images (76):

> We are not simply visual phenomena for each other—our voices must be registered, and so we must be heard; rather, who we are bodily, is already being "for" the other, appearing in ways that we can neither see nor hear; that is, we are made available, bodily, for another whose perspective we can neither fully anticipate nor control. (6)

Earwitnessing the assembly, listening to the voice of the people, means earwitnessing BETWEENNESS, the relationality that depends on supporting and being supported by the appearance of another body enacting interdependency.

It is for these reasons that I will shortly turn to the pots and pans demonstrations during the Gezi Park protests, which correspondingly provide a testimony for bodies sonifying the between. An epistemological shift to earwitnessing—listening critically—can help us hear the between that conditions the politics of appearance.

Meri Kytö and E. Şirin Özgün's acoustemological study of sonic resistance in Gezi Park serves as an important analysis that can inform this conception of the politics of appearance. Taking cues from Steven Feld's definition of ACOUSTEMOLOGY as "[t]he sonic way of knowing and being in the world" (Kytö and Özgün 77), Kytö and Özgün emphasize the centrality of sonic performance in political actions:

> The acoustemological approach, besides focusing on sound itself, also focuses on the places where sounds are produced and received. The meanings of the sounds and the performance through which the sounds are produced provide places with new layers of social meaning, thus turning places into social spaces. The sounds create a sense of place. (79)

Informed by Eric Hobsbawm's argument that "even revolutionary movements backed their innovations by reference to a people's past — to traditions of revolution and to its own heroes and martyrs" (qtd. in Kytö and Özgün 83), Kytö and Özgün focus on the collective memories of sonic rituals in Turkey to analyze three cases of SONIC RESISTANCE. These include the pots and pans demonstrations (to which I return below), the chanting (tezahürat) of the soccer fan group Çarşı, and the collective silence inspired by "Duran Adam" [Standing Man] — a performance by Erdem Gündüz, who stood motionless in Taksim square for six hours.

Both Gündüz, a performance artist, and the left-leaning anarchist group Çarşı — known by their motto 'Çarşı, her şeye karşı' (Çarşı is against everything) — employ the tactics of the creative class. Kytö and Özgün's analysis enables us to realize the different and contrasting ways these two actors sonify resistance. Gündüz inspired collective silence in the spirit of minute-of-silence commemorations, while Çarşı transformed the streets into a masculine football stadium by chanting and through other sonic rituals such as the call-and-response demonstrations they adapted for the Gezi Park protests. These contrasting methods of sonifying resistance, performed by different social identities, were included in the collective repertoire of Gezi — also attracting others to participate in both performances. Nevertheless, not everybody in the assembly could participate in these ways. The

contributions of the creative class are initially marked by a creator-audience dichotomy: the audiences of Gündüz and Çarşı, in the space of appearance, chose to respond to and support these acts of resistance in solidarity, but, ultimately, these two contradicting sounds of resistance do not necessarily capture the relationality that is implied by interdependency, by the between. The collective silence led by Gündüz and the masculine chanting led by Çarşı and other football supporter groups can imply certain identities when approached within an isolated, representationalist framework. Both Gündüz's and Çarşı's performances can be marked by certain messages—Gündüz's left-Kemalist view of Gezi and Çarşı's anarchic masculinity—that do not speak to everyone on the streets. In order to hear the between that "both binds and differentiates," a more inclusive listening practice is required that does not exclude noise (Butler 77).

A prime example of such noise can be found in Gezi Park's pots and pans demonstrations. The practice of clashing and rattling kitchen utensils inside houses and through windows more directly sonified the between in an assembly, as it filled that between with mere noise rather than messages. The act sonifies pure opposition, a nonverbal enactment of solidarity with protestors and against the precarity imposed by the state. Even though pots and pans were banged mostly in houses rather than in the streets, pots and pans demonstrations were the quintessential Gezi

Park performances marked by transgressive sonic resistance. It is hard to tell when the pots and pans demonstrations began and ended during the Gezi Park protests, but according to a witness who talked to the BBC's World Service on 1 June at "[a]bout half past one the entire city started to reverberate. People were banging on pots, pans, blowing whistles" (Greenwood). From then on, every day at 21:00, people started to bang pots and pans inside their houses until their neighbors stopped. Occasionally, an individual would spontaneously start a demonstration and their neighbors would respond. People would also start banging pots and pans whenever the police entered their neighborhood. Some banged pans for a minute or so; some performed all night long. The demonstrations were unregulated, self-organized, and based on the relational performativity of responding to one's neighbor. Although many of these demonstrators didn't leave their houses due to age or physical impediments, their act of sonic solidarity nevertheless marked the core motivation of Gezi Park protests, which was to support the fundamental right to appear in the streets.

As Kytö and Özgün point out, this singular aspect of the pots and pans demonstrations rendered them a feminine domestic space — the opposite of the masculine space of the football stadium. They operated as tools of mothers and grandmothers: "[c]ompared to the youthful and masculine way Çarşı members operated in the streets, this method of sonifying one's

resistance was also accessible to the elderly and to people who did not take part in the street demonstrations" (Kytö and Özgün 88). "[N]oise as pure noise" transgressed the domestic sphere and "was introduced to the street politics" (Kytö and Özgün 89). As Kytö and Özgün's account makes clear, the secure nature of the protest, which enabled women to contribute to the soundscape of the streets without leaving their homes, also made it a popular one.

Nevertheless, this was not the main motivation behind the resurrection of this form of sonic resistance during the Gezi Park protests. Rather, people were once again protesting against state corruption. The phenomenon of pots and pans demonstrations is commonly known to have originated in 1971 in Chile, the choice of implements also referring to the emptiness of pots and pans due to food shortages during the Allende administration. Turkish collective memory, however, associates this mode of sonic resistance to events in 1996, when a car crash in Susurluk — whose victims included a member of parliament, a senior police chief and counter-guerilla hitman — revealed the level of state corruption in Turkey (Kytö and Özgün 88). On 1 February 1997, a mass protest started with the call of an organization called Sürekli Aydınlık için Yurttaş Girişimi [The Citizens' Initiative for Permanent Enlightenment]. The initial plan for the demonstration was to turn the lights off at 21:00 for one minute:

> At first people only turned off the lights, but they then started to turn them off and on, flickering the lights as if winking to their neighbours. Then gradually women added the noise factor to the action. Mothers and grandmothers took their casseroles and pots and started to beat them each evening for one minute in the light of blinking windows ... The protest lasted approximately one month. (89)

While initially improvised, during the later Gezi Park demonstrations the memory of the Susurluk protests against corruption inevitably emerged from the people's collective memory. Kytö and Özgün note that the political instrumentalization of cacophony was also a dependable call for organization, mobilization and solidarity during the Gezi Park protests: "never did a single sound of pots and pans remain unanswered during all those days" (90). Thus, this sonic strategy returned seamlessly to the resistance repertoire of Turkey. Even after the questionable constitutional referendum in 2017 — held under a state of emergency declared after the coup attempt in July 2016 — people did not hesitate to answer their neighbors' call, although few returned to the streets.

The pots and pans demonstrations during the Gezi protests made it possible to mark even the most vulnerable bodies with resistance. Interacting with

noisy domestic objects, each body could become an agent blurring the borders of the domestic sphere and the political sphere reclaimed as the streets. In addition to bridging the gap between the streets and surrounding houses, the pots and pans demonstrations transcended the continuum of past and present political struggles, yet without linguistic reference. Understood in terms of performative memory, the visceral loudness of this cacophony stood voiced the people — embodying remembering as pure noise-making. This enabled the masses to transgress group identities and class borders and become the people: relational bodies resisting the unfair distribution of precarity. The performative enactment of interdependency — responding in solidarity to your neighbors' clamoring call — sonifies the between that constitutes an assembly.

Conclusion

A focus on mediated memories helps us to explore the constitution of an assembly. Nevertheless, the politics and poetics of representation are not the only tools we use to imagine communities — and do not account for the fundamental plurality of the people. An emphasis on this plurality accounts for the self-constitution of the people without presupposing a harmonious unity, establishing political authority through the performative enactment of assembling bodies. Transcending identity formations, peoples' uprisings necessitate a supra-representational approach. In Butler's words: "resistance

has to be plural and it has to be embodied" (217). Thus, analysis of resistance requires us to focus on the very materiality of the bodies involved. When it comes to memory studies, an emphasis on performative memory helps to situate bodies as the initial agents of activism, thus reminding us that cultural memory is always already performative. An overemphasis on the travelling images and globalized aesthetics linking social movements worldwide — what Werbner et al. term "citational intertextuality" — fails to emphasize the fact that it is *the people* that take to the streets, and not the texts and images that might be claimed to represent them (16).

In this paper I have aimed to underline the fact that the poetics of activism are only "a common reference system" and do not capture the relationality of the people exposed to and resisting precarity (Yalçıntaş 44). Rather than reproducing the celebratory Bakhtinianism often associated with the representative memory of the Gezi protests, I examined the pots and pans demonstrations to emphasize bodies as agents and noise as the sound of the between. The orchestration of somatic resistance emerges from sonified relationality via intentional collective noise that does not belong to the realm of mediation and representation but rather to an unregulated repertoire of mnemonic performance. The noise doesn't deliver the identities of the performers, nor their demands, but instead constitutes the soundscape of the assembly and marks the realization

and performance of relationality and solidarity. Transgressing the borders of class, ideology, age, gender, ethnicity, and language—as well as the constructed dichotomies of the domestic and the political spheres—pure noise captures the relationality within the assembly. Bakhtinian accounts emphasizing polyvocality ultimately fall short of defining this people's voice, given that the core demand of Gezi was not simply being heard in a representational sense, but rather *recognized* via the politics of appearance. Its different and sometimes conflicting political demands were secondary to that supra-representational recognition. Acknowledging relationality beyond identity formations helps us to resist condemning occupy movements like Gezi as merely petit bourgeois or middle-class and enables us to position the politics of appearance as an act against precarity.

One cannot listen to all the demands of the peoples on the street, but we can earwitness the cacophonic plurality within an assembly. By doing so, it is possible to hear the performative harmony that legitimates the political authority of the people.

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Mieke Bal

Learning Listening

abstract Reflecting back on the articulation of the methodological framework for the practice of cultural analysis and the founding of ASCA over twenty years ago, Mieke Bal explores a practice of listening through her own installation *Nothing is Missing*. The videos presented in the installation featured mothers of migrants being interviewed by a person close to them. This resulted in confronting dialogues that have the potential to offer the attentive viewer—and listener—new perspectives on familial relationships, migration and

interculturalism. Ultimately, through her analysis, Bal demonstrates the enduring pertinence of the notion that 'the object speaks back'.

Listening is a practice. But, as with all practices, before we can practice it, we must learn to listen. In the noisy world of today this demands serious commitment. In this acoustic whirlwind, we have to learn to make (acoustic) distinctions between voices, languages, tones and moods. Only then can listening be a socially useful practice: a critical one. The objects of study of the humanities have the unique potential to *teach* us that practice. Through their complexity and subtlety, artworks — but also other cultural practices and even, simply, languages and their uses — can help us move beyond simplistic slogans and cursory readings of their alleged meanings.

Early on, when we started ASCA[1] and were developing methodological guidelines in 1997, which were updated and republished in 2017, I explained the need for listening as a method by putting forward the idea that 'the object speaks back'. Quotations should not be used to confirm what a student says, but to complicate it. If we make a habit of systematically looking back at a quotation and carefully checking to what extent it confirms our

point, we will often notice that this is rarely entirely the case. However, instead of panicking, thinking we are wrong, or worse, repressing the differences, this complication can help us move beyond what we (think we) already know. Listening carefully to the object, treating it as a "second person," an interlocutor, rather than a mute "third person" *about* which we speak, is the "apprenticeship" of listening as a critical practice. There is no more concise way to explain how I envision the difference between cultural analysis and other approaches.(2)

Listening to the object speaking back is most concretely shaped in the experiment of what is now termed artistic research. Over the years 2006-2010, I built up a body of video works in which mothers of migrants spoke about what the departure of their child meant to them. I filmed the migrants' mothers in their own houses, talking about their motivation for supporting or their attempts to withhold their children who wished to leave and about their own grief in seeing them go. The mothers converse about this crucial experience with a person close to them, often someone whose absence in her life was caused by the child's

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(1) The Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis.

(2) This idea was further developed and demonstrated in my book *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*.

departure — a grandchild, a daughter-in-law, or the children themselves. I staged the women, asked their interlocutors to take their place behind the camera, set the shot, turned the camera on, and left the scene. This method is hyperbolically documentary. To underline this aspect, I refrained from editing these shots.

The slow, unsmooth and personal monologue that results is a confrontation with the need and difficulty to listen. The uninterrupted presence of their faces in the frame compels viewers to look the women in the face and to listen to what they have to say; in a language that is foreign, using expressions that seem strange, but in a discourse to which we can affectively relate. The translations were made together with the close relative who did the interview, and were placed above the faces so that it was easier to read them without looking away from the speaking face.

Becoming increasingly annoyed by the constant complaining about migrants, I wanted to show a side of migration nobody seems to talk about: the heart-wrenching separations from family and friends, and the grief these cause to those who stay behind. Only when we learn to pay attention to this aspect will it be possible to see migration not only as a harsh necessity, but also as the creation of a more heterogeneous social texture, which is both in need of critical understanding and a potential

source of cultural enrichment. Migration causes new forms of coexistence and, to a greater extent, interaction in a certain social environment between people who can afford to live there permanently and those who cannot — those who are driven to displacement. Listening to different languages around us is only one element that can teach us how to be more attentive to and thoughtful of this.(3)

I presented the recorded interviews in an installation titled *Nothing is Missing*, which consists of a variable number of audiovisual units of about 30 minutes. Imagine a gallery looking like a generic living room, where visiting is like a social call. The video shows a portrait — a bust only — of a woman speaking to someone else. In some cases, we hear the voice of the interlocutor, in others we hear no one other than the women speaking. Every once in a while, one of them falls silent, as if she were listening to the others. The domestic ambiance of the installation is situated within a space that is public, often not a space where such domestic scenes are expected. I have installed *Nothing is Missing* in museums and galleries, in academic settings and in office spaces. In 2007, I also installed it in a corner office in the Department of Justice in The Hague.

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(3) For a longer presentation of this project, see my article "Facing: Intimacy across Divisions," in *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time.*

The visitor is compelled to look at the women's faces and listen to what they have to say. The form of the installation helps to grasp the idea of critical listening. It enables the mothers to speak *together* from within a cultural-political position that makes them absolutely distinct and connected at once. In the installation, this fictional interaction is the meaning of the silences that suggest they are listening to one another, even if they have never met. Also, at moments of restraint, when they seem most reluctant to express themselves, the *performativity* of their self-presentation is most acutely able to pierce through the conventional surface. These are the moments of the performative inter-face. Modestly, visitors listen and learn to distinguish between languages and accents, experiences, and forms of grief. This is how I practice cultural analysis.

Read an extended version of this essay on soapboxjournal.com.

biography Mieke Bal is a cultural theorist, critic, video artist and occasional curator. She works in cultural analysis, focusing on gender, migratory culture, psychoanalysis and the critique of capitalism. Her books include a trilogy on political art. Her video *Madame B*,

with Michelle Williams Gamaker, is widely exhibited. Her most recent film is *Reasonable Doubt*, on René Descartes and Queen Kristina (2016).

Works Cited

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fig. 1

Installation in Zuiderzeemuseum, Enkhuizen, 2008; photo: Astrid van Weijenberg

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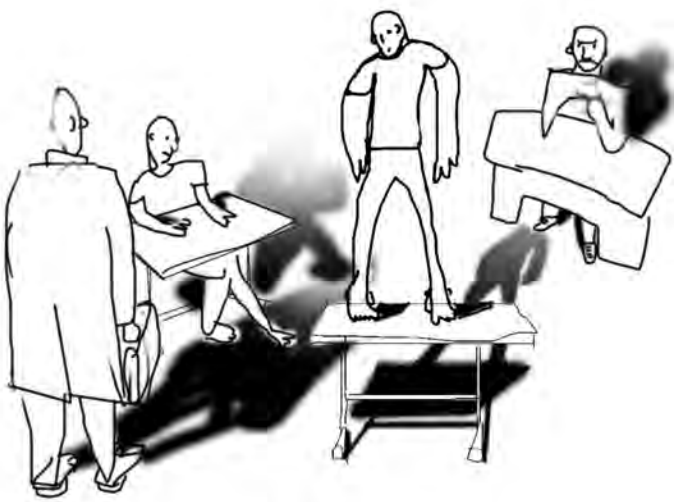

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