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SOUNDING MODERNISM: AN AURAL HISTORY OF THE NOVEL, 1899-1963

BY

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

SOUNDING MODERNISM: AN AURAL HISTORY OF THE NOVEL, 1899-1963

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Dr. Rebecca L. Walkowitz

This dissertation registers the attempts of modern novelists to make the printed word resound, to make the delight and din of the age leap off the page. Beginning with the historical moment in which the voice first took on a life of its own outside the body, *Sounding Modernism* is a record of the formal struggles experienced by authors who wished to write the voice, attempts that often led to their finding their own narrative voices. The twentieth century brought unprecedented breakthroughs in the recording and circulation of sound. Yet, within modernist studies, the auditory is often overlooked in favor of the visual, a critical absence this project seeks to correct. *Sounding Modernism* argues that early twentieth century breakthroughs in sound technology were crucial to the development of modernist fiction. Sound technologies not only captured and disseminated the spoken voice but also transformed and expanded the writer's voice. This is apparent in the way a multiplicity of voices comes to dislodge an authoritative narrative perspective, in the depictions of previously unrepresented experiences, and in the attention paid to silence and inarticulate sound.

Although a device like the phonograph originally gave primacy to the voice, the recordings it produced captured a wide array of sounds, whether those generated by the

recording process itself or acoustics and ambience. A similar dynamic can be tracked in the texts that I study in this project, as authorial interest in the recorded voice ultimately leads to an assimilation into the novel's form of the greater soundscape. Novels unsettled by the existence of the transmissible voice and the workings of these new machines gave way to those that sought to utilize the metaphors engendered by the new media and to represent vocality textually. At the same time, novels that incorporated the conventions of older literary genres like verse and drama to call attention to the rhythm, pulse, and vibration generated by physical space led to meditations on the psychological, existential, and linguistic implications of inhabiting the loud twentieth century.

With this counter-history, I am not looking to enthrone the audible at the expense of the visual. Instead, I am sounding out the novel, documenting both what happens to the literary as it encounters and assimilates new technologies of sound and when and where in post-war literature we might yet still hear modernism's originary echoes. Modern novelists heard a new world and heard the world anew. Through this, they created literary forms that could index the collapsing distinctions between foreground and background, music and noise. This was not simply a matter of reproducing the sonorous in the novel, but of rendering the novel itself sonorous. The modern literary engagement with sound created new models for the organization and structuring of experience and for the elevation of a plurality of narrative voices in lieu of a single controlling figure. Accounting for the auditory dimension of modernism allows us to observe new methods of storytelling, catalog narrative devices that have otherwise escaped detection, and hear the desire of the novel to be heard as well as read.

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I hope with this you have finally forgiven me for not going through with law school. In addition to the aforementioned, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my friends, who enabled all sorts of behavior, but who chiefly enabled me to realize that there's more to life than books, although admittedly not much more. Kelly Clark, Charlie Frohne, Chris Kempf, Gregg Kulick, Clare McNeely, Matt McGee, Keith McKnight, Shannon O'Neill, Torleif Persson, Stephen Potter, Matt Sherrill, Kelly Sullivan, Corey Van LANDINGHAM, and Nadine Vassallo: Thank you.



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## Introduction

“[S]uppose an ear says, ‘I’m not an eye, so I’m not a part of the body!’ Would that mean it’s no longer part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear?”

—1 Corinthians 12:16-17

“You heard her, you ain’t blind.”

—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

This dissertation registers the attempts of modern novelists to make the printed word resound, to make the delight and din of the age leap off the page. Beginning with the historical moment in which the voice first took on a life of its own outside the body, *Sounding Modernism* is a record of the formal struggles experienced by authors who wished to write the voice, attempts that often led to their finding their own narrative voices. These writers endeavored not to simply reproduce the voice—through adjectives and adverbs—but to somehow render the novel itself vocal.<sup>1</sup> But not just vocal—musical and noisy, too, as I also illuminate the strategies that authors used to represent the seemingly unrepresentable: auditory phenomena like silence and ambience, frequency and vibration.<sup>2</sup> By the early twentieth century, numerous surfaces—wax, vinyl, and shellac, for example—were shown to be capable of being literally impressed and imposed upon by sound, storing its content, but paper was not among their number. Yet in the

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow a concept here from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who themselves were inspired by Paul Klee’s statement that the purpose of art is not to reproduce the visible but to make visible. They interpret this to mean that the “visual material must capture nonvisible forces,” which are “necessarily forces of the Cosmos” (*Plateaus* 377).

<sup>2</sup> My umbrella term for all of these phenomena is not sound but sonic, if only to escape the binary that sees sound as the opposite of what the human experiences as silence. Given the human range of hearing, anything below 20hz is generally inaudible, but that does not mean it lacks sonic materiality. This class of sound is what theorist Steve Goodman calls an “unsound,” the felt but “not yet audible” and the sound artist Salome Voegelin has dubbed the “aesthetic inaudible,” that which we “lack the sensibility, will, and wherewithal to hear” (x, 198; 170). Sound, however, will be the central term when referring to anything audible.

wake of the technological innovations that inaugurated the modern era, modern literature, it has been said, developed “parallel technologies of its own” (Kenner 10). *Sounding Modernism*, then, is in part a story about these parallel technologies, but also one that shows, through attentiveness to the soundscape of the period, what new types of stories sound technologies made possible.

One of the questions that served as an impetus to this undertaking was a fairly basic one: What do we hear when we read?<sup>3</sup> This generated further lines of inquiry, about what authors hear as they write, about their investment in sound and the soundness of their medium for sonic material. Media theorist Friedrich Kittler, whose project was described by a former student as “kicking the human out of the humanities,” would think it a very bad investment indeed; in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986), he claims Edison booted tones out of tomes (Winthrop-Young 365). Prior to the invention of the phonograph, he argues, the work of the poet was to induce hallucinations in the mind of the reader; technological reproducibility, revivifying again and again what was once real, banished those phantoms, so that the “dream of a real... audible world arising from words has come to an end” (14). It is a dream, however, that stubbornly persists in the margins, and elsewhere on the page. What looks like a gaffe, the epigraph from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), is in actuality prescient, for it is the reading eye that compensates for the novel’s impaired sense of speech. Its wisdom answers the epigraphic

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<sup>3</sup> This question itself arose from the discovery of a service called Booktrack, which claims that it is “transforming reading, the way sound transformed silent film” (“About Booktrack”). Since I began work on this dissertation, the website has turned its consumers into producers, offering to both authors and students a program that allows them to create their own soundtracks for works they are writing and/or studying.

question posed by St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians: hearing lies with a beholder who is all eye, activated through the apprehension of texts whose auditory appeals are of necessity a mute summons. The great silent French filmmaker Abel Gance, in an essay called “The Era of the Image Has Arrived” (1926), believed that cinema would “impart a new sense to man. He will listen with his eye” (53). The following year, the era of the talkies begins; that sense would atrophy on the silver screen but had been, for decades, stirred by the printed page. With recourse to the work of film theorist Michel Chion, who dilates on the onscreen tension between sound and vision, the work of this project is one of de-acousmatization, an “unveiling process” that tracks the sonic back to its unseen source. Reading between the lines—reading for what is on the page and what is left unsaid—makes visible the writer’s method of making her words heard (131).

But what is really being asked when one asks whether it is possible to “hear” the novel, to find in it an audible world? Put differently, to invert my earlier question, how do we read when we hear? Moreover, what is the methodological difference between hearing and listening? And, specifically, what is at stake by asking such a question of modernism? An era that witnessed the storage of the voice, the amplification of noise, and the proliferation of sounds, the early twentieth century brought unprecedented breakthroughs in the recording, transmission, and circulation of sound. Yet, within modernist studies, the auditory is often overlooked in favor of the visual, a critical absence this project seeks to correct, particularly since much of the early discourse surrounding the phonograph, for example, drew parallels with, and inspired questions about, the process of writing. In late 1877, Thomas Edison brings a “complete phonograph or sound writer” to the offices of

*Scientific American*, which “inquired as to our health, asked how we liked the phonograph, informed us that it was very well, and bid us a cordial good night” and “pronounce[d] its own name with especial clearness” (“Talking” 384). Pondering the possibilities of this writer of sound, in a new age of detachable voices, the editors ask, “Are we to have a new kind of book?” (“Wonderful” 304).

Thematically, what links all of the works in this dissertation is a kind of phonologic, that is, these texts respond, at differing frequencies, to the existence of, and an audience’s knowledge of (or access to), the technology of recorded or transmitted sound. A new kind of book would be more than a century in the offing, and its appeal and construction would have little to do with Edison’s invention. Instead, the book remained what it was, but its restrictions proved productive, a spur to innovation, especially as more became known about this new technology of the literal voice that rivaled the metaphoric voice of narrative. Although a device like the phonograph had no choice but to grant primacy to the voice given the technical limitations of the early models, its recordings captured a wide range of sonic material, whether those emerging from the recording process itself or by the acoustics and ambience of the studio.

A similar dynamic can be tracked in the novels comprising this dissertation, as authorial interest in the recorded voice, at its zenith in the immediate aftermath of the phonograph’s entry into homes, ultimately leads to an assimilation of the greater soundscape into the novel’s form. Novelists unsettled by the existence of the transmissible voice and the workings of these new machines gave way to those that sought to utilize the metaphors engendered by the new media and to represent vocality

through text. At the same time, novels that incorporated the conventions of older literary genres like verse and drama to call attention to the rhythm, pulse, and vibration produced by physical space foreshadowed later meditations on the psychological, existential, and linguistic implications of living in the loud twentieth century. The modern literary engagement with the sonic and its technologies created new models for the mapping, organization, and structuring of experience. Accounting for the auditory dimension of modernism through hearing with the eye allows us to observe new methods of storytelling, catalog narrative devices that have otherwise escaped detection, and recognize the desire of the novel to be heard as well as read.

### *Sound Methods*

This dissertation teaches us to hear the modern novel by drawing on theoretical and historical work from the field of sound studies, a field that, despite its vibrancy, remains in the process of self-definition. Sound cuts a transversal across a vast swathe of methods, theories, and objects: as a physical and affective phenomenon, it seeps into everything, showing up in unexpected places and forming bonds between unlikely pairs. However, like sound itself, sound studies as a field is difficult to get a firm grasp on. Historian Karin Bijsterveld and sociologist Trevor Pinch, editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (2012), defined it in 2004 as “an emerging interdisciplinary area that studies the material production and consumption of music, sound, noise, and silence and how these have changed throughout history and within different societies” (636).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Definitions from editors of other anthologies on the field are slightly fuzzier; Jonathan Sterne, in *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012), claims sound studies ought to be the name for “a group of people who reflexively *mind sound*” while sociologists Michael Bull and Les Back, in their *Auditory Cultures Reader*

Historian and theorist Jonathan Sterne, editor of *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012), concedes that there are numerous ways of conceiving the field and nearly as many collections on the market labeled as sound studies that can legitimately claim to be representative—in other words, it is what you make it (11-12). For my own purposes, then, its contours are the historical, the theoretical, the technological, with permeable boundaries between them.

The historical period signaled in my title, 1899-1963, is one in which the way one could hear sound changed: on record, on the air; at home, in the car; in stereo, in high fidelity. In *The Audible Past* (2003), Sterne uses many of these breakthroughs to demonstrate the degree to which they were products of their cultural moment and how their uses by consumers represented not necessarily the inventor's intended use, but instead a kind of technological wish-fulfillment. Media theorist Michele Hilmes directs her attention to just one of those innovations, the radio, in *Radio Voices* (1997). She contends that radio, more than any other medium, was unifying the nation, an endeavor it both addressed and dramatized in its programming. And yet other people's radios could also drive people apart or have them at one another's throats, for not only did the ways of hearing sound changed, sound itself was transformed: car horns and subway rumbling; screeching brakes and booming bass; ultrasonic and subsonic frequencies.

As sound changed, and the machines making them proliferated, so too did the nature of the complaints, which resulted in the formation of anti-noise leagues across the Western world in the 1900s, as Bijsterveld outlines in *Mechanical Sound* (2008), her

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(2003), believe that it is a call to participate in “*deep listening*” to the social world with “depth and humility” (10; 3, 16).



history of the twentieth-century's noise problem (1-2). One did not have to be part of a league to be anti-noise; Franz Kafka writes to his fiancée Felice in 1915 about a new invention he has had sent to him from Berlin, "a kind of wax wrapped in cotton" that one places in one's ears, which do not stop the noise, only soften it, "but even so" (449). Among other things, historian Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002), a history of modern architecture, addresses the attempts by science to, if not silence the city, then soften its "technological crescendo" (171, 2). Thompson borrows the term "soundscape" from the Canadian composer who coined it, R. Murray Schafer. Assessing the lay of the land in "The Music of the Environment" (1973), Schafer dubs such a situation a lo-fi soundscape, wherein, in order to be heard, even the most ordinary sounds must be "monstrously amplified" (25).

The beginnings of modernism, then, usher in a complete transformation in the nature of sound and the means of experiencing it. And yet the sonic turn comes about, in no small part, as a challenge to the hegemony of the visual in so much critical output, which drowns out auditory approaches. As Thompson finds when reviewing the scholarship of modern architecture, scholars attend to the visual spectacle while remaining mostly silent about the innovative acoustics (9). Media theorist Douglas Kahn agrees, claiming in his examination of modernism's sonic envelope in *Noise, Water, Meat* (1999), that modernism is often seen and read, but rarely listened to (4). Sociologist Fran Tonkiss attributes this omission to the ocularity of seminal critics like Walter Benjamin and George Simmel, a point she makes in both "Aural Postcards" (2003) and *Space, the*

*City, and Social Theory* (2005) (128; 119). Their short-sightedness, she concludes, leaves us with “surface without depth, appearance without resonance” (“Aural” 128).

Despite the seeming contradiction of working on sound in a print medium, exciting work on sound in literary studies began appearing in the last decade and only continues to grow. Debra Rae Cohen has rightly criticized a modernist focus on sound that, by latching on to concepts like inscription and reproduction, seeks to assimilate it neatly into the literary (“Radio” 583). Indeed, with her focus on the ephemerality of radio and its lack of an early archive, she has drawn needed attention to that technology's radical resistance to, and destabilization of, attempts to contain it on the page (“Listener” 572). Resistance, too, is found in Carter Mathes' *Imagine the Sound* (2015), where the influence of black sonic expression works in tandem with literary creation within the Black Arts Movement of the post-civil rights era in America and serves as the artistic life's blood of the ongoing struggle for racial equality. Mark Goble's chapter on sound in *Beautiful Circuits* (2010), his book on relationships with and engendered by technology, makes the important point that, in a developing intermedial world, gestures toward noise create a “fantasmatic soundtrack that communicates more than what the novel could tell us” (217). The end of Ivan Kreilkamp's *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (2005) overlaps with the starting point of my own project, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899); in his chapter on Conrad, he offers many thought-provoking questions about the agon between narrative voice and mechanical voice, reading the novella as a crisis over the fate of “last words” after the phonograph.

My own intervention, into a field where so much remains to be said, focuses on what happens after the phonograph, the project becoming less reliant on sound technology itself as it proceeds and more on the properties of sound that technology is often responsible for unleashing and revealing. So, while Gregory Whitehead's radio art, in particular *Dead Letters* (1985), "a packet of voices borrowed from bodies that have never met," and his co-edited volume *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (1994), inspired my thinking about the afterlife of voices, I have gone a step further toward a consideration of the afterlife of sonic traits rather than the life of machines (71). Likewise, Kahn's thinking on the unheard modernism is invaluable, but in moments when he turns to the novel he is more interested in representations of audio technology—a descriptive reproduction of the auditory rather than an impressionistic rendering of its forces.<sup>5</sup>

In my attempts to make forces visible, I find myself more in line with the philosopher and musicologist Peter Szendy, who opens his book *Listen: A History of Our Ears* (2008), a contemplation on the role of the music listener, with a piquant query: "Can one *make a listening listened to*? Can I transmit *my* listening, unique as it is?" (5). In the chapters that follow, the literary is set side-by-side with a specific audio process, principle, or problem, and the product is, to some extent, an attempt to answer Szendy. To make a listening listened to, or, as I opt for in the next section, a hearing heard through the written word, my methodology has affinities with Seth Kim-Cohen's notion of a "non-cochlear sonic art," that is, a sonic art that addresses itself to a sense besides

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, his reading of the role of the gramophone in Blaise Cendrars's *Dan Yack* (53-54).

hearing, or to a hearing beyond the ear. Where we part, however, in in our primary archives, his *In the Blink of an Ear* (2009) pursuing what he terms the “gallery” arts (xxi).<sup>6</sup> It is a decided strength of sound studies that despite working on very different forms, one finds oneself practicing similar methods, or striking up a common cause. The latter is the case with Emily Thompson, as we both are addressing a similar problem: namely, redressing what we see as a kind of hearing loss on the part of critics and attempting, through attention to the sonic, to provide greater resonance to the historical record by overlaying a little-told tale upon the existing scholarship.

The chief technological hindrance faced by all the authors I am concerned with, marking their novels as zones of conflict with contemporaneous innovations, is indeed a kind of hearing loss, the inability to embed sound within the confines of the printed page. As Kittler puts it so axiomatically, “Record grooves dig the grave of the author” since “[v]oice remains the other of typescripts” (83, 228). The voice, too, was muted by phonologists, scientists whose work can be said to have begun in 1876, the year Jan Badouin de Courtenay coined the word “phoneme,” which shares its root with an invention of the same year (the telephone) and of the following (the phonograph). While those latter inventions sought to transmit and preserve the voice, respectively, phonology saw the voice as an “impeding element,” as Mladen Dolar describes it in *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), his psychoanalytic-inflected taxonomy of the voice. In phonology, not to mention the novel, voice is “the remainder that doesn’t make sense, a leftover, a castoff—shall we say an excrement of the signifier?” (17, 20). Sound has no place on the

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<sup>6</sup> By this, he means to draw a distinction between his quarry and the visual arts; for his purposes, gallery art is any work meant to be received, through institutional imprimatur, as “art” (xxi).

page after the phonograph and industrial and mechanical noise, a nonsensical externality of “progress,” has no place in civilized society, designated a “disease” by an anti-noise campaigner of the 1930s (Richards 632). It is perhaps not surprising that, as Bijsterveld reveals, the anti-noise campaigns in turn-of-the-century Europe turned for inspiration to the Victorian era’s assault on the noisome, so successful in its efforts to stamp out the scourge of stench (3). The subjectivity of noise, however, prevented it from being effectively regulated, despite the best efforts of activists. Like any good bacteria, sonic material virulently resists being stamped out; despite Kittler’s diagnosis of literature after Edison, it persists, unseen but felt, on the pages of its host. The conception of the modern novel that I arrive at is that of a fugitive art, refusing to be bound by its cover, to be rendered tone deaf by typeface. Sounding out the tactics of modern novelists discloses an aural history at a time when everything but the novel was thought to be sounding off.

### *Fair Hearings*

The title, *Sounding Modernism*, read one way indicates that I am “sounding out idols,” following W.J.T. Mitchell’s use of a Nietzschean technique in *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005), which he describes as a critical practice whereby one strikes idols just enough “to make them resonate, but not so much as to smash them” (9). It is a delicate operation, one that does not desire to shatter the existing scholarship, but rather by approaching the text closely; one that endeavors to find, within the resonance generated, new readings of highly visible works within the modernist canon and unexpected affinities between novels little read or thought beyond modernism’s historical remit.

Read another way, though, the title offers a model of modernism in which its auditory aspect is given a fair hearing—and that those elements that compose the auditory receive the same treatment. Noise, for example, is often that which we seek to filter out, unnatural when compared to the voice's proof of life and chaotic when heard beside music's careful construction. Yet phonography proved a democratic process and a great leveler, giving voices to machines and, through its imperfect reproductions, uncovering noise as music's necessary obverse. Phonography, as Kahn explains, heard everything, did not filter or privilege, and by wresting the voice from the body, and thereby making it alien, actually undermined the voice's privilege, making it just one sound among a burgeoning panoply (9). Indeed, on the earliest recordings, even under then-optimal conditions, one had to listen closely to locate the voice, which was often buried beneath noise, fighting to find a niche of its own with the record's grooves. But if one instead simply attempted to *hear* it all, one would hear scratches, voices, instruments, distortion, and the acoustics of the space<sup>7</sup>—in other words, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century preparation for John Cage's "silent" 4'33" (1952), a training of the ear not dissimilar to that the eye received at the hands of the photograph, according to Michael North.<sup>8</sup> The ear, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk ventures, constitutes a conduit between the social and the intimate, between the world and the amniotic audition that serves as the basis for his

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Conot claims that in the 1890s Edison was "irritated by the flood of criticism" that emerged as "attempt[s] to record produced such abominable scratching and nasal sounds that one prominent pianist turned ash white upon hearing the results, and artists almost unanimously divorced themselves from the machine because of its infidelity" (309).

<sup>8</sup> "By confounding ordinary visual experience," North writes, "photography suggested that vision is itself filtered and schematized, so that certain aspects of reality are beyond its ken." He later quotes Louis Aragon: "[T]he photograph teaches us to see—it sees what the eye fails to discern" (51, 68). W.J.T. Mitchell makes a similar claim: "If pictures teach us how to desire, they also teach us how to see—what to look for, how to arrange and make sense of what we see" (72).

notion of the “siren stage.”<sup>9</sup> Hearing functions, then, as a continual openness—literally, in the absence of anything like an earlid, but also figuratively, as a sympathetic and egalitarian sense.

And yet one need only look at many of the titles within my bibliography—*Listen*, *Listening*, *Listening In*, *The Mediumship of the Listener*—to see that hearing itself is rarely heard out.<sup>10</sup> To draw a distinction between hearing and listening, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in *Listening* (2002) riffs on the double entendre of “entendre,” “to hear” and “to understand.” If hearing offers one the basics of a situation—“a context if not a text”—listening provides a “straining toward a possible meaning” (6).<sup>11</sup> We might think of this straining as a kind of focusing of the ear, allowing one to hear things not immediately present, as with the ear-strain suffered by early listeners of the phonograph and the radio. Thus within the ear we see a reinscription of the activity of the eye. One speaks of a visual bias, whether in Western civilization or within the sense itself (its selectivity, its directionality), but within the aural there is a definite bias on the side of listening. In spite of this bias, I choose hearing as the operative term for this dissertation, another of my points of intervention.

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<sup>9</sup> In opposition to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, Sloterdijk puts forth the concept of the “siren stage,” referring back to the experience of the womb as a theater of intimate, amniotic hearing, “an advance hearing of the ego motif” through which “the individual forms a pact with its own future, from which it draws the joy of living towards fulfillment” (493).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Sterne is one of the few dissenters, although the reasons for his dissent are unspoken. Without speaking out against listening, he does insist on hearing in his “audiovisual litany” as the term to oppose vision (9).

<sup>11</sup> Mladen Dolar also brings up the same double entendre, and associates hearing with “mere” meaning and listening with what he calls “the voice beyond meaning,” the voice as the vehicle for that which cannot be expressed in words (148, 30).

Barthes, in what he terms “the second stage of listening,” posits that “what is listened for is no longer the possible, it is the secret,” that which is “obscure, blurred, or mute... the 'underside' of meaning” (“Listening” 249). In proposing a new approach to the novel I would argue instead that this is not the second stage of listening, but the first stage of hearing: the work's open secret. That is to say, when one “hear things,” in a figurative sense, one is not hearing the possible, but rather the improbable, the mute, the unsayable. When one overhears, one hears things not meant to be heard; when one over-hears, he hears an excess. Hearing broadens awareness in a way that listening does not; one listens to voices and music, but one hears much much more. As a term, hearing is a useful push-back against a tendency to privilege, as so often happens, easily isolable elements of sound. As a reading practice, hearing also opens up a text, often in unexpected ways. For example, while one finds any number of books or articles written about the use of Nadsat or Beethoven in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), the method I am proposing in this dissertation, although interested in both voice and music, would assemble them alongside other instances of sound in the novel.<sup>12</sup> Duchamp claims that one cannot hear hearing, but we can *see* hearing in Burgess's novel—we can use our eye for an ear. Within his protagonist Alex's narrative, one sees frequent recourse to onomatopoeia—automobiles “coughing kash kashl kashl” and bells going “collocoll”—in

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<sup>12</sup> On music, see, Paul Phillips, *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2011, and Peter J. Rabinowitz. “A Bird of Like Rarest Spun Heavenmetal’: Music in *A Clockwork Orange*.” *Stanley Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange*. Ed. Stuart Y. Macdougall. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003, 109-130, which, as much criticism of the novel has since 1971, considers both the novel and its film adaptation. For Nadsat, see, Robert O. Evans. “Nadsat: The Argot and Its Implications in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 1 (1971): 406-10, and Robbie B.H. Goh. “‘Clockwork’ Language Reconsidered: Iconicity and Narrative in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 30.2 (Summer 2000): 263-80.



which might be read an index of the surrounding sounds, noises affecting and infecting his discourse, some of which are arguably brought about by the encroaching on privacy found within a tower-block culture that emerged post-World War II (25, 183).

But this remains modernism and, despite the degree to which the idol has been smashed, as critics Johanna Drucker and Rosalind Krauss remind us, Clement Greenberg's understanding of modernism and his association with key terms like "medium" retain historical importance and some residual force.<sup>13</sup> Greenberg famously claimed that in modernism the arts have been "hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated, and defined" (42). In the context of my dissertation, Greenberg and Kittler become unlikely bedfellows, the latter claiming that "[a]s long as the book was responsible for all serial data flows, words quivered with sensuality and meaning," but "[e]lectricity itself put an end to this," effectively turning off the power (10). After all, what was a quiver on a page when compared to the quaver recorded in a groove? Both make forceful and peremptory arguments and have the last say for themselves, while denying the novel a response—and denying that it even could respond.

Rather than being isolated, though, the novel is at first haunted by technological advances like the radio, phonograph, portable recorder, and the telephone—but, as they became more commonplace, authors became intrigued by them, too, aping their effects so

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<sup>13</sup> Drucker on Greenberg's reign: "While this hegemony has long since been shattered, the terms of the Greenbergian paradigm established themselves as highly influential elements of midcentury art critical vocabulary, and even if they have been questioned more recently, they remain significant historically" (233). Krauss, in proclaiming the post-medium age, still recognizes how laden "medium" remains: "[F]rom the '60s on, to utter the word 'medium' meant invoking 'Greenberg'.... Thus if I have decided in the end to retain the word 'medium,' it is because for all the misunderstandings and abuses attached to it, this is term that opens onto the discursive field that I want to address" (6, 7).

as to subvert the novel. There were a host of changes in audio reception and production of which the novel can be seen to be, in a manner of speaking, the paper of record, for what links all of the works in this dissertation, at least temporally, is that they were also published after the introduction of the residential telephone (ca. 1890),<sup>14</sup> the transition within the music industry from the star songwriter to the star performer and from publishing to recording (1892),<sup>15</sup> and the beginnings of industrial noise control in North America and Europe.<sup>16</sup> In a century that saw the invention of earplugs and headphones, authors of the period were attuned to the way these breakthroughs, along with a marked increase in industrialization and mechanization, were changing the world around them and how, too, it could change their art. The first to hear this, there at the dawn of these changes, was Joseph Conrad.

*“By the power of the written word...,” Or: Why Conrad Matters*

*Heart of Darkness* is serialized as the phonograph, which liberated the voice, has been domesticated. In the Greek word *phone* (voice) Dolar notes that one can also hear another word from that language, *phonos* (murder) (19). Jessie Conrad, when listening to her phonograph, would hear the voice; her husband Joseph, on the other hand, was inspired with thoughts of murder by the machine’s infernal racket, insisting that Jessie listen to it on the veranda with all of the doors of the home shut tight. The phonograph, an invention

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<sup>14</sup> Claude S. Fischer claims that the telephone became common in 1890, a year that saw 2 percent of Americans with phones installed. See, “Gender and the Residential Telephone, 1890-1940: Technologies of Sociability,” *Sociological Forum* 3.2 (Spring 1988): 211-233.

<sup>15</sup> Steve Sullivan identifies Len Spencer, whose first hit was recorded in 1892, as a “true pioneer of early popular recordings (Whitburn 5).

<sup>16</sup> For a thoroughgoing history of such measures, see, Karin Bijsterveld. “The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age: Technology and Symbolism of Sound in European and North American Noise Abatement Campaigns, 1900-40.” *Social Studies of Science* 31.1 (Feb. 2001): 37-70.

that embalms the voice, voids the novelist's claim on the same, according to Kittler, who must give up on that ghost, which has fled to other media. Yet it is Joseph Conrad, the author with the greatest distaste for the phonograph, who created the greatest refutation of Kittler's argument through a parallel technology that rendered visible, in its form, the forces that created the voice at his novella's heart. It is this same author whose literal and metaphoric voice left an impression on anyone who encountered it—whether speaking to a collaborator who had yet to learn of his erstwhile friend's recent death or making a tonal appeal to a young poet in a small library in Barbados—the echoes of which are detectable, at varying levels, in nearly every work covered in this project.

In France in 1924, for example, a man looks out of his window and sees a friend forlornly, motionlessly, silently staring out to sea, as if he might somehow bring back the lost voice of the one he misses simply by looking in that direction. This is not a scene from *The Great Gatsby* (1925), but one that features its author, F. Scott Fitzgerald. The writer Gilbert Seldes sees Fitzgerald in such a state; sensing the former's presence, Fitzgerald quietly says, "Conrad is dead" (Milford 143). Conrad died on August 3, 1924, just as Fitzgerald had begun work on his most famous novel, one deeply indebted to the late author. Fitzgerald had re-read the "Preface" to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) right before starting *Gatsby*; he later writes in a letter to H.L. Mencken that that particular work by Conrad was "the greatest 'credo' in my life" (*LIL* 256). It taught him that what was most important about a work of fiction was to leave a lasting impression, to reverberate in the mind of the reader long after she has forgotten particular details, including who authored the text in question (252-53).

But Conrad was especially difficult to forget, as he continued to linger in the mind of his intimates after his death, returning to them, as Kurtz does to Marlow, in the form of his voice. For example, on the day Conrad died, while driving past a rather nondescript field on his way to a railway station, Ford hears his old friend's voice asking him how he would translate that particular image to the page. When he arrives at his destination, he sees a newspaper headline screaming "*DEATH OF JOSEPH CONRAD.*" "This is a bad joke....," he writes, "That paper is of the sort that makes bad jokes.... He was speaking to me. Not five, not three ... minutes.... Not three seconds; just now on this platform ... the duskyish voice with the brown accent, rather caressing.... " (27). That "brown accent" was, more precisely, as he describes it in the original French obituary appended to the volume, "un bon accent meridional francais," which rendered him "presque incomprehensible a tout Anglais qui ne parlait pas au moins un peu le francais" (273).<sup>17</sup>

In a general way, Conrad is an intriguing figure because he so easily operates as a stand-in for any author who agonized over what a technological interloper like the phonograph meant for his art, only his suffering is so externalized, so lived out loud. What primarily interests me about Conrad as an individual, though, is that his premises are revisited—the attempt to capture the beautiful voice of Joanna on a cassette in Muriel Spark, the Kurtz-Marlow dynamic between Janie and Pheoby in Hurston—and his style is imitated, in Ford and Fitzgerald, while Burgess's Alex might be a descendant of the Russian from *Heart of Darkness*. But more than that, his name is continually invoked by

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<sup>17</sup> Ford did not write much more characteristically Fordian prose than he did in his preface to this obituary: "For those not dreading more emotion than the English language will bear, the writer appends what follows, which was written immediately after learning of the death of Conrad. It contains something that is not in the foregoing pages. The writer could not face its translation" (269).

writers and his prose is so often figured by critics as speaking to his audience. George Lamming, who gave up poetry for prose largely because of the influence of Conrad, described the latter's attractiveness was in his "tonal quality," in his "appeal to the ear" (7). Woolf, who knew Conrad personally—and, indeed, began her appreciation of him after his death by noting his "strong foreign accent"—describes him in one of her "conversations" as a "nightingale" who "goes on singing the same songs" and, after his death, she clings to his "sonorities" ("Conrad" 227; "Conversation" 310; "Conrad" 234). It seems a great irony that such a master of English prose should be nearly incomprehensible to native speakers of the language, but it is this conflict, I would suggest, that gives his voice on the page the uncanny ring that continues to seduce across the ages.

His "mistress," Woolf observes, was "his style" and she was "a little somnolent in repose," but "let somebody speak to her, and then how magnificently she bears down upon us, with what colour, triumph, and majesty!" (227-28). Hers is a claim that is, in some degree, difficult to wrap one's head around—Who speaks to her? How does one have a conversation with style itself? What does one have to say to bring her to life? Clarification, perhaps, comes some lines later when Woolf offers a defense against those who wish he was less concerned with style and more with moralizing: "That beauty teaches, that beauty is a disciplinarian, how are we to convince them, since her teaching is inseparable from the sound of her voice and to that they are deaf?" (228). The dialogue

within Conrad's style occurs within the space where a language encounters a voice, and the resulting "friction" is what Roland Barthes calls "the grain" (185, 181).<sup>18</sup>

Too often the credo put forth in Conrad's famous preface, his clarion cry of "by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel,... to make you see," is excerpted as just that final clause. This, of course, elides over the fact that Conrad also wishes to make one hear, the first wish made in his statement ("Narcissus" 13).

"[W]ords," Conrad writes in a letter to Hugh Clifford, "groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of life, have the power in their sound or their aspect to present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental vision of your readers" (*CL* 2 200).

Conrad and Ford collaborated on several novels together and the sound of words was integral to the composition of their final such work, *The Nature of a Crime* (1909),<sup>19</sup> a process mostly oral in nature. Ford biographer Alan Judd assesses the difficulties faced in such an age by the book when it desperately needs to make itself heard: "If... read in silence by someone who does not know the writer great slabs are likely to remain flat on the page, lacking a voice to lift them, and the impression of the whole will be of something less pregnant and pointed, something altogether lighter and looser and easier" (75).<sup>20</sup> Conrad ventured to provide this missing aspect by finding the right "accent," a notion he outlines in the preface to his autobiographical account, *A Personal Record*:

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<sup>18</sup> This friction might also be conceived of as Deleuze and Guattari's "stammer," the sure sign of an individual style in which one creates "a language within a language," such as Samuel Beckett's French or Kafka's German (109, 108).

<sup>19</sup> An oral collaboration between two authors is, of course, a literal version of one have one's style spoken to. *The Nature of a Crime* was serialized in 1909 in Ford's own *English Review* and collected as a book in 1924, at Ford's urging and against Jessie Conrad's inclinations. Conrad's preface for it was his last completed work. See Najder, *JC* 487-88.

<sup>20</sup> Max Saunders, having listened to two radio talks Ford gave in the late 1930s, argues that for Ford, also, his speaking voice gave insight into understanding his narrative voice and his method (322).

“[W]ritten words have their accent, too. Yes! Let me only find the right word! Surely it must be lying somewhere among the wreckage of all the complaints and all the exultations poured out aloud since the first day when hope, the undying, came down on earth. It may be there, close by, disregarded, invisible, quite at hand” (3).

In the first collaboration between Conrad and Ford, *The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story* (1901), a character is introduced who manages to be, at least figuratively, both the written record and the phonographic record at the same time, one whose lack of accent is unnerving. The narrator, himself an author, meets a supernatural figure, generically referred to as “She,” who claims to be from the Fourth Dimension, a place whose nature is “invisible to our eyes”:

She made a long speech of it; I condense. I can't remember her exact words—there were so many; but she spoke like a book. There was something exquisitely piquant in her choice of words, in her expressionless voice. I seemed to be listening to a phonograph reciting a technical work. There was a touch of the incongruous, of the mad, that appealed to me.... And I was listening to a parody of a scientific work recited by a phonograph. (9)

“She”—now a book, now a phonograph—stands as an answer to the question posed by *Scientific American*, namely, after the phonograph, are we to have a new kind of book? The alarm and appeal “She” elicits may have been similar to that felt by many novelists, especially those bewitched by the sound of their own voices, when face-to-face with the phonograph, a device that may have allowed them to dream about a talking book, even if it could only be embodied in a supernatural figure from an unseen dimension.

Just as the voice was given new vessels, transfigured and transvalued, through this technology, that same voice transcended its origins. “When I turn my radio on,” contemporary sound artist Gregory Whitehead writes,

I hear a whole chorus of death rattles: from stone cold, hard fact larynxes at every stage of physical decomposition; from talk show golden throats cuts with a scalpel, transected, then taped back together and beamed out across the airwaves; from voices that have been severed from the body so long that no one can remember who they belong to, or whether they belong to anyone at all. (145)

After the machines have been forgotten, discontinued, made obsolete—after the beloved author is forgotten and only his lessons remain—sound material endures, rattles, pulsates, and vibrates. This dissertation is ultimately about the crucial role traits and properties of sound—timbre, ambiance, and silence—had on the shape and development of modernist fiction, about encounters with machines that inspired authors to make their own technology more sensitive and receptive.

*Frequencies, Vibrations, Revolutions*

Against the later prescriptions of Greenberg, an author like Conrad was not content to be confined within his medium; I begin with him, as the last section made clear, for more than reasons of simple chronology. The opening chapter is the most comprehensive treatment of the literal voice in the dissertation, abrading the ontology of narrative, with Conrad trying to find a form to accommodate the lost voice at the center of *Heart of Darkness* and Ford Madox Ford's John Dowell attempting to write a novel in *The Good Soldier* (1915) as though it were a story, told aloud to an imagined guest. Focusing on the literary and critical work of Conrad and Ford, I argue that literary impressionism, because it shares in the phonograph's mechanism of physical imprinting, was as much an auditory phenomenon as a visual one. This shift in medium not only underscores each work's fascination with unrecoverable voices but also effects a temporal shift. These authors were not looking back to a recent painting technique but looking forward, anticipating



and grappling with the problems presented by sound technology. For example, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, haunted by the voice of Kurtz, is best read as an expression of anxiety over literature's ability to accurately capture voice in a new media landscape, one filled with phonographs and telephones. As noted, Conrad lamented his wife's fondness for the phonograph, which to his ears amounted to little more than "squeaking, wheezing, and moaning" (Allen 87). In contrast, Conrad's new style offers Kurtz's voice as even the most sophisticated recording techniques of the era could not. The voice Marlow ultimately seeks to reproduce is not defined by its timbre or resonance but by its imprint on the shape of his narrative. A revolution in sound, the phonograph, in its unwritten part as an unwritable gap, yielded two exemplars of modern storytelling.

The second chapter, on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, considers the development of American voices in the context of the radio, for which Fitzgerald would write, and folk recordings, which Hurston captured in her role as an anthropologist. This chapter retains an interest in the voice, but more figuratively, since a shift to an America between the wars bears witness to a nascent empire attempting to find the authoritative voice with which it will speak on the world stage. Fitzgerald and Hurston write novels fascinated by the literal voice that contribute to the nation's ever growing folklore and legends. But they also craft forms that evoke the peculiarity of their own technological enthusiasms, which emphasize—through static, tuning, ambient noise—the degree to which the figure is constituted by its ground, the text given meaning by its contexts. Unlike Conrad with his distaste for technology, both Fitzgerald and Hurston were open to the new possibilities of the voice in

a world where sounds were in the air and on record. For Fitzgerald, this meant revising his novel to eliminate much of its physical detail<sup>21</sup> and turning his attention instead toward a style meant for what he once dubbed “the ear of the reader” (“Concerning”). The end product is a novel about the power, attractiveness, and danger of certain voices, at a time of governmental anxieties over an unregulated organ of communication and nationalist anxieties over immigration. According to Langston Hughes in his autobiography, Hurston did not need to write books for “she is a perfect book of entertainment herself”; her trial, then, was to find a way to translate her very vibrant living voice into literature (238). She accomplished this with a voice informed by her recording of folk tales, in which she reproduces the narrative not with faithfulness to the letter of the story but to its spirit, giving the experience to go along with the tale.

With the popularization of radio, people realized, even if they did not completely understand, that the sky was full of voices that we cannot see but, with the proper equipment, can be shifted into frequencies falling within the range of human hearing. The second chapter begins a movement that culminates in the final two chapters, namely, the de-centering of the human and his inventions—indeed, by the late 1920s the amateur’s involvement in both radio and records became largely curtailed by the governmental regulation of the former and the shuttering of Edison Records, whose vinyl cylinders one

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<sup>21</sup> Fitzgerald’s novel is, more often than not, treated to readings that are visuocentric in nature. For a small sampling of essays on this theme, see, Tom Burnam. “The Eyes of Dr. Eckleburg: A Re-examination of *The Great Gatsby*.” *College English* 14.1 (Oct. 1952): 7-12, Lawrence Jay Dessner. “Photography in *The Great Gatsby*.” *Essays in Literature* 6.1 (Spring 1979): 79-89. Wheeler W. Dixon. *The Cinematic Vision of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1986, 21-36, Michael North. *Camera Works*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 109-139, and Scott F. Stoddart. “Redirecting Fitzgerald’s ‘Gaze’: Masculine Perception and Cinematic License in *The Great Gatsby*.” In *F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Perspectives*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, Alan Margolies, and Ruth Prigozy, 102-114. Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2000.

could record on oneself (which was not the case with rival Emile Berliner's gramophone discs). Instead, forces and newly observed phenomena, as well as the environmental soundscape step to the fore of the dissertation, as sound and its properties are found to be in places we could not have imagined or never bothered to consider. Focusing on the multi-genre experiments of Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941), the third chapter argues that both novels incorporate other genres in attempts to not only create some entirely new, but to also celebrate ambience over incidents and plots of land over plotting.

Each work is lined with longing for an embodied audience and for transcendence of their historical circumstances. As the modernist novel's most profound integrations of lyric, dramatic form, and narrative, *Cane* and *Between the Acts* discover meaning beyond the human utterance—just as science is discovering frequencies above and beyond human apprehension—turning instead toward the larger soundscape that accommodates each novel's events and which each author takes great pains to delineate and describe. In the process, Toomer and Woolf create what I call audio-spatial form, the product of an immersive listening<sup>22</sup> to the auditory traits of the voices and vibrations of the soundscape and an understanding of the way those two forces work on one another. Through their constructions, each sidelines the human so as to expand the dynamic range of the novel to encompass silence, vibration, and incoherent noise. In doing so, they interpellate the reader through the array of forms on display, immersing her in the different sound effects

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<sup>22</sup> The use of the term "listening" here is quite intentional, since, in its laser-like focus on sound *qua* sound, immersive listening arrives at egalitarian ends through a discriminatory practice, an overlooking of linguistic meaning so as to establish equal footing for all who occupy the soundscape.

particular to these forms. For instance, excerpted from Toomer's play *Natalie Mann*, *Cane*'s opening story "Karintha" came with instructions from Toomer when it was first published in *Broom*: "To be read, accompanied by the humming of a Negro folk song" ("Karintha" 83).<sup>23</sup> Rendering visible the inaudible forces that bind us all, Toomer and Woolf make the strongest argument in the dissertation for hearing as the sense that opens us up most fully to an engagement with, and an appreciation of, the world—and not just the people—around us.

The fourth and final chapter examines three post-war novels set in an urban England of the immediate past, present, and dystopic future, where nothing is silent, written by authors with active inward ears: Muriel Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1953), and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. This chapter functions as a catchment for many of the ideas that have come before, only deterritorialized—repeated with a difference, in new milieus—in riffs and refrains that spread throughout each novel. After more than a half-century of the intensification and circulation of sound, noise has become such a social ill that greater measures are taken to mitigate the stress, tension, and anxiety that studies begin to show it produces. Soundproofing became a way for one to control the soundscape, to clearly mark one's territory, but it was not available to the economically disadvantaged. In their case, having ceased being able to control technology, they have instead become its pawn, their interiority an inscription surface for all manner of sounds. Rather than being

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<sup>23</sup> It is true that this instruction is removed from the published novel, but I would simply argue that the instruction in *Broom*, with the story published apart from its kin, was for the uses of context. Reading *Cane*, one immediately becomes steeped in its singing pages.

deployed in a vibrational mode, as in the previous chapter, sound here is literally infectious, a disease-vector to be guarded against. The most sensational instance of this appears in *A Clockwork Orange*, when Alex throws himself out of a window to escape the music pouring unchecked into his room, opting for defenestration and chancing death. Soundproofing, as I read it, functions both literally and figuratively in these novels. Building on the work of the previous chapters, I argue that these texts show that at stake in soundproofing is the right to self-definition, to firmly demarcate the boundaries between the world and one's own physical and mental space.

### *The End of the Beginning*

One of Greenberg's most quoted sentences surely must come from "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), his manifesto of medium specificity: "The arts lie safe now, each within its 'legitimate' boundaries, and free trade has been replaced by autarchy" (41-42). It is difficult not to hear within this statement, particularly given the historical moment of anxiety over fascism and calls for isolationism it was penned in, the admonition "Keep to your own kind," a principle that fails utterly in the aforementioned final chapter. Deleuze, if only unconsciously responding to Greenberg, argues that from "another point of view," the question of boundaries between the arts—their "autonomy" and "hierarchy"—becomes irrelevant, and that point of view is from an understanding of the arts as a community facing common problems (*Bacon* 48). What I hope this project accomplishes, apart from demonstrating an ethics of sound that promotes diversity and plurality (that is, community), is a destabilization, brought about by the multisensory appeals made by the authors, of accustomed reading habits, but also of modernist periodization since one of

the—perhaps unintended—consequences of the tide of technology that followed the invention of the phonograph was a fundamental tampering with temporality itself.

The immortalization of speech made possible by Edison, by which a literal voice of the past speaks to us in our present day, is a variety of what Bernard Stiegler calls tertiary memory, “a witnessing of the dead's past,” or, more pointedly, in a term coined by Szendy, phonogrammatization (6; 10). This phonogrammatization is a technology of recording of “a new type—of a new type precisely in that they make it possible to capture exactly the grain of the voice,” thereby changing our relationship to the past through its futuristic capabilities (Derrida and Stiegler 102). If the phonograph ushered in “a new status for hearing,” as Kahn declares, it at the same time also ushered in a new relationship between life and death, between past and future, and between ancestors and descendants (5). If, as I have claimed, Conrad is the tributary from which modern encounters with the auditory begins, I would also put forth that there is—despite the necessary terminus signaled in my title—no end, only an ongoing, rhizomatic flow. All attempts to render the novel vocal, musical, or sonic trigger modernism’s capacious instincts for formal experimentations; like so many dead residues of sound, invisible forces beneath detection, contemporary instances of auditory pulses and modernism’s impulses lay waiting to be excavated.

That is, if we are but willing to hear it. “We can't even hear it anymore,” Walter Carlos Williams claimed of poetry in a 1950 interview, “because we don't believe it can happen in our lives” (17). Here, Williams has taken a familiar saying, a cliché—“Seeing is believing!”—and, unwittingly or not, breathed new life into it by both reversing its

terms and displacing vision. Not hearing is believing, but *believing is hearing*. Put differently, if we could only believe in our eyes—if, to recur again to the epigraph, we are not blind—we might be able to hear. “I’ve got something to tell you,” a refrain in Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means*, is a way of telling the reader that she is back in the novel’s present-day frame, its repetition bespeaking a certain resolve (3, 10, 48). At once, one may look at the page and see this as both a declaration of a character, but also of the text itself; near the end of this project’s timespan, the page has built up the confidence to make explicit what approximately sixty years of writing had been uttering beneath its breath.

Operating in accordance with this logic, this dissertation will set out to demonstrate that modernist novels were responsive to, and invested and immersed in sound, so that we might begin to hear its resonance on the page. Modern novelists heard a new world and heard the world anew. Through this, they created literary forms that could index the collapsing distinctions between foreground and background, music and noise. Ultimately, I hope that this project serves as a corrective to what I see as a blindspot or an oversight—indeed, the difficulty I have in conjuring up figures of speech related to hearing is itself telling. As literary critics, we have long accepted the tenet that novelists have never written in a vacuum; neither, I would add, have they written in an anechoic chamber. With this counter-history, I am not looking to enthrone the audible at the expense of the visual—indeed, if anything, I am hijacking the eye to do the ear’s bidding so as to see how our existing understanding of modernism, and the modernist novel, would be expanded, deepened, given resonance. In sounding out the novel, I am

documenting both what happens to the literary as it encounters and assimilates new technologies of sound, what new stories and voices it is capable of rendering as a result, and where and when in post-war literature we might, without end, still hear modernism's originary echoes.



Phonographic Impressions in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Ford Madox Ford's

*The Good Soldier*

I am the Edison phonograph, created by the great wizard of the New World to delight those who would have melody or be amused. I can sing you tender songs of love. I can give you merry tales and joyous laughter. I can transport you to the realms of music. I can cause you to join in the rhythmic dance. I can lull the babe to sweet repose, or waken in the aged heart soft memories of youthful days. No matter what may be your mood, I am always ready to entertain you.... I never get tired and you will never tire of me, for I always have something new to offer.... If you sing or talk to me, I will retain your songs or words, and repeat them to you at your pleasure. I can enable you to always hear the voices of your loved ones, even though they are far away. I talk in every language. I can help you to learn other languages. I am made with the highest degree of mechanical skill. My voice is the clearest, smoothest and most natural of any talking machine. The name of my famous master is on my body, and tells you that I am a genuine Edison phonograph. The more you become acquainted with me, the better you will like me.

—1906 recorded advertisement for the Edison phonograph

I hear, I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced.

—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

The phonograph was for Joseph Conrad an unsound device. As his friend Vio Allen recounted after Conrad's death, his work habits were so disturbed by the apparatus that his wife Jessie was only allowed to listen to it on the veranda, with all the doors and windows of the home shut. It was not, to be clear, the sounds reproduced by the machine that troubled him as much as it was the sounds the machine itself produced; he complained of his wife listening for hours to the “damn thing squeaking, wheezing and moaning” (Allen 87). “The truth that nobody wanted to hear but everybody knew,” Jonathan Sterne argues, was that “sound reproduction shaped the sounds that went through the network” (272). While Jessie Conrad turned a deaf ear to this truth, listening

to the music, her husband could not help but hear the machine's fidelity problem. Fidelity, first applied to sound in 1877 in the wake of the invention of the phonograph, is the measure of the correspondence between the performed input and the recorded output, of the technological medium's ability to efface its own involvement ("Wonderful" 304).

Yet anyone who has heard an Edison cylinder understands that exact reproduction, what I will refer to as true fidelity, was impossible. What was really being produced—not reproduced—is what Sterne calls a "fictitious" external reality, fictitious because the end-product is inevitably marked by the set of relations between performers, machines, networks, and listeners and furthermore the properties of the spaces they operate in (218). This production of "reality" is similar to Jacques Derrida's definition of "actuality," namely as "[i]t is not given but actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by numerous apparatuses which are *factitious* or *artificial*" (3). For this reason, the listener had to be "trained" to listen, to develop what Sterne calls "audile technique," a prioritizing of voices and music over static and surface noise to which Jessie Conrad unknowingly acceded (25). Instead of reality, what one ended up with was realism—that is, verisimilar, not documented fact—in the form of a copy that is itself, according to Sterne, "a distinctive form of originality" (245, 220).<sup>24</sup>

Conrad's objections to the phonograph anticipate Sterne's resituating of our understanding of fidelity, away from subjective and technological issues of sound quality and toward "a faith in media and a belief in media that can hold faith, a belief that media

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<sup>24</sup> In full disclosure, this reference to Sterne regards play-by-play broadcasting of a sporting event. That said, the phonograph was used to give the listener the impression of having "been there," whether during recordings or through a genre called "descriptive specialty," "tone pictures," in Sterne's words, of different places and events (243-44).

and sounds themselves could hold faithful to the agreement that two sounds are the same sound” (221-22). For Sterne, fidelity is faith not so much in the quality of a given reproduction as in the basic fact of reproducibility itself and the connections it fosters (274). With sound reproduction, these connections—between performer and listener, between original and copy—inhere in the medium itself. “Without the medium,” Sterne writes, “there would be no connection, no copy, but also no original, or at least no original in the same form. The performance is for the medium itself. The singer sings to the microphone, *to the network*, not to the woman listening at the other end” (226).

Where I diverge from Sterne is in my dilation on this problem of performance for Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, authors in search of a new form for the novel, who I understand not just as performers but as themselves mediums, between the world and the word. One is tempted to read Conrad's thoughts about sound fidelity as commentary on the tenuousness of his own practice of fidelity within the novel, “the supreme value in Conrad's ethic,” as Ian Watt writes, an attempt to demonstrate faithfulness, not to facts, but to life as experienced by the narrating consciousness (6). As with sound reproduction, true fidelity on the page is unachievable, no more, Conrad sighs, than the “proud illusion... that [one's] achievement has almost equalled the greatness of his dream” (“Books” 10). Perhaps when Conrad looked at his finished product, he did not see or hear the dream, but instead the scratching of his pen, sentences that do not signify, and, on the silent page, an absence of vibration and tonality.

Fidelity was a chief tenet of the literary impressionism practiced by both Conrad and his occasional friend and collaborator Ford, a “school” for which the latter wrote the manifesto in 1913:

The point is that any piece of Impressionism, whether it be prose, or verse, or painting, or sculpture, is the record of the impression of a moment; it is not a sort of rounded, annotated record or a set of circumstances—it is the record of the recollection in your mind of a set of circumstances that happened ten years ago—or ten minutes. (“Impressionism” 41)

The two men begin their careers as a different kind of record is gaining popularity, within within a world which, as *Heart of Darkness* is being serialized, is seeing a shift from the paper of sheet music to, ultimately, the plastic of records (205).<sup>25</sup> One might suggest that this is what spurred their search for a “New Form” for the novel, what Ford describes as “the rendering of an Affair” (*Return* 159). *Heart of Darkness* and Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1915) could easily be read as indices of anxiety, questioning the sufficiency of a time-tested medium to best tell the tale at hand when sound storage, projection, and circulation are available alternatives. But Ford, son of a music critic and a talented musician himself, seems interested in the ways the novel itself might record sounds, as expressed by several letters written to Conrad while the former is at the Western Front with the British Expeditionary Force in 1916. Ford “hasten[s] to communicate” with Conrad about a “curious opportunity with regard to sound,” namely, the sounds of war (*Letters* 71). Over several letters in the course several days, he provides “notes upon

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<sup>25</sup> According to the 1914 American Census of Manufactures, the value of the “Records and Blanks” industry in 1899, the year of its first appearance in the census, is \$539,370 compared to \$2.27 million for “Printing and Publishing, Music.” By 1904, however, Records and Blanks has eclipsed Printing and Publishing, \$4.68M to \$4.15M. For Records and Blanks numbers, see *Abstract of the Bureau of the Census of Manufactures, 1914*, 255. For Printing and Publish numbers, see *Abstract of the Bureau of the Census of Manufactures, 1919*, 700.

sounds,” hoping in this way to once again collaborate with his friend back in England (73). Conrad responds months later, writing, “Methinks that to make anything of it *in our sense* one must fling the very last dregs of realism overboard” (*CL* 5: 683). What I will argue in this chapter is that both men had indeed already made quite a bit of noise in their attention to the auditory in the novels under examination. Moreover, it required not the throwing over of realism, but a realism more suited to their needs, what Michael Levenson identifies as impressionistic realism in his reading of *The Good Soldier*, a realism that portrays life as experienced rather than life as known and understood (382).

Yet it is not only realism that needs to be differently conceived, but impressionism, as well, for the two epigraphic voices above have more in common than previously believed. Although historically understood as being of a piece with painterly Impressionism, literary impressionism, the new form in question, is, I contend, deeply inflected by phonography. Despite despising the noisome phonograph, and seeming to be uninterested in its operation, I argue that Conrad's fiction offers evidence of an influence of that infernal machine; that, no matter how tightly Jessie sealed all of the doors, the mechanics of phonography, with all of the noise that implies, seeped into the work; that his disdain for the end result of phonographic fidelity was of a piece with his own gloomy feelings about the fidelity of his own work. Ford, the dilettante with the critical eye, reads deeply into his friend's work to emerge with a manifesto; with *The Good Soldier*, which borrows motifs and entire lines from Conrad, he puts the theory into practice, bringing to the surface the struggles submerged in *Heart of Darkness* and acting as the glow that brings out the haze, to paraphrase Conrad's novella's frame narrator.

Pondering the possibilities of the phonograph in 1877, the editors of *Scientific American* ask, “Are we to have a new kind of book?” (“Wonderful” 304). In two questions of his own, Ivan Kreilkamp seems to unpack all that was implicit in their query, posed at a moment of seemingly unlimited promise: “What would it mean to write a work of literature, a novel within this new paradigm of sound and inscription? After the phonograph, does the novel abandon its relationship to oral storytelling—ceding place to a more efficient technology of vocal inscription—or seek to find some means of responding to the phonograph's innovations?” (194). No, my reading stresses, it does not abandon that relationship, but it also develops a response, what I call “sound writing.” To write novels of the phonographic age, Conrad and Ford become themselves—to use a name applied to the phonograph—“sound writers,” utilizing what I'm calling an unsound method to produce, not necessarily novels, but novelistic records. Within *Heart of Darkness*, “unsound” is used by the Manager as an adjective to describe Kurtz's ghastly methods, but for theorist Steve Goodman an “unsound” is the “not yet audible,” “sound becoming tactile” in the form of vibrations (62; x, 198).<sup>26</sup> For my purposes, unsounds register within Conrad and Ford in the attempts of their narrators to reproduce the entirety of an auditory experience—and not a just transcription—through language, and in the way the texts themselves are structured by figures whose voices are never heard within the works but are deeply felt. Understood this way, the rendering of an affair undertaken through literary impressionism is not unlike recording, while “impressionism” itself

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<sup>26</sup> Goodman's epigraph is taken from *Apocalypse Now* (1979), but from a scene not present in Conrad's novel. This scene—Kilgore's playing “The Ride of the Valkyries”—is not dissimilar to the music box from *Almayer's Folly*.

refers less to a movement in painting and more to the rotation of a cylinder as lines are etched into it by sound waves. My belief is that the confusion over interpreting these two works within the critical record emerges from a too-close reading instead of a fair hearing; listening too much to what the voice tells us instead of questioning what produces it and where it emerges from. To begin, I will draw out the ways in which sound fidelity and Conradian fidelity are entangled, and the larger net—or, rather, network—in which mediums ensnare not only operators and audiences but also elements of narration.

### *True Faith*

As stated in the epigraph, the Edison phonograph “always has something new to offer,” so that one will never tire of it, so that it will never grow old. An 1896 ad for the gramophone makes an even grander claim: “[T]he device remains forever New [sic]” (“78RPM”).<sup>27</sup> In the article that introduced the phonograph to the world, speaking for the machine before it had learned to speak itself, *Scientific American* breathlessly proclaims, “Speech has become, as it were, immortal” (“Wonderful” 304). Edward H. Johnson, an electrician given Edison's leave to make public both the device and how it works, avows, “A speech delivered into the mouthpiece of this apparatus may fifty years hence—long after the original speaker is dead—be reproduced audibly to an audience with sufficient fidelity to make the voice easily recognizable by those who were familiar with the

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<sup>27</sup> Although it won't affect this chapter's argument, I still should indicate distinctions between the phonograph and the gramophone. If one were to sing or talk to the phonograph, it would, as advertised, “retain your song or words,” but the gramophone will only play discs and not allow one to record on them. This is in part due to the fact that the phonograph, with its wax cylinders, was made for dictation, whereas the gramophone, with its zinc discs, was made specifically to playback recorded sounds. The gramophone was still working out its kinks while Conrad was writing, but by the time of Ford, it was in the ascendant, especially in Europe, where it had a monopoly. For more on the differences between the phonograph and the gramophone, see Read and Welch, 119-75.

original” (“Wonderful” 304). Phonography creates a kind of immortality, but that’s just the half of it. Teasing phonology for having no use for the materiality of the voice by teasing out its etymology, Mladen Dolar claims that within its first syllable one hears both the Greek “phōnē” (sound, voice) and “phōnos,” or murder (19). Heard this way, the phonograph is the record of a dead voice and a rekindling of that same voice. The two voices that open this chapter, of the pitch person and Marlow—of the phonograph and the novel—are perched on the precipice of Dolar’s distinction, never quite alive (not in the sense that Len Spencer and Joseph Conrad were) but given life through the intercession of the medium, a medium that keeps them forever new.

In this embalming process, the machinery produces a “copy,” even as the medium retroactively creates such a thing as an “original” or a “live” performance, standing in contradistinction to the copy. As with sound fidelity, there is an inevitable loss in translation from thought to expression in writing because of the medium, in Conrad’s case, the printed page and its limitations. In a letter to Ford, shortly before he begins writing *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad lamented over his inability to capture an impression and transmit it to the page, without loss, and yet even if “all this came to pass—even then it could never be so fine to anybody as it is fine to me now, lurking in blank pages” (*CL* 2: 119). And yet Conrad keeps his faith in books, for “of all of men’s creations, books are the nearest to us, for they contain our very thought, our ambitions, our indignations, our illusions, our fidelity to truth, and our persistent leaning towards error” (“Books” 5). Books, in other words, are only human and, like the media of sound reproduction, they engender connections between humans, sustaining our belief that they can hold faith, that



they still can produce mutual understanding. The simple yet notable idea he is convinced that the “temporal world” rests on, Conradian fidelity is, Zdzislaw Najder notes, an “act of faith in the possibility of mutual understanding” (*Personal* 14; 210-11).

It is, Frederick Karl indicates in a footnote to an 1897 Conrad letter, “an inescapable word in Conrad's writing,” while Najder claims it's “characteristic for his work,... recurrent and evident in the fabric of his novels and tales” (*CL* 2: 409; 203). It is just as recurrent in his letters and critical writing, although he never explicitly defines what he means by it.<sup>28</sup> The English word<sup>29</sup> first appears in an 1896 letter to Edward Garnett, taking the form of a personal creed: When one at last sees the world for what it is, “there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life” (*CL* 1: 267-68). By 1897, one begins to see fidelity move for Conrad from the realm of the personal to the professional, or perhaps those worlds simply become more closely allied, for even though the word “fidelity” does not appear in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), as Najder observes, “the idea itself seems to reverberate on its pages” (211). The best definition of Conrad's deployment of fidelity comes precisely in this preface, where it is unspoken yet clearly communicated, in its second sentence: “[A]rt itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt *to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe*, by bringing light to the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect” (emphasis added) (vii). Fidelity might be understood as a form of

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<sup>28</sup> Not infrequently, Conrad would even end his letters with the sign-off “Believe me,” often coupled with a profession of faith, as in “Believe me very faithfully yours.” See, for example, *CL* 2: 381.

<sup>29</sup> In an 1891 letter to his aunt, Conrad, writing in French, uses “fidélité,” a quality he claims he doesn't possess (*CL* 2: 90).

justice, a duty, one that Marlow feels charged with in *Heart of Darkness* in respect to the memory of Kurtz. Fidelity to one's sensations, within the Conradian ethic, is transposed from a way to live to a way to write, a concept within which “morality and art are joined together” and a formula he'd continue to tout until as late as 1920, several years before his death (Najder 211; *WT* viii).

Rendering justice to the visible universe is not accomplished through a form of slavish, prosaic, excessively-detailed reproduction of the sights and sounds of external reality. Whereas the thinker, Conrad's preface goes, looks to ideas and the scientist to facts to appeal to their fellow men, the artist looks within and seeks to appeal to “the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation” (“Preface” viii). As practiced by Conrad and Ford, impressionistic realism—fidelity to one's sensations rather than to knowledge and credulity—relies on a set of aesthetics to produce “a stand in for reality,” to use Sterne's phrase. To generate such an effect, fidelity in the service of literary impressionism asks the writer to bring to bear upon the medium a “scrupulous abnegation” and be oneself “self-forgetful” (*CL* 2: 348-49). Laying out a chief tenet of the method he and Conrad practiced, Ford prescribes, “Before everything the author must suppress himself” (*JC* 194).

Literary impressionism hoped to remove the author from the equation, to be a direct recording of the world as experienced, but neither Conrad nor Ford were able to remove themselves as wholly from their works as they had desired. As with the homophony at the root of “phono” (sound/murder), Conrad and Ford seem to want to broadcast their messages but kill the messenger. Indeed, in a statement that would

vanquish both the ego and perhaps even the physical book itself, Ford writes, “We wanted the Reader to forget the Writer—to forget that he was reading” (*Thus* 153). But suppression proves impossible, the phonograph hisses and the author intrudes, despite—or, perhaps, because of—himself. Far from erasing his handiwork, “Conrad's writing was a way,” Edward Said advances, “of repeatedly *confirming* his authorship amidst a variety of narrative and quasi-narrative contingencies” (Said, “Conrad” 131-32). For his part, Ford, who had made the case for making the reader forget the writer, accomplishes just that in an appreciation of Henry James. What's unfortunate here is that the writer the reader loses sight of is James himself, as Ford acknowledges early on: “I am aware too that the charges may be brought against me that, firstly, in these pages I have made a profuse use of the 'I.' I can't help that... These are the present writer's personal impressions of our author's work put as clearly as the medium will allow” (*HJ* 16). Just as the phonograph listener had to be trained to operate the machine in order to sustain a semblance of sound fidelity, Ford found in the run-up to *The Good Soldier* that there was a learning curve involved in getting his chosen medium to handle impressions and accustoming his own performance to the medium.

Toward the end of his career, Conrad is forced to admit that making one hear the written word is something he has always struggled with: “To render a crucial point of feelings in terms of human speech is really an impossible task. Written words can only form a sort of translation” (*WT* x). If the medium does not mediate and is only an occasion for a performance, as Sterne puts forth, the author must step between life and the page to act as the conduit. “Life did not narrate,” as Ford and Conrad discovered, and,

as I will show in the next section, its vibrations must be translated (Ford, *JC* 194). In this translation, fidelity as an enterprise is not doomed, but, rather, as Sterne contends with regard to sound reproduction, both the concept itself and the range of the novel is enlarged. Through its “failure,” a form evolves that affirms the novel's soundness in a phonographic age.

### *Lossy Translation*<sup>30</sup>

“The traditional concepts in any discussion of translations,” Walter Benjamin writes, “are fidelity and license”; as he uses it, the fidelity owed here is to the word and that fidelity is demonstrated through literalness (“Translator” 77-78). Fidelity and license are continually at loggerheads in the realm of translation—at least, if the conveyance of information or meaning is the goal.<sup>31</sup> Fidelity to translation, as with the phonograph and the novel, must mean something more than lossless, point-to-point correspondence. Conrad himself warns against translations that might be, “from want of skill or from over-anxiety,... too literal” (*WT* x). Fidelity, re-imagined by Benjamin, “must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel” (78). The possibilities opened up by this new conceptualization allow us to consider the translation not simply as a copy in another language, but as a “vessel” (a medium) of signification, still in harmony with the original yet possessing a life of its own.

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<sup>30</sup> “Lossy” is a technical term characterized by an attenuation of energy. It's most often used with regard to file compression, especially as a measure of the reduction in quality from an original to an MP3.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin's thoughts on the value of “information,” as such, are made abundantly clear in “The Storyteller,” about which, more shortly.

Benjamin refers to the translation as the “afterlife” of the original work, extending its shelf life (71). Such language calls to mind the phonograph record's necromantic properties; if it does not necessarily guarantee an afterlife, it at least allows the dead to speak once more. Translation of a word from one system into another, while still maintaining a connection with past usage, revivifies that word, but might also create some confusion. For example, in the advertisement from 1896 for the gramophone referenced earlier, that word, “record,” is not only put in quotes each time it is used, but is also inconsistently capitalized, suggesting that its use in this context is still in flux. Whatever the medium, a produced record, to return to an earlier duality, is realism, not reality. Furthering this, a record may be defined as an impressionistic rendering of a given moment—the truth within “a passing phase of life”—by the medium (Conrad, “Preface” x). For the author, this record is produced by a certain fidelity to his sensations; for the phonograph, this record is produced by a certain sensitivity to vibration and also to the given capacity for fidelity of both the machine and the recording studio. What one witnesses in the translation of the word “record” from print to phonography is precisely the creation of something new and novel, yet retaining affinities with its roots: the new form of the novel pursued by Ford and Conrad, what I will call the novelistic record. Both records, I argue, are translations, versions not of an external reality but of Derridean actuality: culled, produced, selectively interpreted by apparatuses.

I have shown how Sterne's conception of sound fidelity, less about subjective notions of sound quality than about the principle that fostered belief in an arranged network of men and machines, allowed one to hear within Conrad's literary fidelity an

otherwise unheard longing for faith, not in the equivalence of impression and inscription, but in mutual understanding. This lack of equivalence is in part a product of the medium, which, instead of mediating, is in its ineluctability itself the connection within these networks. That revealed as the case, I have proffered a broader understanding of Benjamin's definition of translation as a way of bringing together the literary and phonographic record. These records do not write themselves—the medium-as-material-support and the medium-as-interpreter must duet—which returns us to the questions about hearing voice(s) that opened the chapter.

With the late-nineteenth-century birth of phonography, the idea of what it means to have a voice—to possess a voice, to “own” a voice, to *be* possessed by a voice—becomes unsettled. “[T]he voice seems to be coming from the medium, or the loudspeaker,” Evan Eisenberg observes during record listening, “but where is it really coming from?” (57). Producing the body—habeas corpus—only *seems* to present us with what we're looking for, when what we really need is a writ of habeas vocem: to produce the voice. Claire Kahane is right to say that Conrad cannot produce Kurtz's voice since it transcends language and thus can merely be alluded to (143). But is that really the only way to transmit the voice in the novel? Would Marlow not have been better served if he had brought a phonograph with him and played back the recording for his shipmates? What does it mean to say, for example, that a machine has a voice? What separates the voice of a man from that of a machine? *Heart of Darkness*, in my reading, deals with the anxiety—or, rather, to use the language of the novella, “uneasiness”—that is produced in an era when the ontology of the voice is undergoing a significant edit and, in the wake of

sound reproduction, questions how one communicates experience with fidelity, understood as both one's duty to his fellows and to one's own understanding of what transpired.

*The Good Soldier* deals with a different kind of uneasiness, that which is produced not as one tries to distinguish between man and machine but as one encounters the silence of a listener who is unsound, a presence felt but not heard, as I understand Steve Goodman's term. Ford's novel asks questions about the role of the auditor and how his silence speaks, structuring the story being told and producing something entirely new. In a line unheard in the finished novel, stricken from the manuscript—perhaps because it explicitly stated what Ford wanted to register as but an undertone throughout—Dowell says, “I don't know that I particularly want to write a novel” (Hoffmann, “GS” 147). And he does not, not quite. Both Marlow and Dowell wish to be heard and, moreover, want us to hear what they heard, as they heard it in the moment—but how is this to be accomplished? Peter Szendy asks, “Can one *make a listening listened to*? Can I transmit *my* listening, unique as it is?” (5). Yes, I will argue, but not in the way one might have expected.

#### *A Voice and Nothing More: Heart of Darkness*

“An examination of any one of the volumes which bear this author's name upon their title-pages,” Hugh Clifford writes in his review of *Youth, and Two Other Stories* (1902), “will serve to convince that these books, at any rate, are *written*—really written—as are but few of the works with which each succeeding publishing season inundates us.” Read one way, Clifford's comments complement Said's claim about Conrad: rather than writing

himself out, and erasing all indications of authorship, he's written himself in—*really* written himself in. His next sentence, though, provides clarification: “It is not merely that by no conceivable effort of fancy can the reader conjure up a picture of Mr. Conrad shouting his 'copy' into a phonograph” (827). Here, Clifford registers a lament against the times, a break underway in the connection between the hand that writes and the paper that records.<sup>32</sup> Given Conrad's aversion to the phonograph, it is indeed difficult to envision such a scene.

Yet Clifford was right to worry; as Ivan Kreilkamp observes in his chapter on *Heart of Darkness*, Edison's sound writer posed a challenge to the writer of novels (181). The voyage to the Congo seemed in part to be understood as an escape from modernity, “like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world” (Conrad, *HD* 33). All the same, one encounters the machines of Western civilization in the most unexpected places, as even Conrad himself shows in *Almayer's Folly* (1895), in which “through the open shutter [of a music box] the notes of Verdi's music floated out on the great silence over the river and forest” (88). The music is from *Il Trovatore* (1853); the troubadour is the machine. Sound reproduction had become unavoidable, but rather than the simple trick of the music box, which was historically little more than a pain in the side of the music industry as it was then constituted, Marlow is instead troubled in *Heart of Darkness* by “a sinister resonance,” by the principle of a phonography that, as Douglas Kahn stresses,

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<sup>32</sup> As he writes *H of D*, Conrad emphasizes in a letter to H.G. Wells that it's all being composed in “pencil pencil,” in Conrad 1986, 146. His fidelity to handwriting is such that, even over twenty years later, near the end of his life, he apologizes to Ford for answering his letter using the “machine” (*CL* 8: 194). Unknowingly, too, Clifford reinforces the original/copy distinction operative within the discourse of sound reproduction: that which is spoken into the phonograph must by definition be “copy,” even as it riffs on the then-burgeoning idea of advertising copy, while buried deep within himself Conrad is in possession of the original.



heard everything, the voice itself deprivileged and comprising but one part of a larger phonoscape<sup>33</sup> (“Note” xi; 9).

Aboard the cruising yawl *Nellie*, recounting to the few men along for the voyage, Marlow, once an agent for a Belgian ivory trading firm, remembers how, on a trip into Africa, he became more sensitive to the auditory world enveloping him, as vision failed in the fog and he got nearer to having an audience with the great and enigmatic Kurtz:

‘I heard—him—it—this voice—other voices—all of them were so little more than voices—and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, *like a dying vibration* of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean without any kind of sense [emphasis added]. Voices, voice—even the girl herself—now....’

He was silent for a long time. (48)

Marlow, at those moments he most feels the absence of Kurtz's voice to lift his tale, does not so much fall flat as become deflated, lacking afflatus. The last sentence, spoken by the frame narrator, is key, for nearly each time Marlow slips into silence during his narration, he is trying to resurrect those dying vibrations—translate them back into sounds, just as the phonograph does. But, again, it's not just voices he's attempting to channel; rather, in this novel of resonance, tonality, and vibration—to paraphrase Conrad's description in his “Author's Note”—he is trying to bring back the past's moment into the present, much like a phonograph recording of a time long past. (xi).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> I use “phonoscape” here instead of R. Murray Schafer's “soundscape” to indicate that these aren't (necessarily) heard sounds but rather recorded sounds, a transmission of Marlow's listening. For more on Schafer's term, see Schafer, *The New Soundscape* (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1969).

<sup>34</sup> Compared to *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness* “was like another art altogether. That sombre theme had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear after the last note had been struck.”

Phonographic aspects of the novella have not escaped recent critical attention; in Kreilkamp focuses on what he calls its “phonographic logic”<sup>35</sup>, itself symptomatic of “a new stage in the way fiction understand its relation to speech,” which is abandoned by Marlow when he withholds Kurtz's last words (184). John M. Picker runs with Kreilkamp's term, drawing parallels between the way Conrad's characters function and the way the machine itself works, superimposing the latter onto the former—for example, “Marlow becomes at once listener, archive, and nested narrator; or needle, record, and harnessed talking machine” (782). Kurtz's desires, meanwhile, reduce him to a “shell of the 'original,' a corrupted copy degenerated into darkness” (781). But what is this “original” he refers to? The original/copy distinction is a false one; there is no original without a copy and vice versa. Giving the question a slightly different charge, in my reading, I will show that there is nothing necessarily original about Kurtz or his voice, which amount to the same thing, a word chosen quite deliberately.

The voice, as Dolar defines it, is that which “*does not contribute to making sense.... [and] precisely that which cannot be said*” (15). Marlow seems only far too aware of this:

'It seems I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams....'

He was silent for a while. (*HD* 27)

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<sup>35</sup> Arguably, this phonographic logic is better evinced in a novel Kreilkamp doesn't examine, *Lord Jim*, in which, as Marlow speaks his first word, his body, “extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past” (20).

Marlow does not want to narrate a dream or even offer, as Freud's popular contemporaneous volume would, an interpretation. He wants you to be beside him in the dream, as it happens, to experience the dream-sensation itself, but what is the language of sensation? Jacques Rancière, following Deleuze, recognizes that Francis Bacon seeks not to paint “the horror” but the “cry itself” in his portrait of Pope Innocent X, but, as he asks, “[W]hat is the 'itself' of the cry?” (27). How does one make this cry that cannot be said, or heard, comprehensible? How can “the horror” be made to signify? At the level of first-person narration, Marlow seems to think this is an impossible undertaking:

“‘Absurd!’ he cried. ‘This is the worst of trying to tell.... Here you all are each moored with two good addresses like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end’ (HD 47).

While interrogating what the voice can say for itself and working toward a formal strategy that shows forth the “itself” of the voice, *Heart of Darkness* also refutes the way true fidelity was understood in the early days of sound reproduction, as perfect correspondence between input and output. In the instance just quoted, the men aboard the *Nellie* fail to understand, or Marlow believes they do, because they are equipped differently or, more to my point, they all possess different equipment. Because of social conditioning, we can all only hear what we've been trained to hear and so there is no way to directly transmit Marlow's listening to his shipmates without interference, without noise, without dead air, and so true fidelity fails yet again. However, following Sterne, fidelity is not about ends and origins, or originals and copies, but about the medium as a

means of connection; about the medium's role in production and trust that the medium's message is meaningful; and about how that medium goes about rendering fidelity—the highest kind of justice—not to a fictitious external reality, but to the verisimilitude of a visible, and audible, universe. In short, fidelity is an act of belief in one's medium.

Within the novella, the listeners strike an unspoken compact with Marlow, who acts as a medium between the past action and the present narration. He is described by his inventor as “a familiar spirit,” “a whispering 'daemon,’” and, in a revealing descriptor, “a mere device” (“Note” ix). But what separates a mere device (a recorder, an automaton) from an actual person (an articulator, an agent)? This is just what Marlow has to determine in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Almayer's Folly*, the troubadour was a machine, but, in the later novella, the machines assume flesh and blood. What they lack is interiority, guts, or, in the language of *Heart of Darkness*, entrails. The Manager declares, “Men who come out here should have no entrails” (*HD* 22). How are we meant to interpret this remark? The Manager is led to say this after a rash of tropical diseases had ravaged the insides of his men. But, reading against the text, I want to push for a different understanding. The *OED* offers one early definition of the word, originating in Chaucer, still present but at a lower frequency in contemporary usage: “The inward parts regarded as the seat of the emotions, thoughts, etc.” (“Entrail”). From these inward parts comes “signifying weight,” the Barthesian “grain” of the voice that emerges from “the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages” (Barthes 185, 181). For Dolar, the voice is that which is both hidden by our entrails and issues forth from them (122, 25). If to possess entrails also means to possess a “voice,” Kurtz's ultimate problem would seem to

be that he had something inside of him—emotions and thoughts, ideals even—worth voicing.

Entrails, in other words, get in the way of business as usual; far better for the Crown that its employees be hollow men, highly impressionable to the imperial message. This reading is strengthened by its placement, directly following a description of the Manager, a man with “no learning and no intelligence,” who “originated nothing,” and yet, like Kurtz, “he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man..... Perhaps there was nothing within him” (22). The Manager's spy is described similarly, as “a papier-mâché Mephistopheles” who Marlow “could poke [his] finger through... and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt” (26). These are men who would survive the wilderness, for they are “too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know [they] are being assaulted by the powers of darkness” (49). If Kurtz is indeed a “phonographic god,” as Picker contends, these two are his opposites, if not his superiors, since they prove to be nameless, seemingly indestructible carriers of the imperial message, revealing Kurtz to be little more than the god that failed (781). The feeling generated by “machines” like the Manager and his spy is “uneasiness.” “[The Manager] inspired uneasiness,” Marlow declares, “that was it. Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust—just uneasiness—nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a ... a ... faculty can be” (21-22). Both ellipses in this sentence appear in the original, designating how inexpressible in words the two really are, such that Conrad has double recourse to the extra-linguistic.

Yet the character who proves to be the most challenging for Marlow is the last to be introduced to the listener, one noted for her “capacity for fidelity”: the Intended (73). “I believed in him more than any one on earth,” she cries, “more than his own mother, more than—himself. He needed me. Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance”—put differently, she would have recorded everything, everything, but would she have been capable of playback? (76) And if she knew the truth, could she still believe in Kurtz? Marlow does not believe it, but to justify her faith in the man—to switch on her capacity for fidelity—he does not reproduce Kurtz's final words faithfully, as sound fidelity has commonly been understood, but gives her what she needs: certainty. Sound reproduction worked because the listener wanted it to work, because he believed in it, because he worked with the machine to assure its functioning. The “heavens do not fall” at novella's end not because Marlow's lie was a “trifle”; they do not fall because Marlow's lie bolsters them, reassuring the Intended—so desperate to believe—and assuring the functioning of the “sepulchral city” and civilization (77, 70).

If the company men prove phonographic and the Intended is typical of the phonograph consumer of the time, in discussing Kurtz, a special case, I want to examine the man closer, which means, given its centrality to Marlow's tale, examining his voice. As Marlow confronts the inquirers, from cousins to colleagues, one thing becomes clear: they saw something of themselves in him as he told them what they wanted to hear. Just like the Edison phonograph, he is able to be everything to everyone, and, what's more, his voice was “the clearest, smoothest and most natural of any talking machine” (“Record”). The training of sound fidelity succeeds in the sense that one did not think to ask the

questions I posed, namely, who or what is this voice talking to/at me, whether asked of the phonograph in the epigraph—or of Kurtz himself. Slavoj Žižek has written about the uncanny gap that exists between sound and sight, the incongruity between “the talking machine” (the body) and the voice that rises out of the depths, as if it was an act of ventriloquism: “it is as if the speaker's own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks 'by itself,' through him” (*Belief* 58). The case of Kurtz is an extreme one; there is no “as if,” leading one to question who or what was ventriloquizing Kurtz.

The novella hints that it is the wilderness, which, as Marlow reveals, “had found [Kurtz] out early,” had found “something wanting in him,” something that could not be “found under his magnificent eloquence” (57). It is not enough to have a voice, no matter how grand, since machinery, too, at this time had developed a voice. Kurtz was wanting for interiority, “hollow at [his] core” (58). This begs the question, literal and figurative, what got into him? Perhaps a song of old, transmitted across time? In his reading of the Sirens, creatures who lured men to their destruction through promises of greatness, Peter Sloterdijk claims the “fatal singers compose their songs in the ear of the listener; they sing through the larynx of the other” (487). Their music “rests on the possibility of being one step ahead of the subject in the expression of its desire” (488). Marlow tried to break the spell, “the heavy mute spell of the wilderness that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts” (*HD* 65). What Sloterdijk calls “the siren stage,” in opposition to Lacan's mirror stage, refers back to the experience of the womb and intimate, amniotic hearing, “an advance hearing of the ego motif” through which “the individual forms a pact with its own future, from which it draws the joy of

living towards fulfillment” (493). The call of the wild, then, awakened within Kurtz his destiny, which he hears differently than Marlow, the latter’s curiosity piqued by the idea of a man climbing to the top, while retaining his moral ideas. But what were these moral ideas? They were vague, undefinable—of “some sort” (*HD* 31). Nowhere is Marlow nearer to the truth than, after wrongly believing Kurtz has died before he’s had the chance to speak with him, when he says, “There was a sense of extreme disappointment as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without substance” (47). “Something,” not someone, that was irrecoverably lost before Marlow had the chance to find it. Once one has heard one’s siren song, as Sloterdijk concludes, “[t]here is no path leading back to everyday, unsung existence from the song-grave in their own lifetime” (496). What did Kurtz really die of? He fell ill, we hear, but perhaps he perished from what he heard: not a hymn to deep faith in moral ideas, but a song of himself.

Seemingly in opposition to this conclusion, however, his “dear colleague” the journalist exclaims, “He had the faith—don’t you see—he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything—anything.” Just as he had moral ideas of “some sort,” he also was capable of being a “splendid leader” of “[a]ny party” (72). Read closer, it turns out to be a backhanded compliment, for while believing in “anything” or leading “any” party requires some kind of faith, it is not exactly fidelity to eternal verities. When the Intended says, as quoted earlier, that she believed in Kurtz more than he did in himself, we are no longer left doubting; his commitment to “anything” seems to last no longer than the two-minute playing time of a phonograph record. Earlier I misspoke when I said that Marlow esteems both the Manager and Kurtz as “great”—actually, the word for



Kurtz is “remarkable,” an adjective used six times with regard to him. The insistence on this word and its repetition throughout says a great deal about Kurtz, more than we ever really get from him; like the wax cylinders marked by needles capturing vibrations, Kurtz himself is capable of being marked over and over again, until at last he is worn out. An 1896 advertisement for the gramophone mentioned earlier claims it's the “Talking Machine That Talks Talk,” and Kurtz certainly talked the talk, but could he ever actually speak himself? (“78RPM”). Kurtz is one of the few characters who's given a name, whose body, unlike the epigraphic phonograph, does not bear the name of another, but one could conclude he never had a self to speak of, only a siren-song for a soul.

Paving the way for this to ostensibly to be a theme for “the poor chap” Kurtz, near the start Marlow tells his audience, “I don't want to bother you much with what happened to me personally” (7). What in part makes Marlow the great man of the piece—man and not machine—is that he sees the hollowness where the heart should be with Kurtz and he sees through the machinery of the company and its man-machines. Crucially, he does not see it so much as he hears it, the white noise framing the honorable words of the so-called civilizing mission: “The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed” (23).<sup>36</sup> But, to be just, I must clarify, as he turns a deaf ear to the Belgians and not to imperialism itself, which he believes in as much as he does in Kurtz, despite all evidence. Stated another way, although the word “fidelity” is not used by Conrad in the novella, the imperial project is presented as something worthy of it, “something you can set up, and

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<sup>36</sup> This refrain is repeated later: “The word 'ivory' would ring in the air for a while...” (35).

bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to,” given fleshly form in the Intended, who's also spoken of in similar terms (7).

Najder finds that *Heart of Darkness* is a work of Conrad's in which “the idea of fidelity presents a tangle,” as Marlow attempts to be loyal to his own principles and to “the care of [Kurtz's] memory” (204; *HD* 50). Instead of faith in the *interconnectedness* of networks, machines, performers, and audiences that Sterne offers as his definition of fidelity, we might instead think of its function in Marlow's tale as an entanglement, his attempts at rendering justice create ruptures in his narrative and punctures in the colonial fairytale. The voice (performer) emerges from the body (machine) and in so doing it becomes entangled in language (network), and therefore with society (audience)—in other words, the voice acts as the intersection of corporeality and culture (Dolar 72-73). The voice may be concealed within, but its meaning is to be found, as the frame narrator explains of Marlow's tales, “not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out” (*HD* 5). Thus, fidelity requires a kind of live performance, in which one must never get stuck on repeat or fall into a rut—never simply record but talk back. The best way to show fidelity to experience is to say, as Marlow does so often throughout the novella, “I don't know.” It is to see a French man-of-war shelling the bush and not produce it as a news report, but to render the incomprehensibility audible (14). His most powerful refusal of both phonography and imperial undertakings is to abandon the talking points, to distance himself from his education as a citizen of Europe. Whether it's in the “dislocations in [his] language” or the “ambiguity of [his] metaphors,” he is making an appeal in his discursive, digressive narrative, as Watt writes, “to know what has, as yet,

no name,” words like “racism” or “colonialism” (Said, *CI* 29; Armstrong, “*HD*” 34; 199-200).<sup>37</sup> So, he is not a great man, as I have named him, but perhaps a just man—indeed, in this novel of phonographs, even being just a man is an achievement.

When this man Marlow's tale appears initially in *Blackwood's*, the “heart” of its title is fixed by the article “the”; freed of it when collected in a volume, Watt finds the combination of nouns bewildering, “def[y]ing both visualisation and logic:... How can a shapeless absence of light compact itself into a shaped and pulsing presence?” (200). Clearly, Watt has not been listening, as the novella defies visualization throughout; the impressions given are of other voices, other sounds, not impressionism as Watt defines it.<sup>38</sup> Michael Fried, focused obsessively on the page as the medium of writing, claims that Conrad's sending his aunt an actual page of his writing “testifies to a fascination with the *look* of his prose as it filled up (or 'blackened') the blank sheet” (216). Later that same month, however, in a letter that Fried does not quote, Conrad writes his aunt, “A scratching of the pen writing the final word”—attuned even to the sound of the pen itself—“and suddenly this entire company of people who have spoken into my ear,... becomes a band of phantoms who retreat, fade, and dissolve” (*CL* 1: 153). The brilliance on the page is not just in what we see—the contrast of black and blanks, the page as “a field of boundless possibility for the writer seated before it”—but also in what it enables us to hear (Fried 233). Nor, as Marlow warns, is it necessarily in what one reads, as is

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<sup>37</sup> For a history of these words' history, and their analogs, especially as they pertain to *Heart of Darkness*, see Firchow, 1-17.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to a figurative understanding of impressionism—“the bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understandings”—the “other most distinctively impressionist aspect of Conrad's narrative method concerns his approach to visual description” (174).

made evident by his assessment of Kurtz's report. "The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know," he acknowledges; blunter by far is the journalist's summation: "Kurtz really couldn't write a bit" (50, 72). What it's crucial to remember is that Marlow reads the report *after* he's heard Kurtz; the "unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words" are not the words on the page, but the words as Marlow must imagine Kurtz voicing them, as an audiobook *avant la lettre* (50).

But Marlow has always already heard Kurtz or, more precisely, been aware of him as a voice. "I didn't say to myself," he tells his listeners, "'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice"—but what, if anything, more? (47). The title of the section comes from the epigraph to Dolar's introductory chapter, taken from Plutarch: "A man plucked a nightingale and, finding but little to eat, said: 'You are just a voice and nothing more.'" (qtd. in Dolar 3). The plump appearance of the bird deceives him; the bird's appeal is wholly in its voice, and so seeing is not believing, which is especially the case in a novella like *Heart of Darkness*, plunged in haze and fog. This being the case, as Dolar argues, "[T]he acousmatic master is more of a master than his banal visible versions" (77). Prior to being seen, Kurtz was what Michel Chion has termed the *acousmètre*, "a kind of talking and acting shadow" (21). A voice, once located, loses all of its power, its facade crumbles, much like the way Kurtz's body is described, as "pitiful and appalling" (59). It is almost as if, in order to restore Kurtz's voice, to make him as alive as he'd ever been, Marlow must unsee him. He must remember Kurtz, in an image

defying visualization, as “a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence” (73).

When the voice retreats behind these folds for good, Marlow muses, “What else had been there?” (69). But had even the voice been there? Or, rather, at what point is the record of a man named Kurtz produced? And is not Marlow's name on that record's label? Using the example of the formation of Christianity, Régis Debray points out how “*the object transmitted does not preexist the process of its transformation.*” (18). He, too, speaks of the way in which “news carriers and bearers no longer know how to step aside”; one hears Lacan's Freud, Paul's Christ, and Marlow's Kurtz. This copy, a translation in the Benjaminian sense—fidelity to complementarity, not to “meaning”—produces the idea, and ideal, of an original. Instead of seeking out Kurtz to talk with him as an acolyte, what Marlow is actually doing is hunting down the body of this shadow, rooting it to a place. The trip up river, a kind of pilgrimage, is a process of what Chion calls de-acousmatization, the tracking down of the voice's source (28). It's only fitting, then, that Chion compares de-acousmatization to a burial; the death that follows his having been seen frees Kurtz's voice to live on in another vessel, not necessarily reproduced verbatim—with true fidelity—but with Conradian fidelity to that recorder's own experience of the voice. Marlow says that “the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole,” but, having returned Kurtz's letters to the Intended, he has buried all that Kurtz ever really possessed within himself, added him to his recollection, and in so doing he becomes the master voice, no better embodied than in the moment he, too, in the words of the frame narrator, “had been no more to us than a voice” (69, 27). But it does

not end there, for Marlow does not get the last word, and he too is ultimately displaced by that invisible frame narrator, who sheds light on Marlow, making him utterly seen “in the pose of a meditating Buddha,” even parroting some of Marlow's most haunting words and phrases, particularly at the novella's close (77). “[N]o historical record of memory records itself,” Debray asserts, and the frame narrator becomes our medium, the nature of the connection between Kurtz, Marlow, the men aboard ship, and readers down through the ages—in him the reader (and Conrad) has invested his fidelity.

Using a metaphor apt for my purposes, Debray continues: “Downstream, [the recorder] has the virtue, or vice, of effacing the collective trace leaver upstream” (14). According to Henry James, writing of a later Conrad novel, Conrad “works upon us most in fact by making us forget him” (347).<sup>39</sup> But I would disagree with the master and side with Said when he said that all of that working upon us—the framing, the ventriloquizing, the indirection—only confirms his authorship. Indeed, in a tribute to his mastery, the trace leaver who transports us never really takes leave of us. The novella's levels of past action and present-day narration are entangled through a literary impressionism able to hear and record it all, with all credit due to the name written on the body of the title page, that wizard behind drapes of gorgeous eloquence who, as he writes in the letter to his aunt I quoted above, “buried a part of myself in the pages which lie here before my eyes” (*CL* 1: 153-54). Gravesend, from where the *Nellie* sets sail, is but the beginning of this tale's afterlife.

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<sup>39</sup> The novel in question is *Chance* (1914), which has even more levels of narration than *Heart of Darkness*.

*The Circulation of Hearts: The Good Soldier*

Part of that afterlife is manifested in two novels connected to Ford. In *The Inheritors*, “[t]he sub-villain,” Ford explains, “was to be Leopold II, King of the Belgians, the foul—and incidentally lecherous—beast who had created the Congo Free State in order to grease the wheels of his harems with the blood of murdered negroes” (*JC* 133-34). Fourteen years later, within the pages of *The Good Soldier*, Nancy Rufford's father is speaking with an Italian baron, “who had much to do with the Belgian Congo.... about the proper treatment of natives” (*GS* 88). Caroline Patey draws our attention to the “osmosis” between Conrad and Ford at the levels of language and story, an influence which Theodore Dreiser, in his review of the novel, blames for “the spoiling of this story” (85, 155).<sup>40</sup> The section title from which Patey's quote is taken is called “Misreading of *Heart of Darkness*,” but I'd contend Ford has read Conrad just fine, and heard him better still; that it may appear as a “misreading” since this is, with recourse to Debray's argument above, Ford's Conrad, offered not with true fidelity, but to his own interpretation of things.<sup>41</sup> And with his narrator's use of phrases like “it is all a darkness” or “dark places of the earth” and the way the word “heart” circulates throughout his story, this is Ford's own *Heart of Darkness*.

In his version of things, the narrator, John Dowell, tries to make sense, through the form of narrative, of all that in the last nine years has befallen he and his wife, Florence; Leonora and Edward Ashburnham, the “good soldier” of the title; and

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<sup>40</sup> For more on the similarities between Dowell and Marlow, see Kahane, Moser, and Sullivan.

<sup>41</sup> Ford, it must be noted, was known for his embellishments, but to my knowledge Conrad never contradicted him on a point of great importance, never characterized Ford as misrepresenting his process or his work.

Leonora's ward, Nancy Rufford. It was a time of close intimacy between them all that resulted in the deaths of Florence and Edward, the remarriage of Leonora, the catatonia of Nancy, and the retirement of Dowell from society. Beyond the reproductions pointed to by Patey, Dowell is asking many of the same questions that echo through *Heart of Darkness*, only more directly: How does one know the heart of another, when all is a darkness? What might have one done differently? How is one to know anything at all if we cannot believe our eyes? Frequently in Conrad's novella, "our eyes were of no more use to us than if we had been buried miles deep in a heap of cotton-wool" (43). In *The Good Soldier*, it is Florence who possesses "the seeing eye," which Dowell lacks, "unfortunately," since, echoing Conrad again, he is "trying to get you to see" (8, 9).

Yet, Ford himself has a vision problem as a writer; as Ezra Pound claimed, "he bases his criticism on the eye, and almost solely on the eye. Nearly everything he says applies to things *seen*" (146). Based on this criticism—and that of others, as well<sup>42</sup>—and despite a rich background in music (which started with his father, an eminent critic),<sup>43</sup> Ford would seem to possess the seeing eye. Indeed, it is impossible to ignore the rich amount of visual detail within Ford's novel, but by the same token I'd argue it's just as difficult to overlook the fact that we are meant to hear Dowell, that he insists on the oral

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<sup>42</sup> For essays that continue to compare Ford's impressionism to painting and, more generally, the visual, see Hood, Levenson, and Nigro. For a book-length study, see Colombino.

<sup>43</sup> If one so desired, he would find it very easy to write a paper on the relationship between Ford's novel and, not just the music Ford wrote, but also the musicality of his voice. Two wonderful places to start are both to be found in a special issue of *Contemporary Literature* on Ford and the arts: Saunders and Stang & Smith. In the latter, the authors ask a question of his music that is deeply relevant when considering the relationship between *Heart of Darkness* and *The Good Soldier*, and between Conrad and Ford, more generally: "[H]ow much of what he had to say musically was really his muse singing, and how much was imitation and reiteration of what he had heard and responded to in the music of other composers?" (209).



constitution of his narrative, to the point of devising a scenario for himself from which he shall tell his tale:

I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me. And I shall go on talking in a low voice while the sea sounds in the distance and overhead the great black flood of wind polishes the bright stars. From time to time we shall get up and go to the door and look out at the great moon and say: 'Why, it is nearly as bright as in Provence!' And then we shall come back to the fireside, with just the touch of a sigh because we are not in that Provence where even the saddest stories are gay. (7-8)<sup>44</sup>

Critics, however, have a habit of overlooking this very aspect of the novel, or even underhearing it.<sup>45</sup> It is true that, when the novel is first serialized in part, under the title “The Saddest Story” in Wyndham Lewis's *BLAST*, the story is broken up by pages of Vorticist art, begging the reader to make some connection between the form of both works. But it seems somehow fitting that, until it is published as a whole in book form, its famous opening sentence, absent from the serial, is unspoken: “This is the saddest story I have ever heard” (1).

This claim is unusual as a novel opener in two ways. First, one feels like he's caught Dowell in the middle of something, as though he's just gotten off the phone with an acquaintance—an inaudible, invisible framer—who has related to him what we're about to hear, just as the “and” that opens Marlow's tale gestures at clauses that went unrecorded by the frame narrator. But, second, what's to be made of “heard”? If one

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<sup>44</sup> It's worth noting that even within his imagination, within the very scene from which he is telling the story, he's imagining he's somewhere else. On the one hand, given the sadness of the story, one could understand the desire for escape. And, yet, at the same time I think it says something about the silence that Dowell immerses himself in. No phonograph plays, no telephone rings.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Moser writes that the storytelling is “emphatically pretense” (60). Even though Dowell himself uses the word “imagine,” by emphasizing the “imaginary fire,” the “country cottage of the mind,” and the “imaginary listener,” Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy does a disservice to orality (322). Nigro, arguing for Cubist reading of the novel, writes of its “feigned orality” (386).

replaces “seen” with “heard,” one would not be given pause, but as Frank Kermode notes, “It is not exactly some *anecdote* he's been told and so *heard* is strikingly peculiar”—indeed, it is like he is a “dropout from his own story,” or, more devastatingly, from his own life, as would seem to be the implication of existing in the world as if it's only ever been heard at a remove, never lived (108). According to Miriam Bailin, Dowell foreswears all agency, which makes him to her eyes “only *like* a real person” (626). Michael Levenson resorts to even stronger language: “Dowell *is* nothing.... a formless, contentless, traitless self which does nothing, feels nothing, knows nothing” (383). At a loss, unable to see through the fog, Dowell is “suffering from Impressionism” (381). I agree with Levenson, but we have different conceptions of Impressionism. Contentless and traitless, feeling and doing and knowing nothing, and yet all the same managing to record—does this not sound like the phonograph as vanishing medium? Far better to say that Dowell suffers from phonography, cursed with “a recording mind” (Huntley 171). “Dowell, who has been everybody's confidant,” Sondra Stang writes, “has changed places with the reader” (74). He has recorded and now he gets play back, but it is only in hearing himself out that he is able to come to terms with what happened.

This is not an argument I wish to sustain in earnest, but to counteract the tendency toward the visual I think it serves as a useful provocation. Very few critics have taken the time to hear Dowell out, none better than Denis Donoghue, in an essay entitled “Listening to the Saddest Story.” For Donoghue, *The Good Soldier* is only “nominally a novel” and instead lives up to what's promised by its subtitle, a tale (51). Most novelists, Paul Armstrong points out, want to suborn our credulity in the world they've created, but

Dowell continually breaks that world's fourth wall (*CB* 217). Questions usually sorted out before writing become central to his narrative: "I don't know how it is best to put this thing down—whether it would be better to try and tell the story from the beginning, as if it were a story; or whether to tell it from this distance of time, as it reached me from the lips of Leonora or from those of Edward himself" (7). When combined with his opening proclamation of having *heard* this story and his need to imagine a listener to be able to produce it, I would claim there's something deeper at work here, rumbling at a lower frequency.

As he's writing the novel, Ford puts forth in a book review that he desires of literature "something fresher, something brighter, something sharper.... a book so quiet in tone, so clearly and so unobtrusively worded, that it should give the effect of a long monologue spoken by a lover at a little distance from his mistress's ear" ("*Idiot*" 206-7).<sup>46</sup> This new form of novel, accomplished in *The Good Soldier* through a pretense that must have seem unusually quaint in a world on the brink of war, might also yield a "formula for the Mot Juste" (FMF, *Thus* 41). It has been said of another impressionist, Debussy, that he looked for "the sound underneath the note"; what I would argue is the "Mot Juste" for an impressionist like Ford, writing a novel so insistently oral as *The Good Soldier*, is a means for getting the right sound (Roland-Manuel 30).<sup>47</sup> Or, better stated, for getting the sound *right*, translating the world of sound into a sound underneath

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<sup>46</sup> Years later, he'll say something similar, of how this "new form for the novel" would produce prose "like the sound of some one talking in rather a low voice into the ear of a person that he liked" ("Vocab" 405).

<sup>47</sup> I encountered this quote within Clement Greenberg's "Toward a Newer Laocoön" (1940), but he did not source it (303). After much use of Google, I discovered that it's attributable to the French music critic Alexis Roland-Manuel, Greenberg would clearly take issue with the mixing of media evident in my transforming Roland-Manuel's phrase.

the word, “the terrific suggestiveness” of dream-words that lurk behind our “common everyday words” (*HD* 66). What seems both remarkably *recherché* and nostalgic in Dowell's scene-setting becomes revolutionary as it unfolds, “a magnificently new artistic experience” as Richard Hood has claimed (445).

When one gets beyond the surface penetrates the folds of Dowell's illusion, one finds that *The Good Soldier* is as much about what lies beneath and inside as *Heart of Darkness*, as much about what is unseen and unsounded. “Six months ago,” Dowell relates, “I had never been to England, and, certainly, I had never sounded the depths of an English heart. I had known the shallows” (1). Just as the frame narrator of *Heart of Darkness* offers the metaphor of the kernel, with its distinction between surface and depth, in order to offer us insight into Marlow's method, Dowell, too, presents a similar image before our eyes and asks us if we agree with his reading: “If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?” (4). Dowell, as an actor in the original drama he's retelling, cares little for cores—true, he cares for his wife's ailing heart but not for the heart of the matter. This Dowell falls prey to simple binary thinking—inside/outside, public/private, past/present, or, as elsewhere in this chapter, original/copy—whereas Dowell the storyteller talks his way toward the Marlovian model, coming to learn that the apple is not really seen until one shines on it the illumination that only comes with reflection; until one is ready “to return again and again to the same matter,” as Benjamin advises, “to turn it over as one turns over soil” (“Berlin” 611). Airing his past, Dowell is gradually dislodged from

the imagined sanctuary of the cottage, ending up transmitting live from one of the “ancient haunts of English peace” and its unsettling silence (175-76).

In other words, his study becomes a studio, “a necessary framing device for the performance of both performer and apparatus,” Sterne offers, “[that] isolated the performer from the outside world” (236). “I sit here,” Dowell informs us, “all day and all day in a house that is absolutely quiet. No one visits me, for I visit no one. No one is interested in me, for I have no interests” (176). The “sympathetic soul,” an idea Dowell sticks to through the final part of the book, continues his visitation but says nothing, is “so silent” (9). This voice that refuses to speak, that is heard all the more because of its silence; this voice that had no participation in the “tragedy” and thus might help Dowell make sense of it all—give it structure—if it would only respond, produces uneasiness since it is felt but not heard. This is not dissimilar from his experiences in the past he is narrating; whether because of barriers erected by national difference, or the use of coded language, or a refusal to speak about certain topics—we are told, for example, that Edward did not know where babies came from!—Dowell is face-to-face with people whose eyes, faces, and voices he had to read, searching for signs of suggestions (*GS* 101). The problem with this is, as John Reichert has accurately noted, “he interprets faces so strangely” (162). Still, the nine years the two couples shared were “characterized by an.... atmosphere of taking everything for granted” (*GS* 22). As the tale's conclusion bears out, such a silent atmosphere, ostensibly cultivated for the sake of their hearts' health, proved insalubrious, unhealthy, and unsound.

Utilizing Lacan's schema, Mladen Dolar offers two opposing forms of silence: imaginary or “mystic” silence and the uneasy “silence in the register of the real.” This mystic silence is not unlike Freud's experience of the oceanic, overwhelming yet peaceful, with “no voices to be heard,” comparable to the stillness or serenity felt aboard the *Nellie* before Marlow, who still hears all voices from the past, begins to speak or of the invented seaside cottage Dowell tells much of his story from. Here, silence is “the mirror which reflects the inner and the outer in a perfect match,” in other words, a dream of true fidelity, but one that cannot last (Dolar 155). At the far extreme is a silence that is terrifying, “the silence of the universe which has refused to speak.... It does not tell us anything, but it persists” (155, 156). To compensate for this, one turns on the phonograph so as to channel voices to stave off the silence that might engulf us all, or one talks and talks into the void or fills it with an imagined listener. This silence of the real can be understood as an example of Goodman's “unsound,” that which is “inaudible but still produces neuroaffects or physiological resonances” (198). Just as Dowell's study is made up of the sound of his own voice and the unsound of the listener's, speech, too, is made up of both sound and unsound, but, unlike the phonograph, our equipment is not sensitive to register the vibrations, the “felt” portion, so to speak, of human speech.

One sympathizes, then, with Dowell when he proclaims more than halfway through his record, “It is very difficult to give an all-round impression of any man.... [H]ave I, I wonder, given the due impression of how his life was portioned and his time laid out?” What he's asking, of course, is if he's shown true fidelity to the memory of Edward Ashburnham, whether he's given us a full measure of the man as he knew him,

and as he comes to know him through his reflections. Words in the modern age, Jacques Rancière decries, “can no longer make us see what they say, can no longer make us feel or sense it.... It is no longer a matter of showing what words say, but of showing the invisible power that brings forth speech” (23). Returning to Dowell's dilemma, how might one record both that which is heard and that which is felt? In other words, how, using words, might one record both the sound and unsound, the audible and the invisible? Getting a good recording in the novel, an all-around impression, is similar to getting one in the studio: the performer must devise a way to make the most of the medium's capacities. So, while, Dowell makes it clear that he's no novelist, his use of the device of the sympathetic soul, the silent listener as both the occasion for writing and as his interlocutor enables Dowell to perfect, and correct, his impressions by novel's end—and furthermore enables Ford to find his new form. That is to say, Dowell is no novelist, nor is he a phonograph, as in my casuistic reading of Levenson, but instead he is that other name for that device given in the *Scientific American* article in which Edison shows off his new invention: sound writer.

This sound-written narrative is propped up and propelled forward by the silent listener, who, like the unsound Kurtz, is also an acousmètre, retaining his power as long as he remains off-screen, unseen. However, just as inevitably as Marlow tracks down Kurtz's corpus, “carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity” according to Ford's formulation of *progression d'effet*, Dowell finds at the end of his motionless journey, eighteen months after he'd last written a word, his silent listener (JC 225). We readers, Armstrong suggests, are the “mute auditors” Dowell has been

addressing, but I find Donoghue's argument more compelling, namely, that the listener is but a “surrogate” for the broken Nancy Rufford, no longer sound of mind, whom Dowell has since retrieved, and with whom Dowell shares the silent house (*CB* 212; 47). This, I submit, accounts for many of the changes originating in Chapter V of Part IV, not the least of which is the final iteration of “the saddest story” refrain in the chapter's opening line, no longer experienced for Dowell at a remove: “It is this part of the story that makes me saddest of all” (161). This is the dour Dowell who has no interests, whom no one visits—indeed, as he rather depressingly puts it, for whom “life peters out” (176). Dowell here is at his least knowledgeable—the second and third sentences of the chapter ask what all of them should have done—if only because he is now at his most knowing, having experienced the depths of the dark English heart (161). He has now seen a real horror: how a girl might be made into a machine by monsters.

Some characters within the novel are born heartless, with no hidden depths—Florence, for example, like the Manager's spy in Conrad, is “a personality of paper”—while some keep their mouths shut so as to keep one in the dark, like Leonora, whom, “if she spoke she would despise herself” (83, 122).<sup>48</sup> But, alas, there is yet another class, represented by Nancy Rufford, who seems to have had her heart ripped right from her chest and in the trauma that followed became like a faulty phonograph, stuck on repeat. We know that, at an early age, she became deeply unsettled by a “peculiar note” of her father's voice, which, in a revealing phrase, “could unman her” (89). The process of

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<sup>48</sup> I am cognizant of the fact that Leonora herself had an unhappy upbringing, that she was essentially sold off to Edward, that she had to repress her religion, and so forth. However, I think her life with Rodney Bayham is a rather damning indictment of the kind of person she is.



dehumanization, then, started early; when Dowell first meets her, she's already been so programmed by her Catholic education that "a sense of rectitude...spoke with her voice just now and then" (86). Like Dowell as the novel begins, Nancy, too, is unable to realize that, not only are people two-faced, they are two-sided like records; when she learns about Edward's infidelities, then, it leaves a mark on her. "She certainly had loved him for what I call the public side of his record," Dowell remarks, but the private side was unfathomable and not, as Dowell learns to do, something she could bear to turn over and over in her mind (149). Leonora, too, "left a lasting wheal" on Nancy, "and her words cut deeply into the girl's mind," these impressions too much for her to deal with (145). After being sent away, and upon hearing of Edward's suicide, Nancy is gutted and falls back to her default settings, speaking in the voice her Father, and the sisters at the convent, taught her: "*Credo in unum Deum omnipotentem....Credo in unum Deum omnipotentem*" (162).

Before the rendered "affair" is quite over, Dowell devotes a lengthy passage to his life with Nancy, and a paragraph of negligible length about Florence to "cheer you up" (176). Edward's death is related to us as almost an afterthought, in which he fails to produce Edward's final outburst, one he had twice referenced earlier in the novel, thus opting to keep it off the record.<sup>49</sup> This omission, I believe, is out of exhaustion, rather than out of the respect that Marlow feels when he withholds Kurtz's final words from the Intended. As if to assist us further in what we should be listening for, Ford cuts from the

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<sup>49</sup> "He talked all night" (173). Dowell learned he led Maisie Maidan to the park "in [Edward's] final outburst" (75). It was, apparently, a very "sentimental" outburst, at that (17). Of the critics, Reichert thinks it's odd, not to mention "frustrating," that we don't know more about this conversation (177-78).

manuscript the actual contents<sup>50</sup> of Edward's "whispered something," reminding us that, as in Conrad and as in his own work, "the fable must not have the moral tacked on to its end. If the fable has not driven its message home the fable has failed, must be scrapped and must give place to another one" (177; *JC* 178). The story ends where it does, as in *Heart of Darkness*, because the acousmètre has been found and found lacking; not only can she not sustain the story any longer, she cannot sustain herself without the help of others. To Dowell's great regret, Nancy is not the vanishing mediator, the facilitator of this novel who then disappears afterward. On the contrary, it is "very extraordinary to see the perfect flush of health on her cheeks, to see the lustre of her coiled black hair, the poise of the head upon the neck, the grace of the white hands—and to think that it all means nothing" (*GS* 176). Marlow is able to resurrect Kurtz as voice by continuing to tell the tale, years later, but in his one-off performance Dowell lacks both the faith to believe Nancy can hear him and the strength to continue.

But where is Ford during all of this? Did he successfully manage to suppress himself? H. Robert Huntley believes that, for the first time in Ford's literary output, authorship is "obliterated," and that despite the narrative voice, in agreement with Donoghue, Dowell is really just a struggling storyteller (169; 51). Mark Schorer, on the other hand, envisions Dowell as a medium, a cipher through whom Ford speaks directly, not unlike the sense of rectitude Dowell observes speaking with Nancy's voice (48). My own argument comes down somewhere in the middle, between absence and presence, for in a novel that features an author-reader and a listener-reader, does it strain belief to

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<sup>50</sup> "He just looked up to the roof of the stable, as if he were looking to heaven, and he remarked: 'Girl, I will wait for you there'" (Hoffmann, "*GS*" 149).

accept an author-character? (McCarthy 134; Hoffman, *FMF* 50). Several years before he begins work on *The Good Soldier*, Ford offers his thoughts on such a figure in an essay:

[T]he only restriction upon the author-character is that of his own conscience. If he act indeed as a *deus ex machina* solving all problems set by the story, then the book must be regarded as a mere Utopia. But if the author regarding himself as benevolent but meddlesome, fine yet malicious, generous but *naturally unsound*, [emphasis added]..., then indeed this propagandist author will be giving us a rendering of modern life as exact as could be desired. (*Critical* 34)

Naturally, Ford does not sound off in the novel itself, but his presence is palpable, especially when the novel is read alongside his theorizing of the time period, as I feel it must. Of course, Ford means something quite different from my torquing of Goodman's term "unsound," but, in setting a problem for both himself and his narrator, is he not "fine and malicious"? Does he not set the problem and then let Dowell work his way through it? Indeed, one way to understand the novel's opening line, as I offered at the beginning of this section, is as if Dowell had only just heard this entire story from the lips of another—his author? The working through becomes Dowell's finding his way from story, replete with a finely evoked setting, into life in the register of the all too real.<sup>51</sup> Like Marlow, who claims the story is not about him personally, the "drop-out" Dowell learns he has a voice, too, emerging not as the remarkable Kurtz but as a marked Marlow. In his discourse, we hear the attempt to playback what he's heard, to demonstrate in a novel of unfaithful spouses, the quality of fidelity, not to chronology or "fact" but to his senses.

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>51</sup> For a reading of Ford's novel that makes much more of this, interpreting it through the lens of family systems psychotherapy, see Womack. For a Freudian reading of both novels utilizing seduction theory, see Kahane.

Several times, as his story nears its end, the isolated Dowell is unable to puzzle things out and so, foregrounding his epistemic crisis, he says, “I leave it to you” (*GS* 171). But what is this “it”? His record, a term that only appears for the first time<sup>52</sup> after he becomes certain that Nancy's story will end unhappily, or, as he puts it, “It would today be much better for Nancy Rufford if she were dead” (143). The first use of “record,” then quickly reiterated, is worth quoting, for it is most unusual:

And yet I swear that Leonora, in her restrained way, gave the impression of being intensely sympathetic. When she listened to you she appeared also to be listening to some sound that was going on in the distance. But still, she listened to you and took in what you said, which, since the record of humanity is a record of sorrows, was, as a rule, something sad. (143)

In a certain fashion, this is a model of the distracted listening Dowell's ideal listener would demonstrate, as he'd be slightly attuned to the “gusts of wind and... the noises of the distant sea” (128). But at the same time there's also something incredibly phonographic about Leonora: she gives Dowell a certain impression, but she also receives them. Specifically, she not only records voices, but *all* sound, and is seemingly sympathetic in the way that the Edison phonograph appears to be, describing itself as ready to retain one's words whenever one should speak—but should not a human being be able to do more than retain and replay at a later date? It is curious that this particular interaction with an unreadable Leonora should be the moment that “record” is produced, and a sad record at that. Hynes puts forth that Dowell's record contains “an irresolvable pluralism of truth,” while Kermode asserts that “the *illusion of the single right reading is possible no longer*” (231; 111). In any event, Dowell leaves that determination to us,

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<sup>52</sup> Or, rather, it appears in its meaning as “a collection of information” for the first time then. Earlier in the novel, Dowell uses it as a matter of wins and losses, as in sports (67).

much as record companies at the same historical moment were leaving it to the “practiced listener... the connoisseur of true fidelity,” to determine what was “best” or “truest” (Sterne 270). In other words, there is no single right reading, but instead a plurality of hearings.

But where should the practiced listener of the novelistic record being to locate meaning, especially in these two novels where the narrators, in the end, seem more to shut themselves down than to sum things up? Lisa Gitelman relates a fascinating anecdote about Thomas Edison, buried within court records, indicating that inventing the record did not necessarily provide one with an advantage when it came to reading one:

According to [Frank L. Dyer, Edison's patent attorney], Edison himself had once spent many long hours in his laboratory, trying to read phonograph records. After recording the letter *a*, 'He examined with a microscope each particular indentation and made a drawing of it, so that at the end of two or three days he had what he thought was a picture of the letter “*a*.” But when he compared two records of the letter *a*, he found that 'the two pictures were absolutely dissimilar.'... If even Edison, their illustrious inventor, could not read phonograph records, then they could not be read. (132)

Michael North sees Edison's frustration as symptomatic of an age that had to face the fact that here was a system of writing that one could not read (5). Peter Brooks's chapter on *Heart of Darkness* is called “An Unreadable Report,” but the two books in this chapter are more productively understood as unreadable *records*, thus, the error here is in the attempt to read grooves rather than to listen to records. With regard to Ford, this “bad” reading is evinced in essays that produce chronologies, point out math errors, and attempt to reveal who the story was *really* “about.”<sup>53</sup> In Conrad, it's the fixation on a scene I've

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<sup>53</sup> I wish to stress that I am not designating any of these articles as poor scholarship—indeed, for various reasons, I found them all useful—however, given the method I'm prescribing, I find them in some ways misguided. Disclaimer made, for Edward as the “nearly silent object of desire” of the homosexual Dowell,

yet to attempt to read, for as I've argued throughout about Kurtz, one should put little stock in what he actually says and should rather weigh heavily how Marlow attempts to "speak" him, and his voice. There are two crucial emendations Conrad makes to the manuscript of *Heart of Darkness*, one regarding the content of Kurtz's final words and the other regarding Marlow's reading of them. Working backward, in the manuscript, Marlow waxes rhapsodically about Kurtz's judgment on the world, "Never before in his life had he been such a master of his magnificent gift as in his last speech on earth. The eloquence of it" (*HD* 95). As serialized, Marlow says little better than "He had something to say. He said it," and that, continuing to qualify everything, it was "the expression of some sort of belief" (70). What had he said? In the manuscript, "Oh! The horror!" (95) Why would Conrad add an echo of this phrase in the final draft? How does it transform one's hearing of it? Without reference to Conrad's correction, John Picker reads the repetition as "hollow," but deems Kurtz's summation "perhaps the greatest needle-skip (or, more precisely, needle-stick) in modern literature" (782).

Brooks takes a slightly different tack, or track, reading "The horror!" as "language on the verge of... a fall from language" (250). I agree, in part, but I believe the instances should be read separately, assigning a different meaning to each. The reason Conrad inserts this "needle-stick," in a novel in which repetition proliferates once Marlow discusses hearing Kurtz's voice, is that "The horror!" registers the first time as sound (language), the second time as unsound (felt, not heard).<sup>54</sup> In the manuscript, Kurtz says

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see DeAngelis. For "proof" that Nancy is Edward's daughter, see Ganzel. For a chronology of events, see McCarthy. For Dowell as the murderer of Florence, see Reichert.

<sup>54</sup> For example, "A voice! a voice!" (60, 67), "Cautiously. Cautiously" (61), "die, die" (68), "He had the faith—don't you see—he had the faith" (72), "I loved him—I loved him—I loved him" (77).

the word once and Marlow is struck by this, the peak of Kurtz's gift; once repeated, as in the serialized version, he no longer quite seems to know what to make of it. The word's doubling does not so much efface it as strip it of its linguistic content, creating two different tones that must be heard and represented simultaneously, which would explain Marlow's difficulty in delivering his last words to the Intended. Words are never enough, which is why Kurtz is said to have "cried out" (*HD* 69). The moment a cry is heard, the moment one responds to it, it "retroactively turns into appeal, it is interpreted, endowed with meaning," Dolar writes (27). With this as the case, it is not simply that Marlow decided against telling the Intended Kurtz's final words; he had the words, but he lacked the words. Less gnomically, he could not say the words since they were unsayable.

But were they recordable? That is, returning to the crisis in which the writer found himself in an era of sound reproduction, would Marlow's task (and Conrad's) have been easier if he had just brought a phonograph with him to record the last words he has such difficulty describing? Dowell faithfully renders Nancy Rufford's last word, the word it seems she'll repeat intermittently for the rest of her life, "shuttlecock." Dowell says he knows "what was passing in her mind," that she "felt like a shuttlecock being tossed backwards and forwards between the violent personalities of Edward and his wife" (*GS* 175). He otherwise cedes it very little significance, and, unlike Marlow, reverts to the visual to sum up the poor girl as "a picture without a meaning" (176). He renders faithfully but his reading—particularly his need to fix one, specific reading—does not do her, or the person he's become, justice. It is a lapse in awareness from a narrator who has spoken his way into self-knowledge. If he were to re-read the manuscript of *The Saddest*

*Story*, he's now in a position, after much reflection, to realize that he's spent 75,000 words trying to explicate the horror inherent in "shuttlecocks," the unspeakable behind the audible.<sup>55</sup> In the case of both novels, it is indeed a novel, and not a wax cylinder or disc bearing the name of Edison, that is best equipped, and sensitive enough, to transmit the listenings of Marlow and Dowell.

That which Conrad and Ford already knew and practiced in the construction of their narratives is affirmed by Žižek, who argues that one "looks forward to the 'secret' being revealed somewhere at the end;... but the real 'secret' is already in the narration itself" (69).<sup>56</sup> The kernel, in both the Conradian and Žižekian sense, is not found by uncovering what the dream-thoughts are but in the dream-work that transformed them, not in the dream's interpretation but in the dream-sensation (3). Of *Heart of Darkness*, Brooks claims, "[T]here is no way to state its kernel, its wisdom directly.... Meaning will never lie in the summing-up but only in the transmission" (260). "Its" for Brooks here refers to *Heart of Darkness*, but what of the ineffable "it" within each work, the "it" that Dowell leaves to us and the "it" brought out as a glow brings out a haze in Conrad? Explicitly addressing the latter, but for my purposes addressing them both, J. Hillis Miller writes, "Everything in the whole story, all the mimetic and very similar elements, is for the sake of bringing out a glimpse of that 'it'" (31). But that "it" can neither be glimpsed nor heard. Unspeakable, unsayable, and unsound, "it" is the novelistic record, a

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<sup>55</sup> It bears pointing out that Dowell's work is unedited; it is, as Ford writes in his essay on impressionism, "the impression, not the corrected chronicle" ("Impressionism" 41). He relates having re-read portions of the text in his narrative, and yet he makes no effort to correct himself when he spots errors. Even as a writer, Dowell seems to offer the reader a "live" performance.

<sup>56</sup> For the joke itself, see 68.



translation of the world and its ineffables, attempted with utmost fidelity (31). “[L]eft up the [the reader] to interpret things the way he understands them,” as Benjamin writes of stories, these novelistic records achieve a certain “amplitude” (“Storyteller” 89).

Phonograph records, Theodor Adorno notes, are two-dimensional, lacking music's most powerful dimension—“its height and its abyss”<sup>57</sup>—and can never give us more than, to use Marlow's words, “the mere show” (278; *HD* 29). Yet the novelistic records of Conrad and Ford give us the abyssal darkness of the concealed heart.

Charting the abyss of *The Good Soldier* has tempted critics since its publication. For his part, Dreiser does not understand why Ford's spoiled story gives us a maze when a story really “should go forward in a more or less direct line” (155). “To write badly,” Michel Serres offers, “is to plunge the graphic message into... noise which interferes with reading,” moreover, “simply to write is to risk jumbling a form” (66). But what about when jumbling the form is strategic? When writing badly is not simply a matter of poor penmanship but of a real desire to make some noise? Noise, as William Paulson defines it, is “not loud or obnoxious sounds but anything that gets mixed up with messages as they are sent” (ix). Noise, so understood, is a necessity for Ford's literary impressionism; it takes the form of protracted “justifications” and anything that “may very well prove uninteresting to your reader”; it is rather like the squeaking, wheezing, and moaning Conrad hated about the phonograph. This noise is “an artistic defect,” a form of “non-Impressionism,” that is nevertheless necessary to produce the final effect (*HJ* 46). In this way, it is reached through a combination of Impressionism and non-Impressionism just as

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<sup>57</sup> Of course, Edison's cylinders, by definition, weren't two-dimensional literally, but given Adorno's early thoughts on recorded sound, I think it's safe to claim the figurative sense stands.

the novelistic record brings together both sound and unsound. In a parenthetical, Dowell, momentarily channeling a Baedeker, explains, “I’m not really interested in these facts but they have a bearing on my story”—and, moreover, on our hearing of his story (*GS* 28). But noise, Paulson discerns, can become meaningful in systems where the message itself is just one facet, such as in stories, to which, as Benjamin posits, information is positively antithetical (ix; “Storyteller” 89).

“What has appeared as noise in the first encounter,” Meyer Schapiro explains about experiencing modern art, “becomes in the end message or necessity, though never message in a perfectly reproducible sense” (41). Never, then, with the true fidelity sound reproduction dreamed of, with perfect understanding and without loss. Yet, if despite all of that, we still desire to know, to see, to *hear* hearts dark and silent, Samuel Hynes proclaims, we must make do with “the shabby equipment” nature has gifted us and its valuable yet necessarily compromised insights, what Conrad above called the “proud illusion” of nearing the dream (Hynes 230). In a letter written as he finishes *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad, who apologized for the letter’s incoherence, stated, rather cryptically, “I find I am allowed nothing but fidelity to an absolutely lost cause, to an idea without a future” (*CL* 2: 161). The rest of the letter is vaguely political, but, given his struggles with his novel *Rescue* at the same time—which would go unfinished until 1920—and the usual monetary difficulties brought about by his having dedicated himself to writing, I do not think one need take great liberties to think of this “lost cause,” this “idea without a future,” as the novel, especially in a future dictated by the Edison ad that opened this chapter. “The appearances of this perishable life are deceptive,” he writes years later, but

the “inner voice may remain true in its secret counsel” (*Personal* 70). As cylinders were being displaced by discs and film eclipsed the phonograph, and as unsound as it may have seemed, Conrad continued to believe in his shabby equipment and its capacity for rendering fidelity, for transmitting one's hearing of the inner voice, the hidden inner truth, which is neither audible nor visible and only capable of being felt, written, and read.

Overhearing America in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and F.

Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

"Our dog is dead an' our mule is dead, but I got anuther mule, and when I say (the clucking tongue and teeth sound used to urge mules), he moves from de word... Is you got dat?" She told him, "Naw." He waited a while and he ast her again, "Is you got dat down yit?"

"Naw sir, I ain't got it yit."

"How come you ain't got it?"

"Cause I can't spell (clucking sound)."

"You mean tuh tell me you been off tuh school seven years and can't spell (clucking sound)? Well, I could almost spell dat myself. Well, jest say (sound) and go on."

—Story told by Robert Williams, from Zora Neale Hurston's *Every Tongue Got to Confess*

Language, when it speaks to the eye only, loses half its meaning. For the eye is an outpost of the brain, and wears its livery oftener than that of the character. But the temperament, the deep human nature, the aboriginal emotions, *these* utter themselves in the voice. It is only by the ear that the true mother-tongue that knows the short way to the heart is learned.

—James Russell Lowell, "The Ballads"

### *Introduction*

On April 1, 1922, in what may have struck many at the time as some kind of joke, *Literary Digest* began a regular column called "Radio Department"—indeed, only months into the column's run it led by asking the question, "Is Radio Only a Passing Fad?" ("Fad" 31). Yet that passed, and a month later, on July 8, it opened with an article entitled "Ambitious Radio Possibilities," on the projected effects of Edwin Howard Armstrong's invention of a super-regenerative circuit, which would greatly increase a receiver's ability to capture weak radio signals. "The new work," it reads, "gives pretty full assurance that a sensitive receiver alone can solve the problem of world-wide communication" ("Ambitious" 23). At that time, receivers were sensitive enough even

for those owned by amateurs to send and receive signals across the Atlantic, as happened for the first time on December 12, 1921, when a message from Connecticut's IBCG was heard in Androssan, Scotland by Paul F. Godley and members of his visiting American Radio Relay League. In many ways, it seems an all-too-suitable metaphor for American modernism: bringing with them all that they learned while on their native soil, these Americans only fully realized their visions after spending time abroad.

Leaving behind Ford, Conrad, and England, in this second chapter, on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), like that radio message we too travel across the Atlantic, while remaining within the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, what folklorist Alan Lomax, Hurston's partner on a recording expedition in 1935, dubbed "the period of the phonograph or the age of the golden ear" ("Saga" 173). "Sensitive receiver," of course, refers to radio and recording equipment, but, as I will argue in this chapter, it also refers to the likes of Pheoby Watson, and her "hungry listening [that] helped Janie tell her story," and Nick Carraway, possessed of the "heightened sensitivity" he ascribes to his friend Gatsby, who sympathetically plucks from the air the titular figure's otherwise inaudible lament and gives it voice in his novel (*Their Eyes* 10; *Gatsby* 6). It applies, too, to the authors of these novels, whether like Hurston, directly involved in operating a device, as she did in her fieldwork as an anthropologist, or like Fitzgerald, writing a novel keenly aware of the

power and attractiveness of certain voices when, for the first time, “[r]adio is in the air, electrically, vocally, and popularly” (McMeans 225).<sup>58</sup>

In addition to shifting the landscape, an examination of these two novels also has the effect of shuffling the protagonists, human and machine alike. The phonograph recedes into the background in this chapter, but even so it remains the foundational technology for the two phenomena under consideration herein: field recording, for which it served as the first capturing device, and the radio, the modern incarnation of which began when Frank Conrad started playing records from his collection into his homemade device in 1920, broadcasting as KDKA in Pittsburgh. This Atlantic crossing brings us to an American nation that, perhaps owing to its own newness, was always an early and enthusiastic adopter of nascent technologies. Moving away from the phonograph, a technology of impressions, this chapter is focused on field recording and radio broadcasting, practices that I pair together under the label of technologies of immediacy. Although different in their inner workings, they share a sensitivity and a sensibility. “Immediacy” as I use it here means both the bringing near of the far away and the feeling, at least, of being in direct contact, without the need of an intervening medium. Hands-on and homemade, each technology required the practitioners—amateur operators and builders with little to guide them—to connect with untutored others and in the process capture a moment and mood for audiences they would likely never see. In addition to examining, as in the previous chapter, this relationship between technology

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<sup>58</sup> Only two weeks prior to the article on radio’s possibilities referenced in the opening, Fitzgerald had written to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, about an idea for his third novel, which he hoped would be “something new—something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned” (*LIL* iv).

and craft, I will also engage here with a query particular to the nation and networks occupying this chapter, namely, what is, figuratively and literally, the voice of America, and what would be the voice of its literature?

Bringing together technological and artistic craftsmanship in his study of American modernism, *A Homemade World* (1975), Hugh Kenner links the Greek inventor Dedalus, whom James Joyce's Stephen invokes, and his North Carolinian birds of a feather, the Wright Brothers, a linkage that inheres, as Martin Heidegger reminds us, in a word from Dedalus' mother tongue: *techne* (318). "[I]f Dedalus is the artist's patron," Kenner writes, "art is no miracle but an intricate craft, the issue of which may seem miraculous" (xii). This willingness to experiment, to listen to the wisdom of the ages yet to accept no masters, and to fly too close to the sun for the tastes of their public typified early twentieth-century America, whether through "[m]arrying a box kite to a bicycle, installing a brass box equivalent to sixteen horses, making it fly at Kitty Hawk" or writing a poem called "Poetry" that professes one's dislike for poetry, which one continues to tinker with for the next forty years (221). What these improvisations and renunciations would produce for America is "its own modernism, a homemade variety," "offer[ing] discoveries, not virtuoso performances," and nothing less than a "fifty-year reshaping of the American language" (xvi, 217, xviii). American writers felt free to select or reject, refine or combine any and all styles, dialects, tropes, and figures, or as Kenner puts it "language may be less a heritage than a code, and a code moreover that we are free to change" (213). The language of American modernism, though transmissible like a

heritage, is also a kind of code, generated by its differences and affinities with that which came before.

Unlike Conrad and Ford, Hurston and Fitzgerald share no direct bond, only a homeland, but with their gifts they attempted to bridge the distance and differences between their two Americas, one populated by well-heeled flappers and the other by the oppressed folk.<sup>59</sup> What they also had in common was an ear for music, itself a kind of code, and an interest in the relationship between lyrics and melodies, language and sound. In another life, Hurston might have been a songwriter, penning “snappy airs,” and Fitzgerald might have, as he did at Princeton, written musical comedies, “following the footsteps of Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hart” (*LIL* 147; *Letters* 63). It is unsurprising, then, that both *Their Eyes* and *Gatsby* are attuned to the sounds surrounding them, live and remembered, thunderous and seemingly silent. Janie Starks worries about her relationship with the much younger Tea Cake Woods; she cries, “People will talk,” but so too will everything else in this novel, from bees to trees to buzzards (101). Jay Gatsby’s parties are heard before they are seen and the scant physical description<sup>60</sup> given throughout is fitting for a novel in which voices carry, across the years and across the Long Island Sound.

Along with the nonverbal and the unspoken, this attention to sound communicates what anthropologist Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt refers to as the “remnants of the past in the

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<sup>59</sup> They also shared a kind of missed connection: Fitzgerald’s long-time editor, Maxwell Perkins, was to have served as Hurston’s editor at Scribner’s, but he passed away before getting to serve in that capacity.

<sup>60</sup> Daisy Buchanan seems to be fixed as a blonde in the popular imagination, but not once is her hair color given by Nick Carraway. Indeed, as Joan Korenman points out in “‘Only Her Hairdresser...’: Another Look at Daisy Buchanan,” Daisy is introduced as a brunette in the manuscript, an inconsistency Fitzgerald does little to clarify in the final text (575).



present,” remnants stored and re-presented on disc and, by 1920, on the air (124).<sup>61</sup> Against literary folklorists, who were “distracted by people,” Hurston and her fellow anthropological folklorists saw folksongs and tales not as simply dead letters to be spelled out in, and learned from, books but also as tunes that passed from tongue to tongue through the ages and pulsating rhythms that continued to beat after the listener absented herself (111). Writing in “The Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934) about the performance of a spiritual by a church congregation, Hurston claims that a particular rendition must be considered “not as a final thing, but as a mood,” or as she’d later write in *Their Eyes*, as “[a] mood come alive” (188; 2). For his part, Fitzgerald, Ronald Berman contends in *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times* (1994), “was particularly interested... in texts that suggested something about the break between past and present” (166). In an age in which the voice lives on beyond the body’s decay, whether in the air or on record, both novelists offer us voices that act, as Daisy Buchanan’s voice is described and as Tea Cake Woods’s voice is felt by Janie, as a “deathless song” (*GG* 101).

In my reading of *Gatsby*, I find that nothing dramatizes this temporal break more significantly, or tragically, than the voice of Daisy, the thing that “held [Gatsby] most,” held him in temporal stasis, and “compelled” both Nick and his narrative forward (*GG*

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<sup>61</sup> Early radio did not have its finger on the pulse of the now as much as its contemporary configuration might have one believe. In the early 1920s, newspapers ran schedules for radio stations nationwide, as signals were not yet regulated and required to keep to their own immediate geographical locations; browsing the schedule for an August night in 1924, one sees that classical programs, whether symphonic or operatic, predominate (“Broadcasts” 6). Frank Conrad, father of modern broadcasting, began by playing records from his own collection, that belonging to a man in his late 40s in 1919, before being asked by listeners to play newer music (“KDKA” 225).

101, 18). Whether in these novels or in the audio technology of the time, time does not so much pass as reach an impasse in an auditory version of what, while writing about images, Gilles Deleuze calls “peaks of present,” that is, the simultaneity of the presents of the past, present, and future (100). Under the red, white, and blue—the last title Fitzgerald proposed for the book forever to be known by its titular protagonist<sup>62</sup>—Gatsby believes so readily, as he asserts to Nick, in the ability to repeat the past is because of its seeming co-presence, through Daisy’s unchanging voice, with the contemporary. The tragedy is that, despite his youthful interest in electricity and studying “needed inventions,” Gatsby is unable to register the break his author is interested in, or hear it as such (181). Meanwhile, under “blue ether’s bosom,”<sup>63</sup> Janie, like the folk tales Hurston grew up with, studied, and recorded, occupies numerous presents at once, living amid the “thought pictures” that were “nicer to listen to” (*Their Eyes* 48). For their compatriots, a sense of national unity, both temporal and geographic, was being aided by the countless live and recorded voices and songs moving through the air, which blended together red, white, and blue and more colors besides, “materializing” for listeners “their sense of the nation” (Douglas, *Listening* 73).<sup>64</sup> “How fine is the texture of web that radio is even now

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<sup>62</sup> Less than a month before publication, Fitzgerald wired Perkins to say, “CRAZY ABOUT TITLE UNDER THE RED WHITE AND BLUE STOP WHART [sic] WOULD DELAY BE” (*LIL* 98). Matthew Bruccoli claims that Fitzgerald never felt confident about *The Great Gatsby* as a title, but I think it has less to do with aesthetic preferences than with an uneasiness about making Gatsby himself the center of the book, a claim I will make more of shortly.

<sup>63</sup> “Ether,” as the *OED* indicates, was at the time of publication of both novels a colloquialism for the radio, its first usage in 1899 forecasting a future of “ether-wave telegraphy” (“Ether” def. n. 5c).

<sup>64</sup> Douglas relates an anecdote about early radio enthusiasts, desirous of receiving stations from as far away as possible, who would keep a map of the country next to their radios, marking on the map each time they pulled in a new broadcast. These maps of listening helped them come to some understanding of the nation as a totality.

spinning!” popular science writer Waldemar Kaempffert exclaimed in 1924. “It is achieving the task of making us feel together, think together, live together” (772).

The sense of the nation, then, becomes a collaborative effort, between these voices and those capable of hearing them. Greek for “generated by a difference,” heterodyning, the principle that makes us capable of hearing radio, forges out of two different signals two new signals in a new frequency. With radio, this new frequency is shifted from the inaudible radio range into something detectable by the human ear. The clicking sound of Morse code, put down on the page as a series of dots and dashes, was now with the help of a receiver audible as a series of beeps. In a similar way, the care, patience, and attention of the friendly ears of Pheoby and Nick ensure that Janie and Jay’s lives, respectively, do not go untold—but why do these two narratives take the form that they do? Technology solves the problem of giving voice to clicking sounds, but what of the clucking sound problem posed in the epigraph taken from Hurston’s *Every Tongue Got to Confess* (2001)? How does a writer “just say (sound)”?

This chapter’s main argument is that the formal novelties of *Their Eyes* and *The Great Gatsby*—the role of narrative voice in the former, which has attracted so much critical attention; the descriptive vagueness of the latter, which left readers like Edith Wharton and H.L. Mencken nonplussed<sup>65</sup>—are also generated by a difference, produced through engagements with technologies of immediacy by writers open to the new possibilities of the voice. These selfsame engagements not only led to a new and different

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<sup>65</sup> Wharton believed that Gatsby’s death was not a “tragedy” so much as a “‘fait divers’ for the morning papers” (*Critical* 266). Mencken called the story “somewhat trivial... a sort of anecdote” (265). Laurence Stallings said it amounted to “little more than a sheaf of notes” (“Stallings” 154).

narrative voice, but also led each novelist to participate in a discourse implicit to these new technological possibilities, namely, the gift of voice to the voiceless in *Their Eyes* and the entry of new voices of unknown provenance (and ethnicity) into one's home in *Gatsby*. Both technologies liberated the voice from the body, and in so doing would eventually lead to the liberation of those same bodies, but there remained those, in the novels and in the nation at large, that sought to reverse these gains. In the novels, the relationship between art and the unportrayed new technologies of recording and broadcasting is indexed in form and enacted in content, resulting in the following lessons: how hearing, not seeing is believing, or at least should be; how hearing voices, and therefore understanding them, can build harmonized communities; how just listening to what flatters oneself or fits into an accepted narrative becomes a way of ostracizing and marginalizing, a marginalization that results from perceived difference, whether in gender, ethnicity, or economic class. Heterodyning, as mentioned above, produces two signals, but most often only one is wanted, leaving the other to be filtered out. But, as these novels would have it, both "voice"—Lowell's vehicle of the temperamental, deeply human, emotional mother-tongue—and "America" ought to be pluralized, and sensitive receivers, sensitive to the point of reducing any distance to "the short way to the heart," are the only way to make a viable unity of that plurality. In a world where, as Janie's grandmother tells her, as Nanny tells Janie, "we don't know nothin' but we see," one must make an appeal to the ear—whether through radio, records, or writing—to get beyond skin color or, for that matter, the trappings of a fabulous wealth that conceals a broken dreamer, in order to convince us otherwise (14).

*Folkways and Sound Waves*

A certain sensitivity on the part of American intellectuals with regard to the standing of their national literature is publicly discernible as early as 1855; as part of a lecture series at Harvard on English poets, James Russell Lowell stated amid a presentation on the ballad, “English writers demand of us a national literature. But where for thirteen centuries was their own?” (62). It was to be found emerging from the very soil itself, “like violets,” in the form of ballads and folksongs, precisely where some fifty years later John Avery Lomax, following in the lineage of Lowell’s friend and colleague Francis James Child and his student and successor George Lyman Kittredge, would locate the roots of an American national literature (75). Lomax laments in his autobiography, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter* (1947), how American scholars were uninterested in native folksongs and ballads, such forms only eliciting excitement in direct proportion to their geographical and temporal remove from the present-day United States (82). Nearly singlehandedly, Lomax, who grew up with an abiding love for the cowboy songs he heard as a boy growing up in Texas, put American folksongs on the map and in their own building at the Library of Congress, the Archive of American Folk Song, established in 1928.

While of great value to scholars and as a source for institutional funding, marking a fixed location for collections of songs and tales—implicitly a center—is at odds with the source of lasting power for ballads as a cultural production, namely, according to Lowell, how “a verse could wander safely from heart to heart and from hamlet to hamlet as unassailable as the memories on which it was imprinted” (61). Like the porch talk in

*Their Eyes*, ballads are “[w]ords walking without masters; walking altogether like a harmony in a song” (2). The voice of the people not only emerged from the soil like violets, collected on discs by the likes of Lomax, but also soared unaided, overhead. Around 1925, as record companies sent out their own collectors to scour the soil for signs of song, local radio stations began broadcasting live from their studios the performances of folk acts, from fiddlers to African American vocal groups (“American” 363). Disseminating the folk, away from the center, and wresting American cultural dependence from the centers of Europe—the work of the years 1937-46, as B.A. Botkin and Lomax’s son Alan put forth in an article on folklore for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*—folklore collectors and radio broadcasters became linked in a common undertaking (359; Lornell 54).<sup>66</sup>

The emergence of new representations of voices, exemplified by the treatment in *Gatsby* and *Their Eyes*, is paralleled by the emanation from, and entry into, American homes of underheard, unimagined voices. Radio and records were, to adapt *Their Eyes*’s opening, “passing nations through their mouths,” the mediums themselves but “skins” waiting to be activated by the voice (1-2). Radio historian Michele Hilmes posits that in the 1920s radio wove together a nation as it wove in and out of homes, addressing and dramatizing this sense of unification in its own programming (11). The moment I am most interested in—the moment of *Gatsby*’s composition—occurs slightly before this

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<sup>66</sup> Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” becomes a hit single in 1920 on the Okeh label, the first recording of the vocal blues by an African American performer (Lornell 51). Also on Okeh, in 1924, Ed Andrews becomes the first country blues artist to record (47). Uncle Dave Macon, the grandfather of country music, has his first recording session in New York City in July 1924 (62). On the radio, the Grand Ole Opry began in Nashville in 1924, followed by an explosion of similar shows (54). While the broadcasts originated locally, because of unregulated airwaves, they could be heard throughout entire geographic regions.

simultaneity but also before federal regulation, where the folk drifted freely from its roots.<sup>67</sup> It was a short-lived period, however, lasting from engineer Frank Conrad's founding of the first broadcast station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, in 1920 until the establishment of national broadcasters (NBC in 1926, CBS in 1928) and, most crushingly, the Radio Act of 1927, which gave regulatory power to a new government body known as the Federal Radio Commission (later the Federal Communications Commission). However, that later intervention fails to undermine the promise or potency of the new form. While it is true, as an industrial engineer of the time explains, that everyone had the opportunity to tune in and set their watches by the clock at the Naval Observatory in Arlington, and thus the many lived chronologically as one, "snapped into unison" in the present moment, there was at the same time a growing awareness of social, cultural, and even linguistic difference (McMeans 232). This is borne out by critic Susan Douglas's findings in the day's journalistic record: "What is especially striking about these accounts is the way they describe using radio listening to imagine America as a nation more harmonious than it was yet simultaneously reveling in and embracing its differences—what divided it, what rebelled against 'America' as a homogenizing notion"—or even as a homogenized nation (*Listening* 58). Radio offered the opportunity to participate in the national, in an even more involving way than voting (especially for those doing their own broadcasting), while at the same time celebrating the local, both their own and that of their fellow Americans, as arrant broadcasts arrived at their dial.

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<sup>67</sup> Such a mingling of signal and noise at a later time in Ireland, James A. Connor suggests, was an important influence on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939). "For Joyce the exile, Joyce the aficionado of popular culture," he writes, "radio air was not something to be ignored" (18).

For those without the wherewithal to construct radio sets or, in many cases, without even franchise rights, their celebrations of the local were connected to the nation-at-large by the efforts of folklorists, who were, as early as Jesse Walter Fewkes in 1890, collecting with recording machines.<sup>68</sup> The main part of Alan Lomax's enterprise, as he explained it in 1960, was to provide "a voice for the voiceless.... to redress the balance a bit, to put sound technology at the disposal of the folk, to bring channels of communication to all sorts of artists and areas" ("Saga" 174). To hear their own voices being played back to them meant that these artists "had made communicative contact with a bigger world than their own," a nation enlarged and enriched by their own constitutive part (174). Interest in folk sounds was not the result of migrations or other movements of people, but rather because people back east could pick up Oklahoma and Texas on their radios and at their record shops. One radio amateur provides his listening itinerary on a summer evening in 1922 for *Scribner's*:

Here we have sat in the little back bedroom in a home in Indiana, and, with not even a wire extending beyond the lot, have gone to Detroit and Pittsburgh for a musical treat, heard the boys talking all over America, caught some of the chatter from the sea and the shore, set our watches by Naval Observatory time, taken a lesson in French direct from the Eiffel Tower, heard Panama and Hawaii, and a great chorus of others that we did not stop to identify. (McMeans 232)

This travel is not undertaken by highways, but by sound waves, endorsing *Radio's* "Radiotorial" of May 1922 when it claimed broadcasting "will soon become as much of a public necessity as good roads" (43; 9). "What are two hundred miles in radio?"

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<sup>68</sup> It is for this reason that Béla Bartók writes, "I can positively declare that the science of music folklore owes its present development to Thomas Edison" (294).



Kaempffert asks; unlike the telegraph and the telephone, he exclaims, radio provided the very definition of “space annihilation” (768).

Transcontinental highways, themselves on the verge of being numbered, like stations on the dial, and radio stations, public necessities as *Radio* would have it, were exactly the thing most feared by John Lomax. Evincing a modernist desire for “purity,” anticipating what Theodor Adorno sought for music and Clement Greenberg for painting,<sup>69</sup> Lomax was concerned that “the influence of good roads and the radio combined will very soon put an end both to the creation and to the artless singing of American folksongs” (“Field” 60). What happened instead with an expansion of roadways was a similar expansion in the folk repertoire and the addition of dramatis personae. Writing about Fitzgerald’s “American fable,” Robert Ornstein captures succinctly the shift in the direction of the national mythology underway at the time of *Gatsby* as the movement “from the West to Wall Street,” a realization Nick Carraway himself comes to in the novel’s final pages, *Gatsby*’s death symbolic of the fading of the West (140; 184). “The racketeer, Fitzgerald suggests,” Ornstein writes, “is the last great folk hero, the Paul Bunyan of an age in which romantic wonder surrounds underworld ‘gonnegtions’ instead of raw courage or physical strength”—qualities celebrated in the cowboy songs Lomax began his career collecting (142). What roads, radio, and recording all have in common is that they connected otherwise disparate places, joined them together in a conversation, a song, a nation, each contributing their share to the common lot, and joined them together in, as Michel Serres theorizes in his reading of *The Odyssey*,

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<sup>69</sup> Andreas Huyssen has much more to say about these two in his chapter “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other” in *After the Great Divide* (44-64).

an itinerary, “the mythic adventure... only the general joining of these spaces” (49). Such spaces can only be traversed, Serres writes of the beginning of the world in Plato’s *Timaeus*, by an “artful connection,” not unlike the microphones of the Lomaxes, a wire extending from the home of the performer back to the recording machine in their trunk, and the wireless words of radio broadcasters (48). Voices carry, yes, but they also connect.

After World War I, when amateur radio operations were once more allowed, America had become a major voice on the world stage and also had its disposal a new organ of communication allowing it to connect, and connect with, its populace. If field recording unearthed the voice and songs of the people, radio implicitly asked who would speak for the nation—whose voices would count—and what they should sound like. This discourse manifests itself in each novel through voices whose value resides more in their grain and tone than in the words each articulates. Early in *The Great Gatsby*, after the evening is interrupted by what is understood to be a phone call from Tom Buchanan’s mistress, Myrtle, Daisy says that she had seen a nightingale singing on the lawn; there is a break in her description during which Nick explains how “[Daisy’s] voice sings” (20). Her voice sings—precisely that: not “Daisy sings” or even an explanation of what she may have sang (an imitation of the bird’s sad song?), as if her disembodied voice somehow both possessed a life of its own and was also devoid of any notable content. In *Their Eyes*, the singer and the song must be as one, for as Janie tells Pheoby at the beginning of her tale, “[T]ain’t no use in me telling you somethin’ unless Ah give you de understandin’ to go ‘long wid it” (7). Her story—her itinerary—is just dots on a map

and incomplete without a live performance, the connection of the space between herself and Pheoby. If the narrative of *Their Eyes*, shifting from first-person to third-person, is an attempt by Hurston to render relatable all that Janie experienced, Nick's narrative in *Gatsby* is a book-length evocation of Daisy's voice, its song and its spell. "[T]here's something in that voice of hers," Nick relates, as he attempts to find the words but instead trails off into ellipses, and in so doing he renders Daisy as some kind of modern-day siren (82).

Myths, and their modern-day descendants, folk tales, occupy what John Edgar Wideman calls in his foreword to *Every Tongue Got to Confess* "a pantheistic world where everything talks" ("Foreword" xix). Janie Starks inhabits a novel whose language "sings," as Cheryl Wall puts it, and a world where she is privy to the "inaudible voice of it all," but so too are those of her countrymen who have all of the necessary equipment, in terms of temperament and technology (384; *Their Eyes* 10). In the *Gatsby* manuscript,<sup>70</sup> Chicago is home to a "cult of Daisy," united I would argue around the oft-detailed charms of that voice of hers, just as Gatsby cleaves to her because of that same voice, as he pursues that ineffable something about it (*Facsimile* 17). At the same time, the nation as a whole is being bound together by inaudible voices, present in those radio waves whose frequency must be shifted into human range, and in previously unheard voices, in those

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<sup>70</sup> Throughout I will be making reference to the novel's manuscript. This move is essential to make two of my key arguments: first, throughout the writing process, Fitzgerald made *Gatsby* more and more vague, a person whom one heard about more than one heard from, whose name was always in the air; second, although Fitzgerald eliminates much about music from the manuscript—the longer description of *Jazz History of the World*, Gatsby's song lyrics, and so on—this has less to do with resituating the novel away from the auditory than with the fact that he makes Nick into a more intuitive receiver, sharing a wavelength with his subjects, trusting in his ability to make this music audible to his readership without having to be so literal about its presence.

songs and tales representing a way of life that lies beyond one's experience (*Facsimile* 17).

What these voices have in common is a need for sensitivity, a shift in the human range of sympathy. Finding the narrative voice to speak these voices, to write sound, proved as arduous and time-consuming an undertaking for Fitzgerald and Hurston as finding stations on the radio for the amateur or finding new voices to record for the folklorist, especially given the kind of stories they were intent on writing. In my readings of each novel, I argue that what each novelist ultimately arrived at through their encounters with these technologies of immediacy, field recording and radio broadcasting, was a kind of sound writing that supplemented the phonographic impressionism of Conrad and Ford, a literary device, so to speak, similar to a mechanical one that English folklorist Percy Grainger, allowing his imagination free rein, dreamed of:

To my mind the invention of a machine is badly needed that would record on paper (as the phonograph does on wax) all sounds played or sung into it, giving the number of vibrations of each note, precise rhythmic durations of notes... and pauses, dynamics, vowel-sounds and blends. Such a machine, producing a visible record on paper, together with the phonograph and gramophone preserving an audible record, would surely afford ideal means for collecting the music and speech of the known world, providing also... a basis for universal comparison. (152)

Fitzgerald and Hurston, like all great modern American improvisers, marry the audible record to the print record, solving the riddle from the epigraph, both saying and writing “(sound).” They create narrators with access to, in the words of *Their Eyes*, the “basin... where words float around on thought and thought on sound,” located not, as that novel would have it, in the mind, but floating on the ether and rising from the soil.

Although field recording and radio broadcasting are two different technological processes, underlying both is a desire for preservation and expansion, to paradoxically make an epic of the intimate, not in the name of universal comparison but in the name of sympathy, sensitivity—universal *compassion*. “The voice of the common man,” Lomax and Botkin write, “sounding from the loudspeaker, opened new horizons and established immediate bonds of feeling and interest,” whereas the radio, Waldemar Kaempffert exclaims, united all of those who shared a horizon, who were “so nationally related and yet physically so unrelated,” and were made through its ministrations “to acquire a sense of intimacy” (771). The unsounds discussed in the previous chapter, the “not yet audible,” are here the becoming-audible, voices for so long misheard or underrepresented beginning to take wing, annihilating space and time. Comparing Nick Carraway and Marlow, the critic Robert Emmet Long writes of how the approach of Conrad and Fitzgerald “makes necessary a new mode of narrator, even as it creates a new mode of hero” (“Part II” 422). This approach, Long argues, is rooted in Conrad’s impressionism and how it produces protagonists who measure all claims—who, in the language of anthropology, participate and observe—and ultimately come down somewhere in the middle (“Part I” 274). This new mode of narrator, what I call the sensitive receiver, is indeed a development of impressionism as I defined it in my first chapter, a narrator whose impressions are more auditory than visual. The voice of *Their Eyes*, who herself finds voices everywhere and in all things, is the direct result of Hurston’s initial expedition with a recording machine, while Nick Carraway knows that, contrary to “his”

novel's iconic cover, it is not so much a pair of eyes hanging over the city as a voice, from lips on the verge of an utterance, waiting to be overheard.

*Communities of the Voice: Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In her 1942 autobiography, Hurston reveals that in 1925, the year *Gatsby* is published, she traveled to New York to, among other things, study English at Barnard College, but she soon found herself drawn to anthropology (*Dust* 168). At Barnard, her work in the anthropology classes she took so impressed those at the Rosenwald Foundation that she was granted a two-year graduate fellowship for anthropological study, under the mentorship of Franz Boas. Anthropology was, in the words of her biographer Robert Hemenway, “the passion of her life,” “as full of things a writer could use,” Hurston explained in a letter to early benefactress Fannie Hurst, “as a dog is full of fleas” (“Foreword” 4; *LIL* 85). It was at this intersection of anthropology and writing that she was found by Alan Lomax, who was at that time trying to find his own voice, differentiating himself from his estimable father. Years later, Lomax, in a letter to Hemenway, described himself as “entranced and dazzled and almost worshipful” upon meeting Hurston, as her prose was of the “purest and finest aesthetic quality”:

I was engaged in my attempt to reach the same peak of excellence and later in my own books of oral history I hope I occasionally achieved it, but when I met Zora she already had mastered the editorial style necessary to transmit the whole plangent sound of black folks' speech onto the page then confused by mistransliteration or the redundancies that no eye can accept. (qtd. in Szwed 79)

The callous eye is less generous than the democratic ear, and Hurston, despite Lomax's plaudits, was not herself entirely accepting of her work in *Mules and Men*. “The Library of Congress says that [*Mules and Men*] is the most important book on American folk-

lore,” she writes a later editor, “and no studies on Am. folk-lore fails to mention it. It is one of the sorrows of my life that I could not do it over in the light of greater experience” (564). “Experience” is one of those great catchalls that can mean any number of things, but here she seems to mean the experience of having collected with a recording machine,<sup>71</sup> an expedition that changed not only her collecting style—after 1935, she had “relatively little interest in the formalities of academic method”—but also her prose style (Hemenway 212). Writing to Oliver Strunk at the Library of Congress about his 1935 expedition with Hurston, “the most exciting field trip I have made,” Lomax claims that it “can only be told in a long, rambling novel, but I shall confine myself to a catalogue [sic] of records which, while exciting enough, is by no means adequate for the whole story” (Letter). While neither particularly long nor rambling, Hurston in essence wrote that novel, the plangency Lomax heard in her early prose resounding all the mightier from the experience. The whole story does not reside in the recordings themselves, but must be brought out by a sympathetic ear.

Transcribing by hand, the method used in her initial expeditions, got in the way, not just literally, with the notebook as barrier between Hurston and subject, but also figuratively, preventing her from “making contacts” and making connections (*LIL* 116). Lomax and Botkin concurred, critiquing transcription for destroying any sense of spontaneity—as one would often have to interrupt performances to make sure one heard the words right—and thus the emotional heft (360). African American folklore specifically possesses, John Edgar Wideman asserts, an “unwritability,” which resulted in

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<sup>71</sup> It comes as little surprise, then, that tales she recorded stenographically for *Mules and Men* she would later record phonographically with Lomax and Mary Barnicle in 1935 (*Tongue* 86, 113).

major aspects of the performance being lost in translation (“Foreword” xiv, xvii). This returns us to a quandary that motivates much of my project: How does one write the unwritable? As in the epigraph I recur to, how does one say (sound)? “The answer,” as Hurston wrote the head of the Florida Writers’ Project, “is a recording machine,” and its capabilities enabled Hurston to conceive of a novel narrating consciousness, not necessarily omniscient but omni-audient (*LIL* 415). Here, Hurston is proposing the machine as an antidote to the restlessness and self-consciousness of the informant, but I extend this further by suggesting that, as she evinces in *Their Eyes*, there are entire dimensions of the encounter that are brought to life and given a voice through recording. One needs context and culture in addition to the stories; one needs them to be put “in atmosphere and not just stuck out into cold space” (269). The old way of doing things, of taking down by hand, only offers “in a very static fashion a myriad-voiced reality,” as Lomax puts it (“Preface” 64). “[M]ost white people have seen our shows,” Hurston writes in an unpublished essay intended for the *American Mercury*, “but not our lives” (“Know” 2). To correct this, to see “the true inside” and “the deep inside stuff,” one must write for the ear (4).

When Joe Starks cannot believe his ears after Janie makes a biting comment about him in public, one of the bystanders, Walter, replies, “You heard her, you ain’t blind” (75). On the surface, one sees such a comment and may simply chuckle at this gaffe, but for a writer like Hurston there is much folk wisdom contained in such a misstatement—in other words, Joe really should believe his ears, for they “see” through the surface, to the truth inside. Despite the conceptual bias that renders it as a lesser function, in this chapter



I advocate for hearing over listening—hearing which, as Walter Ong put forth, “register[s] interiority without violating it” (71). Grainger, lodging one of his complaints about relying solely on one’s ears while collecting folksongs, writes, “One is so distressingly liable to think one hears what one is expecting to hear”; those who had it in for Janie, says Pheoby, owned a “treacherous ear,” hearing about her travails only what they wanted to hear (152; 5). In both cases, it is not hearing itself that is at fault, but these auditors, who, unlike the sensitive receiver, are closed-off and listening for something specific. Phonography, to reiterate Douglas Kahn’s claim in my first chapter, hears everything, whereas the radio received, and broadcast, everything—voice and music, but also squalling, buzzing, and sizzling.<sup>72</sup> In everyday conversation, to say “I hear you” means “I understand you,” and it is only through receiving it all—as Hurston did while operating her recording machine; as Pheoby does at the feet of Janie—that one can grant a fair hearing.

The recording machine, then, allowed Hurston to “get inside of Negro art and lore,” she wrote Langston Hughes, where she might discover, as Jim Allen puts it in a tale from *Mules and Men*, “de inside meanin’ of words.” What he calls by-words—proverbial expression, coded language—“all got a hidden meanin’, jus’ like de Bible. Everybody can’t understand what they mean. Most people is thin-brained” (134-35). Getting at the kernel of not just folk stories but folk life is incredibly valuable to the anthropologist—indeed, in his single-page preface to the book, Boas praises Hurston not once but twice for depicting the “true inner life” of her subjects (x). But Hurston herself was a native of

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<sup>72</sup> Those descriptors are taken from contemporary advertising for products meant to eliminate such noises (Sterne 270).

Eatonville, and so an insider; without the use of an appendix, how does one give all of the meanings of the by-words to those not in the know? How does one give the experience needed to understand the performance? The recording machine not only aided Hurston in the field, enabling her to make connections, but her experience with it also served her purposes back home, when she needed to translate what she had heard onto the page. The answer is indeed the recording machine, for it brings one inside of the lore. Returning to Ong, sound registers, and records, interiority without violating it, without making it self-conscious or restless; using comparisons suitable for my purposes, he explains further: “Sounds all register the interior structures of whatever it is that produces them. A violin filled with concrete will not sound like a normal violin. A saxophone sounds differently from a flute: it is structured differently inside. And above all, the human voice comes from inside the human organism which provides the voice’s resonances” (72). The song, easily transcribed, gives us the words and melody, but it is only through recording that one gains the individual and her voice, which are structured differently from other individuals and their voices. In the recorded voice, one hears the relationship between the practitioner and the material, her interiority registered without upset, the performance presented inviolate.

Getting inside comes from putting the tale in atmosphere, the specific instance placed against the wider cultural backdrop. In other words, insight into the meaning of folklore can only be produced in sound. There remains the problem, however, of finding a literary form for this oral material, the visible record that gives at the same time the audible record, and this problem led Alan Lomax to Hurston. Early in his career, seeking

frontier ballads, John Lomax receives a letter from a correspondent in Michigan: “I am going to North Michigan to hunt deer. Think I can find some old lumber-jack songs up there. I can sing the tones of the ones I am sending just as they were sung to me. But I do not know how I could send you the tone by mail!” (*Adventures* 36). Decades later, in a song collection credited to Lomax *père et fils*, Alan writes in the preface to *Our Singing Country* (1941) that, “[s]ince the songs themselves cannot be heard in their living quality, we have not hesitated to adopt certain means for conveying as much of their content as possible to the readers,” but these “means” are limited to providing lyrics from variants or introducing songs using quotes from the songs themselves (66). “Listen and read,” Wideman advises in his foreword to *Every Tongue Got to Confess*, but in *Their Eyes*, Hurston’s “do-over” of *Mules and Men*, announcing the adoption of certain means or explicitly urging a reading practice is unnecessary, for with the aid of Lomax’s “sensitive, new recording machine” Hurston invents a voice that gets inside of it all—not so much free indirect discourse, although there is that, as shared affective exchange, bound by, and binding with, feeling (“Foreword” xvii; *LIL* 353).

This voice is composed of, and has been commented on by, a multitude of voices, all of which, for the most part, combine and mesh in complementary ways.<sup>73</sup> One of the

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<sup>73</sup> Additionally, many of the major voices in the critical discussion achieved a kind of multi-tracking, overlapping, but not talking over, one another; Karla Holloway, Henry Louis Gates, and Michael Awkward—in that order—all publish books with important essays on the narrative of *Their Eyes* in successive years. Robert Stepto was among the first to notice Hurston’s “curious insistence” on not giving Janie, who sits down to begin telling the story to Pheoby of her life and loves, control of the narrative (166). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who calls the novel a “speakerly text,” and Michael Awkward see the resulting narrative voice as mediating between different practices, whether black oral and standard literary or precultural “natural” communication and African-American call-and-response (Gates 174; Awkward 45). For Gates, “the diction of the black characters’ discourse comes to inform the diction of the voice of narrative commentary such that, in several passages, it is extraordinarily difficult to distinguish the narrator’s voice from the protagonist’s,” representing for Awkward a modified form of call-and-response,

major shifts in voice in the novel is characterized by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as a “curious” movement from third person to “‘no-person’ (that is, the seemingly unmediated representation of Janie’s direct speech)” (195). What none of the critics offer is that this no-person—disembodied, selfless, traitless, yet capable of recording—might be the recording machine.<sup>74</sup> If it was, as Janie contends, Tea Cake who “taught me de maiden language all over,” it was recording folklore, to paraphrase Lowell from my epigraph, that connected Hurston to the mother-tongue that knows the short way to the heart (109). Listening to the recordings made in Georgia and Florida in June of 1935, one is first aware of the crackle and hiss, something undoubtedly not lost on Hurston, a reminder, artfully rendered by *Their Eyes*, that nothing is silent if one is but willing to hear. Often, it is difficult to make out what is being said or sung, but one can feel the joy or sadness as communicated by voice, instrument, and, especially, varied forms of percussion; one can see the hands slapping knees, the bottle running along guitar strings, the figure telling a joke stomping across the stage breathlessly, the arrangement of children singing a playground song. Much like in *Their Eyes*, particularly during Janie’s trial, one fails to get the exact details, a perfect transcription, yet the experience is no less vivid for that loss. Above all, however, one gets Hurston, now talking to Alan Lomax underneath the performance, now ending the recording by telling us what we have just heard, as after

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“in which two voices can be combined successfully into a *single voice* to communicate a *single text*” (191; 54). Karla Holloway observes a give-and-take between narrator and characters, a commingling of voices that suggests “shared voice as a narrative possibility” (Holloway 50; Awkward 55).

<sup>74</sup> Archivist Erika Brady describes the role of the phonograph in the anthropological encounter similarly, as a “stubborn, sometimes uncooperative, and slightly deaf, presence” (43). Deaf, but also rendered unseen by many anthropologists. Between 1890 and 1935, the real span of phonograph usage in the field before new devices were introduced, Brady found that only twelve articles in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* mention the use of a phonograph, while others couched its use in ambiguous terms (60-61).

one song when she adds, “All the men are pulling on the rope and singing for all they’re worth, folks!” (“Dawning”). To be clear, this is not Hurston exhibiting her great fear when it came to transcribing, namely, as she wrote Boas, a tendency to “let myself creep in unconsciously” (*LIL* 150). On the contrary, this is the sound of Hurston connecting with both the lore and the people, of Hurston—in a really wonderful recorded moment—exuberantly shouting the title of a song after its performance and then being told, as a singer acknowledges the barrier between them only to shatter it, “Come down and join us!” (“Judgment”).

As these recordings make clear, it is not only the novel’s form that reflects her experiences, but also the content, which advances claims made above, namely, that one needs to hear and to be heard in order to join in and feel part of a community. The machine enabled Hurston to make connections with others; it is perhaps unsurprising in light of this that the characters judged mostly harshly by the narrative are those who fail to connect, who only listen to their own voices or what confirms their own prejudices. These themes are at work in the progression from husband to husband, where one not only witnesses Janie’s discovery of her own voice, but one also encounters a sort of allegory of the advancements in the anthropological collection of voices, from Logan Killicks, a man who expends what little poetry he possesses “talking in rhymes” early on and becomes a voice all but forgotten, to Tea Cake Woods, whose voice lives on long after his death (25). Of the three men, however, it is Joe Starks, with his characteristic interjection “I god,” who poses the most interesting case study, a sort of unwitting advertisement for the value of anthropological folklore and its study of both singer and

song. As Joe physically deteriorates—as he becomes less and less of a man—it becomes clear that he was nothing but a voice, a voice reduced to a whisper at his death, and never heard from again. On the one hand, Joe represents the way in which a living, vibrant culture becomes etiolated, diminished by a disinterested auditor, the opposite of Hurston's enterprise (82). But, moreover, he is the first example of what happens to those in the novel with ungenerous ears.

In the novel's closing paragraph, Tea Cake is identified as a memory but, at the same time, "[o]f course he wasn't dead" (184, 183). Tea Cake is impressed on Janie's brain and survives on her tongue, for it was through their initial joking that he "[s]eemed as if she had known him all her life," that he establishes himself as the "man she had never seen" but for whom Janie had been "saving up feelings for" (94, 68).

Anthropological folklorists like Hurston believe that the past has a continuing presence in the contemporary, that ballads still retain life in ongoing performance as songs and were not just confined to the memories of elders (Zumwalt 121). Tea Cake had a way with words, but like Hurston herself he enjoyed acting out his tales, an irreducible combination (27). Joe Starks, on the other hand, was little more than a "big voice"—"all voice and less and less substance," as Gates finely observes—but it was a powerful voice all the same (189). Listening to it, one became bruised by its tone of "mighty compellment," heeded the "bow-down command in his face" and the "switch in his hand in his voice" (33, 44, 46). On his death bed, he is accused by Janie of being too busy listening to it and mere listening, as Janie knows better than most, is not the way to live if one wants "any love and sympathy in dis world" (82).

Earlier, Janie is the first to really hear him, and she calls him out publicly: “You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but ‘tain’t nothin’ to it but yo’ big voice. Humph! Talkin’ ‘bout *me* lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life.” Despite bearing witness to these physical changes himself, it is only at this moment that Joe, hearing Janie for the time, is “robbed... of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish” (75). If being blind is related to being unable to hear, as Walter’s gaffe would have it, then it is no wonder that physically Joe begins to fade; exposed as having nothing to say worth hearing, his voice dies away, with his body not far behind. His funeral is a grand spectacle, “the finest thing Orange County had ever seen with Negro eyes,” but Janie can spare nothing of herself but her outward appearance, while what she thought of as “herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world” (84-85). Joe’s selfish listening is responsible for sundering Janie’s self into an inside and an outside, a development that leads to the achievement of her own voice, but it is Tea Cake’s hearing and her hearing of him, even after his death, that leads to a reconciliation of self and soul. Joe does earn some sympathy from Janie, however, and strikingly it comes when impending death has robbed him of his voice but not his body’s ability to produce sound. There is “a sound of strife in his voice,” material that would have gone unrecognized by untrained or disinterested ears,<sup>75</sup> which left Janie “full of pity for the first time in years. Jody had been hard on her and others, but life had mishandled him too. Poor Joe!... She thought back and forth about what had happened in

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<sup>75</sup> In an essay on Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana* (1994), which features a ZNH-inspired protagonist with an experimental recording machine, Jenny Sharpe expresses the gains of recording exceedingly well: “Since the recording machine does not filter out sounds that are extraneous to words, it allows her to capture emotional expressions that would be excluded, because they are immaterial, from a written text” (95).

the making of a voice out of a man” (82-83). The impossibility of connection between Joe and Janie and the hollowing out of his person until nothing remained but a soon-forgotten voice illustrates Hurston’s frustration, voiced above, with the interruptions and breakdowns brought on by transcription.

One would think that the fate of Joe Starks would serve as a cautionary tale to those who listen to themselves primarily and to others selectively, but that is hardly the case in *Their Eyes*. Those who wish ill for Janie upon her return, in an odd form of transubstantiation, “got [her] up in they mouth” as nothing but “a name to gnaw on,” dehumanized and amounting to little more than a chew toy. Throughout her tale, she is cognizant of “lying tongues” and invisible auditors waiting to pronounce judgment, which is literally the case when she is on trial for Tea Cake’s death (120). Unwilling to hear what she has to say in her defense, the gathered African Americans are metonymized into tongues, “cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks,” ready to rain down a “tongue storm” on her (176, 177). The tongue is a “killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks” because it is only an act of symbolic violence, a figurative not literal transformation in the eyes of the community, and all these weak folks have left as a means of seeking vengeance upon an acquitted Janie (176).<sup>76</sup>

Mrs. Turner, the primary example of an individual who is doomed to repeat Joe Starks’s downfall, directs her tongue against the entire black community in the muck of Everglades. She possesses a specific, immutable set of opinions about her fellows:

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<sup>76</sup> By contrast, Joe Starks dies because everything he said was indeed used against him and he knew it to be true. It was as justified a “killing” as Janie’s shooting of Tea Cake, and only joyless because of the amount of love Janie bore for her last husband.



Ah can't stand black niggers. Ah don't blame de white folks from hatin' 'em 'cause Ah can't stand 'em mahself. 'Nother thing, Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid 'em. Us oughta class off.... And dey makes me tired. Always laughin'! Dey laughs too much and dey laughs too loud. Always singin' ol nigger songs! Always cuttin' de monkey for white folks. If it wuzn't for so many black folks it wouldn't be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin' us back. (135)

Inarguably, Mrs. Turner is color-struck, but she is at the same time as disturbed by vocal tone as by skin tone; blinded by “Janie’s Caucasian characteristics,” she fails to hear anything she has to say. She listens to the laughter around her, but she never hears the jokes; she listens to the songs, but cannot understand how they relate to her. Since Mr. Turner cannot be depended upon to speak to his wife, dealing with her racial attitudes becomes a communal problem. A tongue storm, predicated on a considered assessment of the situation, is organized as word of mouth spreads, but, crucially, words and deeds—language and bodies—are not severed here, instead performing as one, and a ruckus results at the restaurant such to make the Turners desire to return home to Miami (145). When hearing—unbiased, compassionate, egalitarian—stands in opposition to listening as a reigning paradigm, when “they” replaces the “I god,” a just policing of the borders of the community takes place.

Janie’s mother is another example of the perils of rigid listening, a woman who did not hear her own mother’s “great sermon about colored women sittin’ on high” and as a result “got lost offa de highway” (15). She was meant to “expound what [Nanny] felt,” a precursor of the role that Pheoby, “eager to feel and do through Janie,” would successfully fill for her granddaughter (15, 6). Pheoby’s “hungry listening”—a simple, elegant phrase that perfectly encapsulates my definition of hearing—“helped Janie to tell

her story,” helping her to make of it a tale and not merely a recitation of facts and information (10). In aiding the storyteller, Pheoby is similar to the device of the silent auditor in *The Good Soldier* except with a key difference: John Dowell needs to believe that someone hears him in order to commit his story to paper, whereas Janie actually does have someone hearing her and this dynamism makes the tale what it is, Pheoby’s listening itself a kind of (albeit unspecified) response, as Michael Awkward posits (50). Their bond, indexed in the novel’s narration, exemplifies the difference made by the recording machine in fieldwork, namely, how the mechanical presence, as archivist Erika Brady writes, “automatically frames information as a performance or a presentation: brief, powerful, permanent” (70). When Janie says “mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf,” what she means is that Pheoby will faithfully receive and transmit Janie’s performance, and that, as Awkward asserts, “[Janie’s] individual narration of her own text is not essential to its accurate depiction” (54). Performances vary and, as in Hurston’s observation in this chapter’s introduction regarding spirituals, no given instance should be understood as definitive. As with the mule-talk, the Big John tales, and the singing of the traditional prayer-poem in *Their Eyes*, the shared demotic mother-tongue, in a beautifully democratic way, begets new performances with all of the freedom and agency that entails. All that is needed is for one to be asked; all that is needed is for another to have the faith that one has something inside them worth hearing.

Getting inside of lore, Hurston gets inside of these characters, her narrator capturing everything, even those things that would seem to be inaudible—the mule funeral and Tea Cake’s thought process as rabidity sets in, as two examples—indicating

an omnipresence of ears and tongues that desire to create understanding. More than death itself, Janie feared being misunderstood, so while on the stand, testifying in her trial for killing Tea Cake in a scene that, with its prejudiced listeners and sensitive receivers serves as a microcosm of the novel as a whole, she does her best “to make them see” (179, 178). Justice ought to be blind, but the jurists are not, which means, following Walter’s earlier association of hearing with the eyes, they heard perfectly what Janie had to say, thus setting her free, even if we as readers do not get to hear what she said. But we had already experienced what took place, so we do not need a recapitulation of the facts; far more important instead is hearing from Janie that which would not be reported in the transcript and entered into the court records, namely, all that she had felt that went into her testimony, the lived experience that went into the song. We get all of this thanks to Pheoby, for at the beginning and the end, she is there. Like an ideal folklore collector—with the sympathy of a person and the memory of a machine—she never interrupts or intrudes or has her own voice creep in, only capturing, and serving as the occasion for, the performance.

From an early age, Janie was privy to a “singing... that had nothing to do with her ears”; Hurston, working in a medium that can have little to do with one’s ears, discovers a way to make that singing audible and apprehensible. Three times in the novel the idea of new words needing to be made to fit one’s experiences appears in the narrative, the first two times voiced by the narrator—having nothing to do with Pheoby’s ears yet everything to do with her hearing—and the final time, fittingly, in Janie’s own voice (31, 77, 109). To accommodate this particular woman’s experience and her distinct voice, new

forms would be needed, too, forms that, as the narrator tells us at novel's opening, "forget all those things [women] don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget." The recording machine offered Hurston the opportunity to choose those things she wanted to forget, while offering to her imagination unforgettable "sounds and lesser things" that would have been beyond the capabilities, and beneath the threshold, of mere pen and pad to remember (1). If the undying voice of Tea Cake is responsible for teaching her that "new thoughts had tuh be thought and new words said," it was the undying voices on records that taught Hurston the new, "no-person" form needed to communicate the vision, not of a community "under the sound of [Joe's] voice," but of a community *of* the voice, in which all have an equal say, even those we do not credit with a voice or traditionally have not heard—or, at least, have not heard yet (109, 46).

*Wireless Fantasies: The Great Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald first appeared on the radio in 1934, albeit in adapted form courtesy of the Dramatic Guild, a version of "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" that aired on May 16 on WABC. In October of 1935 his ten-minute anti-war sketch written for a CBS program co-sponsored by World Peaceways, Inc. and the Squibb Corporation entitled "Let's Go Out and Play" aired. In a sketch that went unused,<sup>77</sup> about "the first battle over broadcast," Fitzgerald demonstrated his great familiarity with radio form, his announcer offering a prize to the listener who comes closest to guessing the number of the day's casualties and signing off by introducing the next program, a performance of the "Slinky-

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<sup>77</sup> "The Broadcast We Are Waiting to Hear" was never itself heard, but was published posthumously as a short story in the Fall 1947 issue of the literary journal *Furioso* under the slightly-amended title "The Broadcast We Almost Heard Last September."

winky Blues” by Prince Paul Obaloney of Dance Hall Society (“Broadcast”). Encouraged by that sale, Fitzgerald penned a proposal for his own series of playlets, to air twice a week. That idea never went anywhere, and by 1937 Fitzgerald had moved to Hollywood for his final act, but within that proposal one finds a telling phrase. The problems of his series, concerning the relationship between a father and daughter over the course of her lifetime, would be “dramatized for *the ears of the reader* and not simply ‘talked out,’” as in so many programs of the day (emphasis added) (“Concerning”). That phrase, like Walter’s gaffe in *Their Eyes*, is intentional, appearing in every edition of the proposal, evincing an understanding on the part of Fitzgerald regarding a reader’s approach to every presentation of the written word regardless of medium, an approach native to his earlier musical writing for the stage.<sup>78</sup> Although written years earlier, *Gatsby*, I will contend, is a narrative for the ear of the reader that begins the through-line that leads to his thoughts on radio. *The Great Gatsby* is not a radio drama but rather Fitzgerald’s wireless fantasy,<sup>79</sup> a novel about the voice: its immateriality, what it hides, and the illusions it produces.

*The Great Gatsby* is written within the historical moment bookended by the beginning of the “radio boom” in spring 1922 and the holiday season of 1924, nicknamed

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<sup>78</sup> *Gatsby*’s writing for the ear of the reader is observed by Mark Goble in Fitzgerald’s follow-up to *Gatsby*, *Tender Is the Night* (1934), noises indexed in that novel forming a “fantasmatic soundtrack that communicates more than what the novel otherwise could tell us” (217).

<sup>79</sup> This phrase is a nod in the direction of *Wireless Fantasy*, a 1960 electronic piece by the composer Vladimir Ussachevsky celebrating the invention of radio. In its four-and-a-half minutes, *Wireless Fantasy* unfolds like a radiophonic big bang, a universe given life by the sparks of a transmitter, which sends out Morse code signals; through the noise, one eventually can make out a quotation of the prelude to Act I of Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal*. Through the dust and din, the noise and idle chatter, one eventually receives from Nick Carraway the origin story of James Gatz, a man who, like Wagner’s hero, “had committed himself to the following of a grail,” the path toward which was signaled by a siren’s song (156).

“radio Christmas” because of its presence on so many wish lists (Douglas *Invention* 315; *Listening* 78). It is a time of hungry listening to the radio, “[w]hen several million persons suddenly take up a new occupation which keeps them busy virtually all the evening six or seven nights a week,” as Bruce Bliven assessed the scene in *The Century* of June 1924, with the listener “hear[ing] it all for fear of missing what he seeks” (154).<sup>80</sup> In this period, one sees a shift from an emphasis on the construction equipment, and therefore production, to the act of listening, or pure consumption. This moment is identified by sociologist Richard Butsch in his study of covers of *The Wireless Age* magazine (established 1913):

Without any warning or explanation to the subscribers/readers, the editors began a new format in May 1922, an entirely new face, less technical, more domestic.... The May cover depicted a well-dressed woman sitting and listening with headphones in her parlor, the radio on a table with wires and batteries hidden in a furniture cabinet, and playing along with the music with her hands. (561)

As shocking as the shift in practices must have been to *The Wireless Age*’s readers, the shift in gender might have proved to be even more of a jolt; advances in technology meant that radios were no longer the province of specialists, some becoming as easy to operate as a phonograph.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> In his conclusion, Bliven worries about radio not living up to its potential as “the most wonderful medium for communicating ideas the world has ever been able to dream of” because of the weakness of its programming, and in so doing foreshadows Bertolt Brecht’s same assault on the medium, in very similar, albeit Brechtian, language eight years later in “The Radio as a Communications Apparatus” (154). Indeed, what is striking about reading these essays on radio and folklore by writers who are not necessarily thought of as high theorists is how meditation on these mediums leads them to conclusions later drawn by more famous thinkers—sometimes much later. Lowell’s comparison of newspapers and stories precedes Walter Benjamin’s “The Storyteller” by more than eighty years. Hurston and Lomax, through their experiences recording, arrive at something quite similar to Roland Barthes’s “grain of the voice.” Percy Grainger, a renowned British folklorist, even produces a Barthesian “third meaning” for phonography by slowing down the record in order to tease out details not necessarily audible at full speed (148).

<sup>81</sup> That device’s promise, the epigraph to the previous chapter, is rewritten for the radio in a 1923 in an article in *Radio Press Service*, and given a woman’s touch: “[R]adio lightens her burdens. For instance,

By placing headphones on the depicted listener, the cover artist is able to circumvent a problem for mute mediums like the magazine—and the novel, for that matter—namely, the direct representation of sound (see fig. 1). Instead, one sees indexed in her countenance the effect of the unheard program: a frozen smile and transfixed gaze, well befitting a woman seemingly lost in reveries, enjoying her unknown and unknowable pleasures. Perhaps as she stares out beyond the magazine's edge, head tilted, eyes wide open, she is trying to imagine who it is she is listening to, an image inaccessible through the wires. In his novel, Fitzgerald makes it no easier for his own audience, especially when he cut descriptive sentences about Gatsby, like the following: "He was undoubtedly one of the handsomest men I had ever seen the dark blue eyes opening out into lashes of shining jet were arresting and unforgettable" (*Facsimile* 53). By elevating voices and eliminating physical description, Fitzgerald riddles the reader, asking her to overcome the enticements of the voices, not to mention of his own prose, in order to envision the characters herself.

Fitzgerald's editors and friends also, when closely examining the work, had as much difficulty making out just what it was that they were looking at. Maxwell Perkins complains that, compared to a vivid rendering like Tom Buchanan, Gatsby is "somewhat vague.... his outlines are dim" (*LIL* 87).<sup>82</sup> Fitzgerald replies, "*I myself didn't know what*

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instead of having to invent a story to tell the children at bedtime, she can turn to a station broadcasting a bedtime story, which ten times to one, is better than she herself could tell. Or, instead of wondering what to cook for dinner, she can tune in on another station and obtain a menu. All this by turning a knob. Each day, too, some of the largest stations broadcast information about up-to-the-minute fashions in dresses" (qtd. in "Women" 25).

<sup>82</sup> The cover design by WH Chong for a 2012 edition of the novel published by Text in Australia seems to have had Perkins's criticism in mind. The illustration of Gatsby, a suited and coiffed bust, lacks facial features entirely

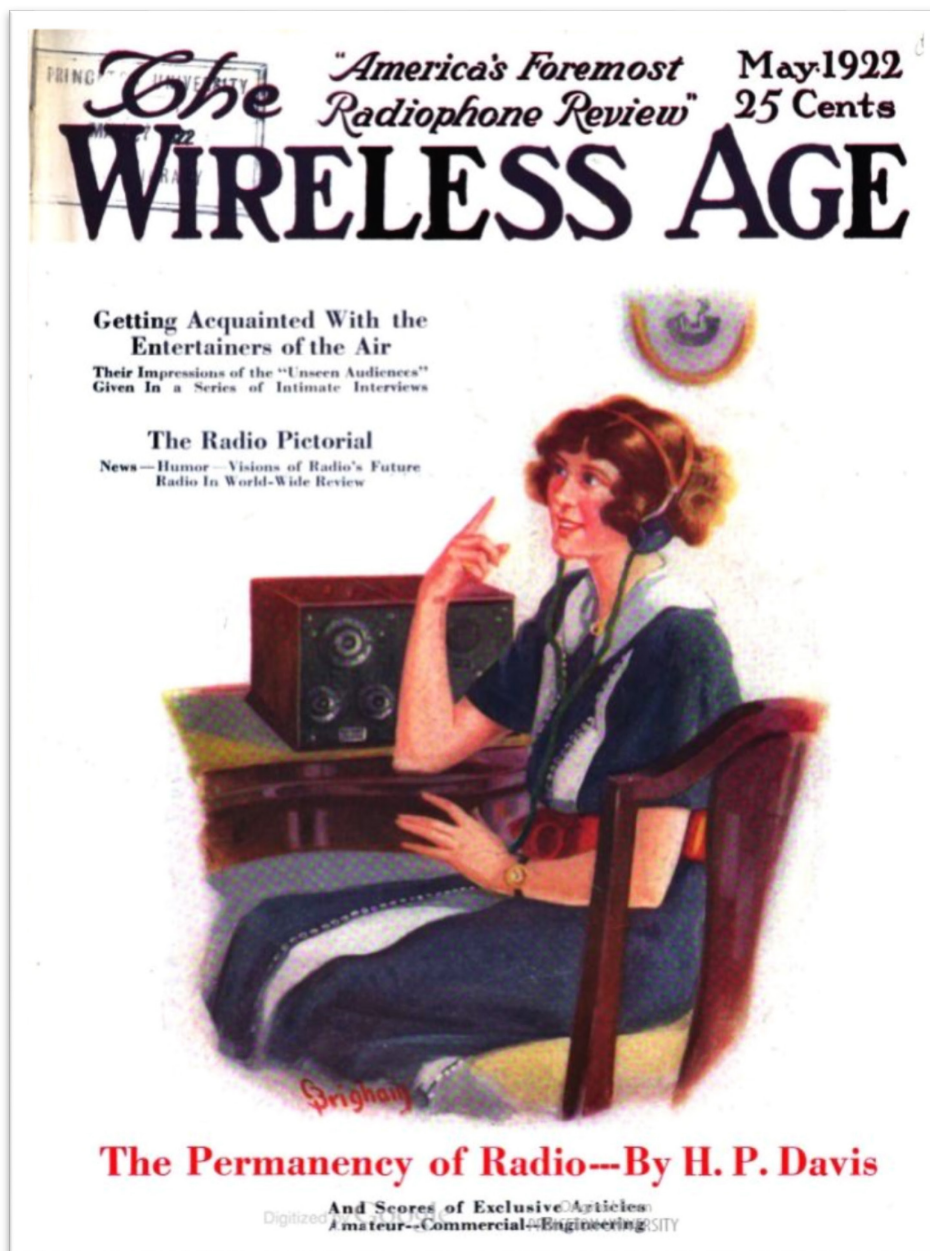


Fig. 1: *The Wireless Age*'s change in format, embodied by a shift to Rockwellian cover art. Illustration by W.C. Brigham, *The Wireless Age* 9.8 (May 1922). *American Radio History*. Web. 3 Mar 2016.



*Gatsby looked like or was engaged in* and you felt it”; after his revisions, which Fitzgerald believes has “brought Gatsby to life,” Perkins is satisfied: “Those [changes] you have made do wonders for Gatsby,—in making him visible and palpable” (91, 96; qtd. in Donaldson 263). John Peale Bishop, however, was less convinced by this finished product, writing to say that “[Fitzgerald’s] own experience of things outside your self [sic] still seems to me a bit blurred,” exemplified by Gatsby, who is “seen through a mist,” seen “in patches instead of...a complete man” (267). The concerns of Maxwell Perkins and John Peale Bishop, about the blurriness of Gatsby, are based on the expectation of having one’s visual imagination exercised and of characters possessing a certain “solidity,” as Bishop wrote (267). Fitzgerald’s strategy, frustrating to his closest readers, was to back away from efforts to merely reveal Gatsby descriptively, leaving him as much of a “vast obscurity” as the “dark fields of the republic,” a strategy that served several purposes, as shall be seen (*GG* 189).

Noting in an article on the revisions made to *Gatsby* that Jay’s appearance is one of the most reworked parts of the novel, the critic Kenneth Eble remarks, “Gatsby is revised, not so much into a real person as into a mythical one,” one who maintains a kind of “necessary insubstantiality” (322). So it was with good reason that friends and colleagues of Fitzgerald found themselves experiencing a kind of eye strain as they read *Gatsby*, or read for Gatsby. If one wanted to see the man Gatsby one would have to look elsewhere, beginning, I would suggest, by looking to Fitzgerald’s chief inspiration prior to writing the novel, Joseph Conrad’s “Preface” to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897).

According to his introduction to the 1934 Modern Library edition of the novel, Fitzgerald had read the “Preface,” what he called elsewhere “the greatest credo in my life,” right before beginning work on *Gatsby* (224; *LIL* 256). The “Preface” taught him that what was most important about a work of fiction was not to leave a lasting image but rather a lasting impression, an echo in the mind of the reader that sounds long after she has forgotten particular details, including who authored the text in question (252-53). When writing to Perkins about the novel that would become *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald hoped to produce the “model for the age... that Conrad didn’t find” (108). I would counter that, following the Conradian model, Fitzgerald had already produced it, for a radiophonic age of immaterial voices at inaudible frequencies, having unwittingly inculcated along with much else the auditory inflections of Conrad’s work. Unlike Conrad’s fidelity, however, with its uneasy affinities with phonographic technology, Fitzgerald’s intimacy with radio has less to do with the machine’s concealed inner workings than with the fragility and mystery of the disembodied voices entering and exiting one’s home. “Radio’s ‘immateriality,’” Michele Hilmes writes, “allowed it to cross... boundaries,” and though it was Jay Gatz’s material wealth that allowed him to cross boundaries, it was “Jay Gatsby’s” own insubstantiality—his ability to remain anonymous at his own parties, even though his name was on everyone’s lips—that allowed him to come within earshot of his long-pursued dream, crossing borders and overstepping boundaries social and marital (19).

Easily crossing boundaries, given his pedigree, and installed at the heart of the tale is Nick, but he has often been read as being as insubstantial as Gatsby himself.<sup>83</sup> Nick is more of a receiver than an actor, and he is around always, and always with an open mind, following the advice of his father that he keeps turning over in his mind as he opens the novel: “Whenever you feel like criticizing any one... just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you have” (5). Like an amateur anthropologist—or a sociologist, as the manuscript has it—Nick finds himself taking it all in, “within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life,” a kind of exploration in oblivion, to paraphrase Tom’s dissatisfaction with being introduced as “the polo player” (*Facsimile* 40; *GG* 112). “Will you just—what was your name?” Wolfsheim’s secretary asks Nick and, indeed, if not for his telling us otherwise, he might be “Mr.—,” what Gatsby’s father calls him on their first meeting (137, 176, 178). To be present, to have presence, and yet to pass in and out without much notice taken, fading away after initial exposure—this is another characterization that allies Nick with *Their Eyes*’s narrator, similar to Henry Louis Gates’s tracking of the movement from third person to no-person. In his physical person, Nick often operates from the same position of oblivion and anonymity as in his guise as novelist, a broadcaster with his friends’ tongues in his mouth. As with the narrative of *Their Eyes*, where the readers get lost in the novel’s reveries and lose sight of the speaker—as, too, with the listener of radio who loses sight of the machine before her as she listens to it—

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<sup>83</sup> For scholars like Hugh Kenner, he is “less a narrator than a conscience, somewhere around”; for his editor Perkins, he is “more of a spectator than an actor”; and for critics like Gilbert Seldes, he is “an obstacle,” “obviously intended to be much more significant than he is” (36; *LIL* 86; 118).

Nick intrudes every once in a while to remind us of his existence, whether through noting the passing of his birthday or detailing his corporeality, his “underwear... climbing like a damp snake around my legs” (142, 132-33). He acts as a kind of prototype of what Fitzgerald in his radio proposal some years later would call an “insulation idea”:

[L]istener will not be plunged immediately from loud music on another program into the comparatively quiet mood of a play. This will be done by ‘wasting’ the first minute-and-a-half with some sound, music or cacophony which will be a lead-up to the sketch and a part of it yet will serve as a sort of bridge across which listeners’ attention will pass before arriving at the sketch itself. (“Concerning”)

Nick, of course, is a part of the novel, but this idea formulated later suggests that we might read him as being outside of the action, as well; he is neither wholly integral, nor, as critics have contended, largely insignificant. His interludes of physical presence, while necessary, are there to lead us eventually to where the book’s action exists, which only his intercessions can bring forth: at auditory levels, whether located in intimate whispers or floating high overhead.

With his receptive gifts, Nick proves more perceptive than he is given credit for, for example, by critics like Robert Wooster Stallman, who, when comparing Carraway and Marlow, writes of how the latter “penetrates the mask of Kurtz and the soul of [Lord] Jim, whereas Nick Carraway presents Gatsby only from the outside” (11). Gilbert Seldes, on the other hand, reviewing the novel for *The Dial*, claims Fitzgerald “has ceased to content himself with a satiric report on the outside of American life and has with considerable irony attacked the spirit underneath” (118). Unlike the narrator of *Their Eyes*, Nick does not necessarily get inside of his characters, as with free indirect discourse, but he does bring those insides out, conjuring up the spirit underneath their

words and facades like the Conradian glow that brings out the haze, detailing the qualities of Tom and Daisy's voices even before the opening ten pages have passed. Despite what the attentions of Jordan would suggest, Nick is not much of a looker, but he is a hearer, and through Nick sound and voice flow into the ear of the reader. It is likely true, as Tom says, that Gatsby "threw dust into your eyes," but that does little to interfere with Nick's reception, which is borne out by Fitzgerald's decision to eliminate scenes from the manuscript in which Nick must be *told* everything by Gatsby (187).<sup>84</sup> The Gatsby of the manuscript, for example, seems too aware of the way in which others were content providers, as though his "brand" were communal property, contributing to the folk ballad that was his life. "[T]he truth is," he tells Nick, "I'm empty and I guess people feel it. That must be why they keep on making up things about me, so I won't be so empty" (*Facsimile* 162). He knows too much and, moreover, says too much, leaving Nick to serve as his amanuensis or, rather, his transcriber. After the revisions, such revelations are left for Nick to intuit and convey, less matter-of-factly. In the finished novel, money did not so much fill Gatsby's voice, as he himself claims of Daisy, as it provided its base notes; he possessed a range of tones that he seemed hesitant to sound and that very few besides Nick were interested in hearing. Gatsby is allowed to "drift into [the narrative] casually," an early line from the manuscript detailing Nick's method that moves from being part of Nick's novel to serving as one of Fitzgerald's guiding principles (*Narrative* 3).

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<sup>84</sup> As noted earlier, there is something almost embarrassingly confiding about Gatsby, registering even more strongly than the notes of vanity, in the manuscript in his desperate need to talk about Daisy and about himself, of which I will have more to say (*Facsimile* 68, 162, 176).

Many of the deletions, then, can be seen as Fitzgerald working out his form through Nick's own exercises in transcription. Evidence of this is seen in a lengthy scene cut from the novel, where Nick adopts certain means to convey as much of the content as possible—to recur to Alan Lomax's phrase—offering a sort of ekphrasis of the second movement of Vladimir Tostoff's *Jazz History of the World*.<sup>85</sup> The best he can do, he writes, is “make a story out of it”:

At first there was a sort of monotony about it—a little disappointing at first as if it were just a repetition of the spinning sound but pretty soon you were aware that something was trying to establish itself, to get a foothold, something soft and and [*sic*] persistent and profound and next it was established rather scornfully without you and it seemed to look around with a complete self-sufficiency as if it had been there all the time.<sup>86</sup> (*Facsimile* 54-55)

Fitzgerald's final plan for Nick's role as narrator is to eliminate his lengthy ruminations, “word pictures” as they were often called by radio broadcasters, letting them drift in so that the music might speak for itself without Nick taking up page-upon-page telling us about it. Nor does he devote swathes of ink in the published novel detailing Gatsby's looks or his varied pastimes. The soft, persistent, and profound thing—the casually appearing Gatsby, a corporeal wisp—manifests itself without a definite sketching, suffusing the atmosphere with its essence such that one cannot remember a time before it.

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<sup>85</sup> J. Hillis Miller has observed that, curiously, there is no term that describes the attempt to capture music in words, as in this scene or in the description of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910). He settles, “by a species of catechresis,” upon calling it ekphrasis (409).

<sup>86</sup> Much of the material cut from the manuscript reads like Fitzgerald himself, and not Nick, thinking aloud, whether in the earlier instance about drifting in, which becomes the way Gatsby is ultimately deployed, or here. Ronald Berman argues that Gatsby was a cut and paste job, a well-tailored suit of clippings collected during his youth, but that leaves a lot out, like the “melancholy and romantic beauty” of the melodies of Tin Pan Alley that Jay tells Nick, in the manuscript, marked the beginning of “Jay Gatsby” (189; *Facsimile* 217). In the themes of this excised movement—from inauspicious beginnings to self-sufficiency; dreams being made reality through one's will; greatness hiding in plain sight—one hears the impetus behind Fitzgerald's conception of Gatsby or, as the title of a Jerome Kern standard from *Music in the Air* (1932), no less, would later have it, “The Song Is You.”

In the manuscript, Gatsby is a writer of songs; the music speaks for itself, and it is objectively “terrible stuff,” as Nick rightly judges. Gatsby’s songs are maudlin and sentimental but Jay Gatsby, as a prefabricated identity, was James Gatz’s first folksong, a rags-to-riches motley tale whose time has passed but lives on in lyric and legend, and exactly the kind of hero “a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent” in the early years of a new century (177; *GG* 104). Yet, for such a legendary figure, he strangely only seems to be half-remembered, at least physically, whether by Jordan after renewing acquaintance with him or by the cop who pulls him over who promises to “[k]now you next time, Mr. Gatsby,” all of which leaves one questioning Nick when he writes that “the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man” (*GG* 80, 72, 107). A concerned Maxwell Perkins observed that, as with the cop and Jordan, the “reader’s eyes can never quite focus upon him.... Couldn’t *he* be physically described as distinctly as the others, and couldn’t you add one or two characteristics like the use of that phrases ‘old sport,’—not verbal, but physical ones, perhaps” (qtd. in Donaldson 261). Compared to the “great big hulking physical specimen” that is his rival, Tom Buchanan, Gatsby seems downright immaterial, perhaps capable of being pushed around by Daisy, as in a whisper Nick picks up, in a pink cloud (*GG* 99).<sup>87</sup>

Despite this contrast, it is the insubstantial and ephemeral that bind Tom and his rival together. Nick proclaims that both men are beguiled by a “disembodied face float[ing] along the dark cornices and blinding signs,” but when he is not straining for a poetic chapter closing, at the more intimate level of conversation he hears that it is

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<sup>87</sup> Perhaps I am guilty of reading backwards, but this, along with the pink suit and just his perceived lack of physical might, makes it seem as if Fitzgerald was trying to make Gatsby as potentially other as possible.

instead a kind of disembodied voice—disembodied somehow despite a physical presence, not unlike the radio encounter itself—that has taken hold of these men (85). Nick himself writes, “I had no sight into Daisy’s heart,” since only in sound does “her heart... come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words,” even when the word does not seem to fit the subject, as when she compares Nick to a rose (10, 19). Grain supersedes content as the voice takes on a life of its own, as in the earlier referenced nightingale scene, where her voice sings, and in the novel’s climax, where to Gatsby hers is “that lost voice across the room” and to Tom her “voice begged again to go” (142). Her deathless voice, with a life unto itself, sustains Gatsby, acts as immaterial support in the endeavors that result in his home in West Egg. Yet it is a voice whose tone is easier to describe—Nick, for example, calls it “indiscreet”—than to read (127). Simply listening to her speak can be deceiving, since it often leads one to believe than one shared a deeper connection with her than she may have intended. Her murmur begged intimacy, forcing others, as her detractors would have it, to get closer to her to hear what she had to say (13). And in that voice with its “singing compulsion” that “whispered, ‘Listen,’” lurked the “promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since,” and “that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour” (14). As Gatsby leads her around his party, Daisy’s voice plays “murmurous tricks in her throat,” as if trying to find a way to shift the “spectroscopic gayety” into a frequency apprehensible by the ear of the reader (111, 49). One of its tricks is to render itself not simply musical but like “an arrangement of notes that will never be played again,” producing a visible record to go along with the audible one (13). Such a trick reaches its apotheosis at one of Gatsby’s parties, but not



through Daisy. Operating under the principle of Grainger's dream of a transcription machine, an anonymous woman with tears rolling down her cheeks, bringing with them some of her mascara, becomes marked with musical notes—perhaps reflecting her inner mood, perhaps not—and is jokingly asked to “sing the notes on her face” (56). If the manuscript gave us a dress rehearsal of Fitzgerald's sound writing, the completed novel is an index of the struggle.

Daisy's own alchemical capabilities hew closer to a machine only recently realized and made available to the public. “Her voice struggled on through the heat,” Nick writes, “beating against it, moulding its senselessness into forms,” just as the radio consumer—adjusting his antenna, winding the right amount of wire on his tuning coil—pulls out varied forms from the chaos of the airwaves (125). These forms themselves amount to a certain senselessness, their value little more than a mark of distinction, a “bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter” that nevertheless signified her acceptance to her auditors (16-17). In what Susan Douglas identifies as the initial stage of radio listening, lasting from 1920 through 1924, the practice known as DXing (telegraphic shorthand for “distance”), in which amateurs sought out more and more remote signals, was what “infused radio with its sense of romance, magic, and potential for nation building” (*Listening* 93). Content, she notes, was incidental to such listeners—indeed, content is subordinate to connection, as explained by a DXer she cites: “It is not the *substance* of communication without wires, but the *fact* of it that enthralls” (qtd. in *Listening* 73). When applied to the novel, it is the fact of Daisy's enthralling voice, the lost voice across the Sound that sang and begged, that led Gatsby to extend his

“trembling” arms “in a curious way”—like an antenna?—toward Daisy’s dock “in the unquiet darkness,” not in an attempt to throw his arms around her, but rather around something far more elusive: that thing within her voice that drove him on and fired his belief that one could repeat the past, “as if the past,” Nick writes, “were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hands” (25-26, 116-117). Nick recognizes the auditory tricks at work, whereas Gatsby dies unaware that it was but an illusion, fading away like so many in *Their Eyes* listening to just the things they wanted to hear, that encouraged and sustained their own self-deceptions: “The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. *It made me uneasy*, as though the whole evening has been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me” (emphasis added) (22). “Uneasy,” of course, is a word that looms large in *Heart of Darkness*, a feeling inspired in Marlow by the man machines of empire. Here, it represents the moment Nick, as the signal breaks up, hears the new empire of America speaking through one of its most persuasive vessels, seizing control of the means of transmission, and thereby bringing about his friend’s death.

*Gatsby* is not only written during the rise of radio but also amid vociferous debates over immigration quotas. For radio to work, one of the two signals produced during the heterodyning process must be filtered out; for the nation to work, many nativists believed that ethnic minorities must be barred entry into the country. Radio may have been interlacing the populace in 1924, forging common sympathetic bonds, but that same year also saw the passage of the xenophobic Immigration Act of 1924, which in

large part was “about saving the Nordic race from being swamped” (Higham 312). In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald seems loath to put the question of race to rest by refusing the reader easy answers about who exactly it is they are dealing with, characters already underdrawn becoming undermined by the troubling interjections of Tom Buchanan. Elucidating for Jordan the existence and merits of a so-called Nordic race—“we’ve produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art and all that”—Tom, the character most defined by his physicality, adheres alarmingly close to the “science” behind contemporaneous eugenics (18).<sup>88</sup> Tom hesitates a moment before including Daisy in the club he shares with Nick and Jordan, which suggests that Daisy, in the eyes of the characters if not in the collective eyes of popular culture that insists on her bloneness, remains in some way the “dark lovely girl” Fitzgerald had written her as in the manuscript (*Facsimile* 14).<sup>89</sup> Hilmes devotes a chapter of her book *Radio Voices* to her contention that, from the founding of the world’s first commercial radio station, KDKA, in 1920 to the year of radio’s real breakthrough in 1924, the year that Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover announced the need to regulate radio,<sup>90</sup> the control over who got to broadcast was part of the larger question of who “counted” as an American.

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<sup>88</sup> Grant, in *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), believed that, in its glorious past, all Americans were once Nordics, but that the “race” was slowly dying out and the old noble blood becoming tainted because of the untrammelled arrivals of the lesser races: the Alpines, Mediterraneans, Jews, and blacks.

<sup>89</sup> She is also described as having a “dark lovely voice,” though this appears much later in the manuscript. But given the ambiguity of, and paucity of reference to, her coloring and even more so the ubiquity of her voice, her dark and lovely vocal tone is clearly what stuck with Fitzgerald in the revision process (*Facsimile* 221).

<sup>90</sup> Offering recommendations for the regulation of radio, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover claims in his address to the Third National Radio Conference in 1924, that radio is now in need of regulation since it “has passed from the field of an adventure to that of a public utility” (2). It only took two years for radio to make good on the “Radiatorial” prediction of May 1922 that it would soon be as much of a public necessity as roads.

Elsewhere in the nation during these years, in addition to immigration law, one sees the American publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the growth of the Ku Klux Klan into the Midwest. *Gatsby*, then, emerges at a moment of troubling new voices that intensified a paranoiac desire to patrol both the air and the borders.

With that in mind, one returns to the radio tableau on the pivotal cover of *The Wireless Age* described above—an attractive, well-to-do young woman listening to the radio in her home, seemingly alone—and asks a new question: Who exactly is she listening to? As if the silence of a magazine cover was not measure enough to secure her secret, she is also wearing headphones as an added layer of encryption. The radio listener, Walter Benjamin writes, “unlike every other kind of audience, welcomes the human voice into his house like a visitor,” a comparison that gives this question a new, disquieting charge: Who is she listening to, but also, when she turns on the radio, who is she letting in? (392). Is he an embraced visitor or an unwelcome houseguest? In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald is not writing for radio, nor does he write radio into the novel, but when read in this context, just as with the magazine cover, one is able to see the work anew. Tom Buchanan’s complaint that allowing “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere,” as he labels Gatsby, into one’s home and to “make love to your wife” signals a lapse in morals that will soon allow for “intermarriage between black and white” is of a piece with anxieties of the time from those fearful that the disembodied radio voices from afar may belong to a Jewish or African-American man who is being allowed to read one’s child a bedtime story (137).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> This fear had to be nipped in the bud with regard to the popular singer Arthur Collins, as was made clear by the matter-of-fact title of an article in *Edison Phonograph Monthly*: “Mr. Collins Is Not a Negro” (Gitelman 135-36).

“[T]races of ethnic and racial difference haunt both the narrative’s and the nation’s outer limits,” critic Meredith Goldsmith writes, but it is radio, and a novel intrigued by that technology’s possibilities, that amplifies the encounter (463).

What kind of story did Fitzgerald, with his radio-inflected new form, think most worth telling in the American 1920s? And with the careful hearing and selective visual memory his own creator granted him, what kind of novel was Nick Carraway in a position to write? The absence of solidity in so many of the novel’s characters—but crucially not in Tom, who must act as an enforcer—should be read in the end as symptomatic of a fear of the era, whether the alleged porousness of immigration law or the pernicious infiltration facilitated by radio waves. Featuring fuzzily-drawn characters whose seductive voices bid us closer and closer to them, heedless of any consequences, *The Great Gatsby* emplots both nationalist anxieties over race and governmental anxieties over an unregulated organ of communication that Hilmes had identified. He could have been from anywhere, Nick writes of Gatsby, “from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York,” and that’s precisely the problem (54). As with the prejudiced tongues in *Their Eyes*, Tom practices selective listening, only willing to find out about Gatsby what is most expedient in removing him from his life. He succeeds, too, a lesson to Gatsby that, despite his wealth, he will never be welcome in the “rather distinguished secret society to which [Daisy] and Tom belonged” (22). Gatsby’s fate is attributed by Nick to “living too long with a single dream,” which has its truth, for in a way the unmodern Gatsby must perish because, unlike Nick, when faced with Daisy’s voice he is unable to distinguish between a live broadcast and a previously recorded

performance. But critic Carlyle Van Thompson may have struck on something when he asserts that Gatsby dies “because of his threat to whiteness” (169; 99).

The anti-modern Tom survives by sheer brute strength alone, but must all the same seek out, if but temporarily, a more remote redoubt. He must also spirit Daisy away at novel’s end—her voice only heard secondhand through her husband—emblematic as she is of both the white body on the magazine cover that needs to be protected and the suspicious, excessive voice that must be regulated. She not only first draws the reader’s attention to voices, but also acts as a linchpin for many of the discourses of the period: suspect ethnicity, potential victim of the barbarians at Lady Liberty’s gates, and possessor of an attractive voice with “magical properties” (Person 254). “[C]ultural authority in the ether,” an implicit theme of many 1920s articles on radio according to Susan Douglas, would eventually be seen to bureaucratically, but the leisure classes would have to remain vigilant down on the ground, patrolling their ranks for usurpers, tuning out and turning deaf ears to anything that fails to advance their interests (*Inventing* 313).

### *Conclusion*

But perhaps, to offer another reading, Gatsby dies, because, having been too busy listening to the myths circulating around him, he hears in Tom Buchanan’s condemnation something he always knew about both himself and Daisy, and hearing, as has been seen, dispels all illusions. When Nick writes that Gatsby chose this moment to tell him about his origins “because ‘Jay Gatsby’ had broken up like glass against Tom’s hard malice” maybe James Gatz, too, was now a broken man (155). Gatz was a young man who had been formed by the sounds that poured into him, the sentimental songs of youth and the

“cymbals’ song” of money—“Daisy Bell”<sup>92</sup> and Daisy Fay (127). Only after it was too late, despite his studying of needed inventions and electricity, does he realize the incongruity between Daisy’s voice, still the same after all of these years, and her present embodiment, cynical society wife—between, in other words, the voice and the machine that now contains it. The only safe way to attempt to relive the past, it turns out, is through prose, but even that carries its risks, as John Dowell discovers in *The Good Soldier*.

Dowell discovers himself through storytelling, as does Janie Starks, who, as Missy Dehn Kubitschek writes, “discovers her own soul only through the art of storytelling, thus intimating the artist’s responsibility to, and dependence on, the larger community” (109). But sometimes—and I think this is the case with Janie, as well—all one needs is a single intimate to begin with, who can help them bridge the distance to the larger community, the way Pheoby is sanctioned to spread Janie’s gospel or how Nick writes a biography of Gatsby, a man who at the best of times was never lacking for company and at his worst time had his remains raked through for one last story. And let us not forget the way, too, for example, the recording machine wielded by the Lomaxes brought a plea for early release from folk blues singer Lead Belly to the governor of Louisiana or how a signal from Greenwich, CT annihilated an ocean, bringing home nearer for some radio operators abroad.

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<sup>92</sup> Better known as “Bicycle Built for Two,” this song, written by Harry Dacre, appears the same year that James Gatz is born in North Dakota, 1892. A later version, released as part of a medley by the Victor Mixed Chorus called *Songs of the Past*, was a top 5 chart hit in 1915, the year Nick graduates Yale—and Fitzgerald meets Zelda Sayre (Whitburn 433).

New media not only creates a new set of voices, they also give voice to those previously unrepresented, to heretofore unheard songs and stories about ways of life that lie beyond one's own experience. Given the mileage racked up by all of the protagonists of this chapter, on the ground and on the air, it becomes evident that technologies of immediacy are, in part, received charge from distance, and that they do indeed record the itinerary of a discourse. "It's uh known fact, Pheoby," Janie shares, "you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there," a lesson that had different consequences for Nick and Gatsby, yet both of whom were changed inalterably. Through the experiments of Hurston and Fitzgerald, and also of the Lomaxes and Frank Conrad, the right equipment was devised so that, even those who lacked the wherewithal to go "there" could at least know "there" better (183).

And there is a great deal of there there; it is a large country with many voices to be recorded and transmitted. Kenner believes that Fitzgerald's pitting of East and Midwest "give a spurious look of scale" and that "Fitzgerald didn't need a geographical myth to lend import to Gatsby's story" (37). I disagree, but would concede that distance may not have been as important as difference for, after all, as Janie Starks's journey shows, one need not literally travel very far to feel oneself very different indeed. Yet, it is not coincidental that James Gatz's plotting to make himself a great American hero, those notes he wrote for his future self, begins where his copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* ends. Fitzgerald's understanding of this puts him in tune with how life at the time was being lived under the red, white, and blue and an ether "vibrant with human thought and emotion" (Kaempffert 772). The radio craze and the growing interest in America's native folklore, epitomized in 1925 by James Stevens's best-selling *Paul Bunyan*, gave evidence



of a paradox at the heart of Americans, elucidated by Nick, that of feeling “unutterably aware of our identity with this country” and of looking at a smaller patch on the map and saying, “I am part of that” (*GG* 184). Alan Lomax, in a preface to a book put together with his father, hoped that “America may get to know itself better through these records,” which cuts both ways as sometimes one does not like what is reflected back at oneself (65). A positive sign that Americans were, through the understanding brought by hearing other voices, getting to be accepting of difference, came with the case of popular radio entertainer Roxy in *Gatsby*’s publication year of 1925. A German immigrant born to Jewish parents, Roxy was instructed by station management at WEAf to lose his loose, vernacular presentation and to conform to some deracinated standard. But after forcing him to sound more like Mr. Nobody from Nowhere, the executives were flooded with mail asking what was wrong with Roxy and demanding that he return to his former, less formal style (Hilmes 19). It was slowly beginning to seem that America was undertaking the long, still-ongoing process of cleaning out its ears and becoming less trusting of its eyes, and that the nation’s understanding was growing broad enough to encompass both porch talkers and hooch runners. Cognizant of the distance between the mighty and the lowly, Hurston, in her peroration to her autobiography *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942), writes, “Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet, or meet again, in this world, will meet at a barbecue,” but thanks to this chapter’s sensitive receivers they at least have the opportunity to bridge that distance on the page, on the air, or on the now-dusty tracks of field recordings (286).

New media creates new voices, yes, but it also trains its audience in how to hear them. Americans, then, in addition to owning the right equipment, were beginning to develop the “different ears” Alan Lomax felt necessary if one was to give undervalued voices a chance (“Reels” 76). Pheoby Watson and Nick Carraway, on the other hand, were born sensitive, Nick even noting his inclination to “reserve all judgements” (5). Pheoby becomes a walking archive of folklore ready to set the record straight, “ten feet higher from listenin” to Janie—airborne but still with her feet on the ground (182-83). Of Janie, the narrator says, “[Tea Cake] could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking”; by telling her story to Pheoby, she has created a faithful copy that will live, and walk, on (183). After Gatsby dies, he crosses the boundary between life and death, returning to Nick as a voice, a “protest [that] continued in my brain,” suggesting perhaps that even the voices of the dead live on, at frequencies beyond the threshold of all but a precious few, the grave no barrier (173). It is obviously a voice he keeps alive; though it is foolish to speculate about the sales of a fictional novel, one imagines Gatsby has a greater sympathetic network than he had in life.

When listening to the second movement of *Jazz History of the World*, Nick writes, “[Y]ou yourself were trying to help it, struggling, praying for it—until suddenly it was *there*” (*Facsimile* 55). Nick’s open ear, as Michael Awkward writes of Pheoby, helps to create Gatsby, enabling him to fill out as a man. Listening to Gatsby’s singing voice in the manuscript, in a portion that survived *mutatis mutandis* in the novel, Nick is driven to write,

Through all he said, even through the doggerel of the song I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words that I had heard

somewhere, a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb-man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever.

Not unlike Conrad's Kurtz, Nick tries to sum up, to judge, but in the moment the words do not come, for how does one write a rhythm? It would require more than a word: it would take a novel, and a new form, one that would, through attention to the auditory, show the reader what to look for. At a moment when voices were free but ethnic bodies were tethered, Fitzgerald and Hurston's attending to the qualities of sound liberate Nick and Pheoby from the tyranny of transcription; the authors' sound writing yields their creations' sensitive reception. Each narrative moves forward, as will the nation it celebrates and condemns, not through prejudice and discrimination but through attentiveness to a plurality of voices. Having expanded her own horizons while collecting folklore, Hurston ends *Their Eyes* by having Janie pull "in her horizon like a great fish-net," capturing the rich voices in the air and singing airs while reminding us of the life that goes on beneath us, unheard. "So much of life in its meshes!" the narrator exclaims. And, as Hurston recognized when playing back her records, so much of life in those grooves!

At the Limits of Audibility and Form in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Jean

Toomer's *Cane*

The universe of sound has been enriched by that of ultra-sound, which is still unknown and may remain so, since we are limited to the registers that our senses can perceive and our brain record; but this does not prevent us from realizing increasingly that our little world is situated in the midst of another, vast world; and that it would be naïve to think that the progress we make takes place within clear, easily defined limits, however astonishing it may be.  
—Jean Cocteau, “Sound Civilization”

If a particle ceased to vibrate, it would cease to be. It is now impossible to conceive the *existence* of an element of matter without adding to that element a specific frequency. We can therefore say that vibratory energy is the *energy of existence*.  
—Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*

*Introduction*

About a decade before the publication of her first novel, in which a character wishes to write a book called *Silence*, she wrote a family friend, “A church bell—they ring them for 2 hours daily—says something to me hardly to be translated: there again it is sound that wraps up the meaning and colours it and translates it and keeps it mystic and unexpressed meanwhile. Should you think there was any sense in that?” (*Letters I* 264). Making sense of that, or making sounds make sense, became in part the work of *Between the Acts*. In offering a vision of the novel of the future in her essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art” (1927), Woolf attempts to translate to the page genres that historically are given meaning and colored by their relationship to sound:

It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted. What is important is that this book which we see on the horizon may serve to express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them. Let us try, then,

to come to closer terms with it and to imagine what may be its scope and nature.  
(224-25)

One can hear in this the genesis of the multi-generic form that would be employed in her final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Many of the new facts gleaned about life due to modern breakthroughs—“[t]hat the age of the earth is 3,000,000,000 years; that human life lasts but a second”—led Woolf to believe that this new age required a new novel (224). “On all sides,” she writes, “writers... are forcing the form they use to contain a meaning which is strange to it,” which leads to “some dissatisfaction, some difficulty... lying in our way” (218). Chafing against these constraints, *Between the Acts* and Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923) represent the modern novel’s richest attempts at incorporating poetry and drama.

At first glance, such combinations augment the novel by bringing to bear on it further registers of expression—a plurality of voices and perspectives—and additional critical apparatuses. But for Woolf and Toomer it is not a question of accretion of forms so much as it is an arrangement of tones; it is not a question of concentrated force but of volume—and, moreover, frequency and stereophony. The previous chapter was about radically different voices, and how the growth of radio and the circulation of records were helping, despite economic and racial differences, to find common ground between Fitzgerald’s Valley of Ashes and Hurston’s dirt roads. However, this chapter begins a movement away from the voice, generated through a practice seen at work in *Between the Acts* and *Cane* that I will call immersive listening. In ecocriticism, this concept highlights the vibratory power of sound to work on the unconscious but for my purposes I align it

with what Michel Chion calls reduced listening,<sup>93</sup> a focus on “the traits of sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning” which disrupts accustomed habits and produces unimagined questions (Ingram 60; Chion 29). As will be seen, however, for Woolf and Toomer, this listening is anything but reduced, as commonly understand—rather, it is expanded and amplified. Through such a listening, these authors bring out, and bring attention to the aural aspect of, the “semi-transparent envelope surrounding us,” an observation Woolf makes in “Modern Fiction” (1921), and make manifest the novel of the future (106).

The shift away from the voice and toward the sonic envelope was foreshadowed in the opening chapter, wherein Joseph Conrad’s appreciation of the recorded voice was ruined by its being submerged in the recording’s noise, and becomes fully formed here in the age of electrical recording, which births high fidelity and stereophonic recording. Privileging the traits of sound, Steve Goodman argues, is a way of overturning “the subordinat[ion of] the sonic to semiotic registers,” which forces sound to make sense and “los[es] sight of the more fundamental expressions of their material potential” (82). This subordination has the effect of relegating the human voice to being just one element of a larger environment, what musicologist R. Murray Schafer termed a soundscape, “any acoustic field of study” (8).<sup>94</sup> In the last chapter, I argued that America had not a single voice, but many of them, as heard on the radio. Here, I put forth that plurality of voices in

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93 Chion himself borrows this term from Pierre Schaeffer, for whom reduced listening drew attention to the sound remaining when one has bracketed off any physical, cultural, or psychological influences (268).

94 Steve Goodman’s terms “environmentality” or “ecology of vibrational affects,” reorienting Schafer, are preferable given their decentering of human audition as the necessary center of any given soundscape, but they lack Schafer’s clarity and concision (xviii).

the world is made up of sounds above and below our hearing threshold, as high fidelity would make clear, and that this plurality could coexist and be “seen” (or located) only through hearing, as binaurality and then stereo demonstrated.

In this chapter I argue that Woolf and Toomer turn to multi-generic experimentation in order to create an audio-spatial form, for a new novel encompassing the sounds of modern life, in so doing subordinating the human-scale. This audio-spatial form is the product of an immersive listening to the soundscape, to the voices it contains but also to the vibrations it produces, and the way those two forces work on one another. In doing so, they interpellate the reader through recourse to multiple genres, immersing her in the different sound effects particular to these forms, and illustrate the inaudible forces that bind us all, like the “tingling, tangling, vibrating” wire of words connecting people in *Between the Acts* (11).<sup>95</sup> They disrupt accustomed habits of reading, not simply because of the variety of genres on offer, but also through a dispersal of meaning and significance throughout the novel rather than in a culmination at its end.<sup>96</sup>

For Woolf, this new form, her last, attempts to capture the unseen and unknowable, in service of material that is itself concerned with just that, the war waiting in the wings for the novel’s pageant-goers. The future, for the novelist and her audience, is found in noise. “The noises of a society,” Jacques Attali writes, “are in advance of its images and material conflicts,” and are therefore prophetic (11). Noise is “the source of

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<sup>95</sup> This vibrating thread, this unseen yet palpable feeling generated by sound, echoes Millicent Bruton’s sensation of “one’s friends [being] attached to one’s body... by a thin thread” and the “leaden circles” of sound—“that sound, that string,” as Clarissa represents it—created by Big Ben’s tolling in *Mrs. Dalloway* (112, 4, 127).

<sup>96</sup> In this way, they abide by Ford Madox Ford’s reading of Conrad in *Joseph Conrad* (1924), as quoted in the first chapter: “[T]he fable must not have the moral tacked on to its end. If the fable has not driven its message home the fable has failed, must be scrapped and must give place to another one” (178).

power,” Attali claims, and it is the dynamo that charges Woolf’s vision of the future novel, but at the same time power itself “has always listened to [noise] with fascination.... The technology of listening in on, ordering, transmitting, and recording noise is at the heart of this apparatus” (6-7). Since it “makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things,” noise becomes a contested battlefield, between power and those who hope to oppose it (11). Depicting the soundscapes of the time points a new way forward for form, but Woolf and Toomer, through their attentiveness to noise, register their concern for the future of humankind itself, threatened by impending war and caught up in forces stripping it of its agency, respectively.<sup>97</sup> “The ear probes the future,” Goodman writes, “through listening for those clues that pass so quickly they could not have been present: phantoms, hallucinations, initiated by affect, or anticipation, or perhaps dread” (50). The embrace of theatrical form, especially, by these two authors makes that ear a sympathetic one. In his study of the influence of authors’ thwarted dramatic ambitions on their later novels, David Kurnick submits that the modern novel, too often defined by its insularity and focus on interiority, is “lined with longing references to the public worlds they would seem to have left behind” and catalogs “a desire for a palpable relation to an embodied public and an impatience with the inward gaze of narrative fiction” (3, 4).<sup>98</sup> This desire

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<sup>97</sup> In *Future Tense* (2015), his study of modern warfare and trauma, Paul Saint-Amour writes extensively on Woolf, but sets aside *Between the Acts*, believing it to have already been covered comprehensively (125). However, given his interest in the state of permanent anticipation of destruction he argues was instated by World War I and its representations, it is strange that he did not write more about Woolf’s novel, especially when her diary entries of the time are rife with *bukimi*, a Japanese term meaning “ominous” and “uncanny” that Saint-Amour notes was used often in the wake of the bombing of Hiroshima.

<sup>98</sup> It is a critique shared by Woolf herself, who, against the navel-gazing of the psychological author, believes the future novel “will be written standing back from life, because in that way a larger view is to be obtained of some important features of it” (228).



for, and frustration of, connection is exemplified in the novels by the crowd for the pageant in *Between the Acts*, once united, but ultimately dispersed or the rumble in voices, in the wind, and from the ground felt by all at various moments in *Cane* (11; 25, 50, 66).

Perhaps inaugurated by the harnessing and coinage of “ultrasound,”<sup>99</sup> this era saw a paradigmatic shift in the character of sound, its effects and applications. Moreover, although for diametrically opposed ends, there was a shared a sense, by scientists and artists, of inadequacy with existing forms, a need for new methods for recording, and a premonition of there being something beyond what our senses experienced. As in the Cocteau epigraph, the boundaries of our own, limited phenomenological world are exceeded by one far vaster, and music, but also sound in general, “makes us see the hidden, join the broken,” as the narrator of *Between the Acts* claims, gesturing toward the unseen through its content, true, but also through its traits, such as frequency and vibration (83). Woolf and Toomer, probing the future by ear, sought to rejoin the broken, the incipient shattered seen in the pageant’s finale of the former and the exiles of the latter, brought to such a state by the power that continued to listen in, more feverishly and sinisterly than before. Through their audio-spatial form, with its assimilation of lyric and theater, they drew attention to that which itself was not yet visible, but possible: collectives and communities developed along new lines. The page’s limitations would remain what they were, but for these two authors it became a matter of using their own

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<sup>99</sup> Ultrasound sees its first practical application in 1917 for submarine detection by French physicist Paul Langevin. According to the *OED*, the term first appears in 1923 in *The Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* (“ultrasound, n.”).

technology, that of writing, to offer soundscape recordings, “dimensioned experience” in Toomer’s words or, as Woolf might have put it, “a complete whole” (“Critic” 27; *Diary V* 133). As my readings will demonstrate, the dimensioned soundscapes they compose—the acoustic spaces their words simulate—allow them to assemble the motley into an arranged whole, raise silent alarms about social ills to the level of audibility, and offer up what it is about their respective plots of land that are worth saving.

*The Soundscape and the Stereophonic*

*Between the Acts* takes place, like *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), on a single day, this time June 1939, out in the English countryside. It presents the day in the life of a revolving ensemble cast, the day of the town’s pageant, hosted at Pointz Hall, home of the Oliver family, and written by one Miss La Trobe. Early in the day, Isa Oliver, lady of the house, although admittedly “book-shy” finds herself in their library looking for a volume to read. After her eyes pass over Keats, Shelley, Yeats, and Donne, she thinks, “perhaps not a person’s life; a county’s. Or not a life at all, but science” (14). Echoing this rapid telescoping away from the human subject to that often invisible thing behind all of life, science, *Between the Acts* is a novel about, as Melba Cuddy-Keane writes, “what is surrounding [the plot], as opposed to what lies ahead” (“Introduction” xlv). Reading her novel from a bird’s-eye view, or even an airplane’s, refusing to single out particular elements or the oppositions between them, is to be encouraged in a work so uninterested in individual incidents. As the narrator of *Between the Acts* proffers, “It didn’t matter what the words were, or who sang what. Round and round they whirled, intoxicated by the music” (65). Woolf, immersed in the plot of land forming the soundscape in which

she wrote, focused as much on sound itself as on meaning, and as a result wrote a novel with a reduced plot, in which, as is thought of Miss La Trobe's pageant, the story was largely inconsequential and “only there to beget emotion” (63).

The novel opens with the opening of a window onto a great lawn, the narrator sharing her gift with the reader of how beyond the sounds of the cows and birds, the plants too talk “with their many-tongued much syllabing” (83). *Between the Acts*, like the more sensitive microphones of the era, reproduces the inaudible “beat, beat, beat” vibrations of butterfly wings and “the unheard rhythm of ... wild hearts” (12, 45). Much like Cocteau in this chapter's epigraph, Woolf appears conscious of a world behind this one, one we only glimpse—or, rather, overhear. A hearing over and beyond anything previously thought possible and an opening out into a world of sound yet uncaptured is accomplished, technologically, by the December 1925 release in England on HMV of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, the first full-length electrically recorded works. “[I]t was just as if the doors of my machine were a window opening on to the great hall in which the concert was held,” wrote H.T. Barnett in *Gramophone*, while Ernest Newman of the London *Sunday Times* felt, for the first time, “the thrill of the real thing” (qtd. in Gelatt 232, 234). Known initially in the press as the “new recording,” electrical recording, when compared to the Edison acoustic process, offered the performer a heretofore unexperienced freedom: They did not have to huddle before the horn of the phonograph, but rather were allowed to play in large studios with proper acoustics because the new process no longer depended on out-and-out volume (231). Acoustic recording privileged the voice, perhaps because Edison did not see the recording of music

as one of the chief uses of his invention or because it could not record a broad sonic palette.

If Barnett felt as though electric recording opened a window to the symphony hall, this was due in large part to the fact that, as Joseph P. Maxfield and Henry C. Harrison from Bell Labs who headed up the project explained, the microphone “picks up the sound after it has been properly blended with the reflections from the walls of the room. It is in this way that the so-called ‘atmosphere’ or ‘room-tone’ has been obtained” (qtd. in Read and Welch 462). Breakthroughs such as these enabled Jean Cocteau, writing about the “widening of the audible universe” in 1953, to foresee technology reaching a stage whereby we “shall know that fish shout, that the sea is full of noises and.... that [man] is surrounded and hemmed in by invisible and inaudible forces” (64).

Woolf herself grew up and lived with reproduced sound at the periphery, if not the forefront, of her day-to-day life, whether the records and pianola of her youth or the wireless of her later years. She wrote to it, as well, informing her sister Vanessa that her letter was “written to the tune of the pianola” (*Letters* I 395). A “wonderful machine,” that device—more than a machine “in that it lets your own soul flow thro’” (57). As I argued in the first chapter, one of the achievements of phonography was the realization that the human voice is but one speaker in the soundscape, and indeed was so often lost within those grooves as to require an education to hear it. The pianola foregrounded for Woolf that our actions so often occur within a particular sonic envelope—have a soundtrack whether or not a soulful machine is operating—and that they are but one component of that larger landscape.

In her diary, near the beginning of the novel's composition, she calls *Pointz Hall*, as the novel was then known, a "medley" (*Diary V* 193). In the finished work, the pageant is described as both "medley" and "mellay"; the sonic traits of the word "medley" lead to "mellay," just as recourse to writing sound—the ordered, composed medley—draws one's attention to the chaotic, noisy, busy modern world, the melee (*Acts* 193). This mapping of the modern world through recourse to its sonic signatures is what Schafer calls in *The Tuning of the World* (1977) soundscape analysis, a form of cartography of acoustic spaces, which are as easy to isolate and identify as a landscape (7). The task of the soundscape analyst, as he lays it out, "is to discover the significant features of the soundscape, those sounds which are important either because of their individuality, their numerousness or their domination" (9). Her task, however, when compared with the analysis of landscapes, is more difficult, since precise representations are harder to come by when dealing with features that cannot be seen.<sup>100</sup> Getting the lay of the land by way of the ear rather than the eye had been a preoccupation of science since World War I, when German gestalt psychologists developed a device for the battlefield called a directional listener (*Richtungshörer*), known as the "Wertbostel," which would be in use until the mid-1930s. When connected to earpieces, the device, set upon a tripod and featuring what looked like horns set at a fixed distance at either end,

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<sup>100</sup> One of Schafer's proposed methods for notation of the soundscape is what he called "aerial sonography," a utilization of the work of meteorologists and geographers, who got high above the ground to see the entire picture. "The best way to appreciate a field situation," he writes, is to get above it" (131). "Aerial sonography" would be understood very differently by the military during World War II, when it would have described the use of radio waves to locate targets in adverse conditions.

would enable its operator to determine the whereabouts of enemy machines long before they would be visible to the naked eye.

The Wertbostel was, in effect, just an outsized hearing aid. The future of acoustic location was in radio waves, which had been seen at least theoretically possible as early as 1899, by Guglielmo Marconi, who many years later spoke of tests he had performed:

It seems to me that it should be possible to design apparatus by means of which a ship could radiate or project a divergent beam of these rays in any desired direction, which rays, if coming across a metallic object, such as another steamer or ship, would be reflected back to a receiver screened from the local transmitter on the sending ship, and thereby immediately reveal the presence and bearing of the other ship in fog or thick weather. (qtd. in Davis 88)

In situations where the eye could not be trusted, German scientists of World War II developed a system whereby different pulses—dots in one ear of a headset, dashes in the other—became one continuous note when the listener neared a target, stereophony years before it became available to civilians. “Ever since,” Friedrich Kittler writes, “human ears have no longer been a whim of nature but a weapon, as well as (with the usual commercial delay) a source of money” (100).

But sound is not simply limited to the spatial dimension, annotating and demarcating land or transmitting and disseminating data across great distances. Phonography, of course, became a way of auditory embalming, preserving the past for future generations, but even without these technological adjuncts the properties of sound can bring back the immediate past, as with echoes, or anticipate the future, as with tremors. Cocteau imagined a past “recorded by matter” that, when extracted, would teach us that “past and future are only an illusion of perspective” (64). In *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s aural environment acts as a temporal leveler, demonstrating what may be

unearthed if one listens closely enough, perhaps “a primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present.” (*Acts* 96). The novel makes a stand upon a specific piece of soil and makes it sing, of past, present, and possible futures. The historical pageant has the effect of making one feel “neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves... suspended, without being, in limbo” (121). Perhaps Goodman’s gloss on the prescience Attali credits to sound gathers these separate threads most clearly: “Instead of straining the eye toward the distant horizon or even making short-term projections or prophecies, the idea of sound as a sense of the future keeps its ‘ear to the ground,’ listening for microsignals, in an immediately present future, where the present virtually coexists with the resonances and vibrations of the past and opens on to its futurity” (49).

This function of vibration and resonance—ephemeral, invisible, ungraspable—to anticipate the future shares affinities with what William James called “feelings of tendency,” an “anticipatory intention,” a “permanent consciousness of whither our thought is going” of which we can form no mental image and which fades once what it has presaged materializes (253, 255). According to James, “a good third of our psychic life consists in these rapid premonitory perspective views of schemes of thought not yet articulate” but should “we try to hold fast the feeling of direction, the full presence comes and the feeling of direction is lost” (253). Much of the descriptive language James uses for this phenomenon is auditory; he writes of how we “tingle with the sense of our closeness” to the thought not yet formed, of its “reverberating” and then its “dying echo”

when the thought emerges (251, 255).<sup>101</sup> Further, in a sentence full of significance to the reader of Conrad and Woolf, he writes, “The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it” (255, 259, 255). For Conrad’s Marlow, as noted in the first chapter, it is not the kernel that matters so much as the haze that surrounds it; similarly, Woolf writes in “Modern Fiction” (1921) that “life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (106).<sup>102</sup> Vibration facilitates a coexistence of temporal frames and makes us tingle with the sense of our closeness to the future, but it also acts as a force that connects all things and is a constituent element of the envelope surrounding us.

Anything that moves through air generates vibrations, and when its oscillations are at a minimum of 16 times per second it registers to human ears as sound. If a body should cease to vibrate, as Gaston Bachelard indicates in the second epigraph, it ceases to exist, so that vibratory energy in his reckoning is the energy of existence. Using the Spinozist definition of affect—that is, the ability of one body (including the mind) to produce a change in another body—Goodman utilizes a vibrational mode of affectivity to subtend what he calls, in opposition to oversimplified fields like the politics of silence or the politics of noise, the (sub)politics of frequency.<sup>103</sup> Within this category, he privileges “proactive tactics that grasp sonic processes and technologies of power and steer them

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<sup>101</sup> While James is clearly not discussing sound, I think it is intriguing that he should describe this confounding state, intensely felt but ultimately leaving no trace except for the future that it portends, in such clearly sonic terms.

<sup>102</sup> Whether there is a direct influence on either author, I am unable to say, but such statements attest once again to a Woolf’s understanding of how all of our actions occur within a world much more expansive than our own consciousness.

<sup>103</sup> The prefix “sub” functions in two ways, the first highlighting that one does not often think of sound as a being a mode of politics and the second referring to low-end frequencies such as infrasound (xx).



elsewhere, exploiting unintended consequences of investments in control” (xx). Despite their militaristic origins, such processes and technologies are in and of themselves apolitical once released out into the world, free to be turned against their makers. Against the power to eavesdrop or drop targeted bombs, the work of Woolf draws attention to the microsignals of vibration and resonance so as to bolster communities rather than raze them.

At the heart of soundscape analysis is a goal very similar to Goodman’s project, Schafer tasking the researcher with accounting for the ways in which sounds work on one another and on individuals (131). Despite its spatial orientation and its isolable features, soundscapes are not immune to change over time and are thus susceptible to the consequences of an investment in control. Schafer sounds a klaxon at the very of opening of *The Tuning of the World*:

Modern man is beginning to inhabit a world with an acoustic environment radically different from any he has hitherto known. These new sounds, which differ in quality and intensity from those of the past, have alerted many researchers to the dangers of an indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of man’s life. (3)

By affecting one another—by becoming locked in a feedback loop of intensification—sounds were changing each other and, as a result, those sharing the soundscape. That such change was already underway was not lost on modernist man, either, as indicated by Luigi Russolo’s futurist manifesto *The Art of Noise* (1913), in which he writes, that “with the advent of machinery.... noise reigns supreme over human sensibility” (4). One might date this shift even later, to on or about 1921, when Virginia Woolf replaces the largely

noiseless bicycle, which featured in 1919's "Modern Novels," with the motor car, in said essay's final incarnation "Modern Fiction."

In the person of Miss La Trobe, with her use of the technologies of sound and the voice, the gramophone and the megaphone, out in the English countryside, one sees the way in which machinery not only reigns over human sensibility but also displaces human agency.<sup>104</sup> The former, hidden from sight and also personified in the novel, "gently states facts" and "warbles," "affirms" and "asserts," and "triumphed" and "lamented" (117, 133, 134). It, and the "anonymous bray" of the megaphonic voice, introduces and distributes new voices, all the while having the effect of allowing the creator to disappear (138). It brings about changes to bodies despite having no body of its own. Woolf never takes her eye off of La Trobe, though, evincing a fascination with that which lurks behind the surface and the sound and that which is just out of sight, whether the guns hidden "under a net tagged with strips of green and brown stuff to imitate the hues of autumn leaves" or the airman "driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers; ... [but] driven by voices in himself" who needs to be freed from his machine "sawing" overhead, in "Thoughts of Peace in an Air Raid" (1940) (175, 176). The German fighter planes' "zoom of a hornet" is a "sound—far more than prayers and anthems—that should compel one to think about peace" (173). As in Attali's formulation, these sounds are prophetic of what is

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<sup>104</sup> Miss La Trobe is an interesting study in what Martin Puchner calls an anti-theatrical modernist, particularly in her Beckettian distrust of actors and her desire for control. To read the "script" of the play as including all that the narrator captures from commencement to dispersal, one sees an example of Puchner's "exuberant" closet drama, a play that "willfully exceed(s) the limits of theatrical representation" (15). She ultimately lives up to Puchner's thesis, namely, that it is their very opposition to theater that brings about the revolutions for which modern dramatists like Beckett become best known (19). Despite her attempts at micro-management, La Trobe finds the play escaping her grasp and, as a result, is opened up toward the aleatory, as in those moments when nature takes a part.

to come, whether in *Between the Acts* where Isa hears behind the idle chatter of Bart and Lucy the line from the newspaper about the girl screaming as she is assaulted by troopers, or in her own diary, where she wrote how war “grumbles, in an inarticulate way, behind reality,” about a year before its outbreak and a handful of months after the June 1939 setting of the novel, and how “the raging voices began again last night in Germany,” three days prior to the commencement of war (*Diary V* 166, 288). Set in the year prior to the outbreak of hostilities, *Between the Acts*, with its “scraps, orts and fragments” about Russia, dictators, Jews, and “damned Germans” and the imperialistic zoom of unseen airplanes above, tells us that if we studied the soundscape, if we were really listening we should have heard it coming all along (128, 103).

Our failure to have heard it coming, however, may be due to the continually changing of the soundscape, which necessitated Schafer’s distinguishing between two categories of soundscape and is indexed in his terms: hi-fi and lo-fi soundscape, admitted reference to the technology of high fidelity. “The hi-fi soundscape,” he explains, “is one in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise level.” Despite being an “old-fashioned” space, the countryside of *Between the Acts* deserves the technologically-advanced descriptor; it is a hi-fi space, although one, as shown above, being encroached upon. By contrast, the lo-fi soundscape is that of the city, where “(t)here is no distance; there is only presence. There is cross-talk on all the channels, and in order for the most ordinary sounds to be heard they have to be increasingly amplified” (43). Schafer’s use of new technology as a descriptor makes sense in that such “cross-talk” and needed amplification was in all likelihood attributable to the proliferation of

these modern breakthroughs but, moreover, embodies the techno-pessimism that dogged such innovations from the start. The reactions to the “new recordings” that opened the previous section were not as glowing as the cited reviews would suggest and, indeed, were initially mostly negative. The Tchaikovsky is described as a “jangle of shattered nerves,” while in *Gramophone* the letters section complained of how “reality [has] given place to screaming” (qtd. in Gelatt 232). In hindsight, one can see why “new recording” was used as a euphemism for “electrical recording,” as these criticisms can easily be read as broadsides against modernity itself, reality itself increasingly becoming screaming and a collection of shattered nerves. Woolf, cobbling together her shattered fragments and scraps thrown to the wind, formally treats the countryside proleptically as a war-zone. Cross-talk is heard throughout, especially in scenes depicting the conversations of the pageant-goers as a whole, while the most ordinary sounds—the lowing of cows, for instance—can only be heard through amplification, and then it is as if they have been heard anew.

Before having a part in irrevocably influencing and altering it, electrical recording began as an attempt to reproduce reality, with the inevitable failures of fidelity outlined in the opening chapter. High fidelity, the expanded frequency of which paved the road for stereo recording, begins, as so much technology did, on the shattered battlegrounds of Europe. In 1926, the English engineer Harold Hartley coined the term “high fidelity” to describe the improved reduction produced by a loudspeaker that he and partner P.K. Turner had invented.<sup>105</sup> In 1934, the first self-proclaimed “high fidelity broadcast” took

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<sup>105</sup> Years later, in the wake of products that built upon his coinage, Hartley was said to prefer the term “realistic reproduction,” which is just as vague (Aldous 35).

place, with the first record (*Also Sprach Zarathustra*) appearing in May 1935, but this was all semantic. It was not until World War II that any appreciable expansion occurred, when Arthur Haddy, technical director of Decca Records, was tasked with several missions by the RAF: to record and filter German night fighter transmissions for code-breakers, to disseminate high-quality recordings of the identification sound emitted by friendly fighters, and to develop a recording system sensitive enough to record the difference between German and British submarines. The only detectable difference between the subs—the difference between life and death—was to be found in sonic frequency, that generated by the propellers of each, but that difference only existed at very high frequencies, exceeding recording capabilities of the time. “We had to build a disc cutter that would handle the full range of human hearing,” Haddy said, and this same cutter would be used to manufacture, post-war, their trademark FFRR discs, “full frequency range recording” (“Hi-Fi” 356).

Around the same time that Hartley coined “high fidelity,” a feature in the June 1926 issue of *Popular Radio* introduced to its readers a concept known as “stereophonic reception,” an effect whereby “sound waves appear to reach the ears of the listener from all directions at once, just as they do at the concert hall” (Lord 584). The concept is actualized under, at least initially, a different guise, known as “binaural” in a 1931 British patent filed by English engineer Alan Blumlein and the Electric and Musical Industries, Ltd. (EMI) (Gelatt 277).<sup>106</sup> Applying the principle of the Werbostel directional listener to

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<sup>106</sup> In America, working separately yet along similar lines was Bell Labs, who patented their own vertical-lateral disc system. Test recordings were made with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1932.

electrical recording, Blumlein hoped to “provide a sound recording and reproduction system whereby a true directional impression may be conveyed to a listener” (qtd. in Alexander 63). An early experiment by Blumlein, recorded with inferior materials, was played years later at the Institute of Electrical Engineers in the UK in 1958, after stereo recording had become standard. Of the experience, Percy Wilson, technical editor of *The Gramophone*, writes, “It was adequate to show that true stereophony was produced by Blumlein’s instruments; but the background noise was too great, and the frequency range too small, for the result to come up to what is possible with modern methods” (qtd. in Read and Welch 433). Blumlein created the early blueprint, anticipating modern methods, for how to achieve stereo recording, that is, the accommodation within the same groove of two different channels. The cutting stylus had two armatures, the coils of each receiving sound from different microphone/amplifier channels; for one channel, the pivoted stylus would cut laterally and, for the other, vertically. The same principles of binaurality that the Wertbostel enhanced would, after the wars, reach the home, implemented chiefly by Haddy and Decca.

The physical process of stereophonic recording demanded that the vinyl disc must become more accommodating, much like Virginia Woolf, who, using modern methods of her own, utilized sound such that it was “almost as if a microphone were set up in multiple locations,” as Melba Cuddy-Keane observes (“Introduction” xlvi). Blumlein’s invention was born of the frustration of attending the cinema, which had just recently learned to talk, only to hear the sound all come out of, in a sense, a single speaker (Alexander 61). Such had long been the plight of the novel, the victim of a solitary

consciousness, the slave to a sole authoritarian voice. What Woolf achieves with her soundscape is a kind of novelistic stereophony, a fidelity to method that, in the spirit of Cocteau, is sensitive to the ultrasonic and infrasonic and all of the frequencies in between that tether us all together. “The phonograph,” Kittler writes, “permitted for the first time the recording of vibrations that ... writing hands could not catch up with”—but not, by the time of Woolf, for much longer (118).

*Forms and Fields*

“Hi-fi stereophony can simulate any acoustic space,” Kittler tells us, but the task of the soundscape analyst is far more complex than mere simulation (103). “To give a totally convincing image of a soundscape,” Schafer contends, “would involve extraordinary skill and patience: thousands of recordings would have to be made; tens of thousands of measurements would have to be taken; and a new means of description would have to be devised,” but, as a writer, Schafer feels he inevitably suffers “the misfortune of having to present data on silent pages” (99). What is a misfortune for Schafer becomes a productive limitation for Miss La Trobe, *Between the Acts*’s artist figure: “[S]he was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world” (105). It is much the same for Woolf, who develops new means to record and measure her acoustic environment, the English countryside, making an audible world emerge through the word.

Whereas previous novels showcased Woolf’s interest in multiple internal monologues, her final novel’s audio-spatial form is an attempt to reproduce the hi-fi soundscape of its setting—instead of a person’s life, a countryside’s. “[H]earing cows

bellowing, gramophone music, gossip, megaphone, the play,” Gillian Beer writes, “these are the forms connection may take. Woolf disperses meaning and story through many voices here” (“Island” 164). Two weeks after having begun work on the novel, Woolf commits to her a diary a vision of what was then *Poyntzet Hall*, at its heart a stereophonic “we”:

“I” rejected: “We” substituted.... “We”... [sic] composed of many different things... [sic] we all life, all art, all waifs & strays—a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole—the present state of my mind? And English country; & a scenic old house—& a terrace where nursemaids walk? & people pass—& a perpetual variety & change from intensity to prose. & facts—& notes. (*Diary V* 135)

Along these lines, in a working notebook for the novel, she offers the following potential plot précis as it stood in September 1938: “Small girl Phyllis Jones is England, the private feeling: the public; History of England. People passing. Cows” (Notebook 2). Here, in this displacing and then dispersing of the “I” and this juxtaposing people and cows, we see Woolf trying to get away from herself. In a radio talk given almost a year to the day before her work on *Between the Acts* began, she asks, “[H]as any writer, who is not a typewriter succeeded in being wholly impersonal? Always, inevitably, we know them as well as their books” (248). Typewriter, in its earliest usage, referred to both the machine and its operator; in her own amalgam of man and machine, of La Trobe and gramophone and megaphone, Woolf succeeds in creating that kind of impersonality. In words that can easily be directed at the gramophone, Woolf writes in “Anon” (1941), an unfinished project about that poet whose name appears on so many early lyrics, “No one cares what his private experience may be outside the song... We cannot separate him from his song” (“Symbol” 2).



Nor is it possible to separate the component parts of the novel from each other without an attenuation of its full impact, recalling Schafer's assertion that, despite its isolable elements, a soundscape is a field of interaction. Plot, as commonly understood, may be absent from *Between the Acts*, Patricia Laurence argues, but there is "rhythm and pulse"—indeed, her plot, steeped in England's very soil, is more like a map of vibrations, rhythms, and pulses affecting one another, in proximity and from a distance (244). Woolf's reconceiving the landscape as a sonic field of interaction runs parallel with military undertakings at the time, as greater precision in aerial warfare required an auditory understanding of the ground below. A leaked report<sup>107</sup> revealed that the German military during World War II was developing rockets and torpedoes to be controlled by radio remote control, as well as a radar system for detecting enemy craft. This latter system, British scientist Reginald Jones discovered in 1940 through German prisoners, was known as the X-Gerät or X-Apparatus; "if we had overheard correctly," he writes, "it seemed to involve pulses, which were presumably radio pulses" (84-85). This fortuitous overhearing contributed to Allied victory in what was known as The Battle of the Beams, German radio navigation undone by British means of interference and jamming. It is a singular instance in modern warfare, a battle named not after a patch of land but after the invisible waves and pulses and countermeasures upon which the future depended.

Woolf dies two months before this battle ends, at a moment when Allied victory was anything but assured; dies before anyone would have been aware that such a battle,

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<sup>107</sup> That leak was the 1939 Oslo Report, one of the great leaks in the history of military intelligence. The man responsible was Hans Ferdinand Meyer, a German scientist who sympathized with the British. His name was not revealed until after his death; when arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 and sent to a concentration camp, it was not for espionage of any kind but for listening to the BBC!

one waged at the level of frequency, was occurring. But as *Between the Acts* attests, she was more than aware of the importance of such sonic signatures, their effects and the world waiting behind this one of which they were harbingers. What drives her toward her concern for future collectivities, of individuals but also of genres, is a concern of a deeply personal nature. Woolf's desire to stage a play within *Between the Acts* may have been motivated by her great fear, one that war could make possible: "No audience. No echo. That's part of one's death" (*Diary V* 293).

Her ruminations on beginnings and endings, of peoples and forms, led her to believe that, with *Between the Acts*, "I've tapped something perhaps—a new combination of the raw & the lyrical" (*Diary V* 259). Her effort to tie together so many threads thematically and stylistically led her to approach her earlier ideal of the future novel, *Between the Acts*'s larger structure having continually been altered by the material she was developing. At the beginning of the writing process, Woolf envisioned *Between the Acts* becoming a play; some months later she was composing poems for it; upon completion its final form was assessed by its author as "an interesting attempt in a new method" and later by Cuddy-Keane as "a kind of writing rather than a subject about which to write. (*Diary V* 139, 180, 340; "Introduction" xlii).

Several years prior to Woolf's criticisms, Jean Toomer, a published poet, frustrated musician, and failed playwright, was also to be found bristling at the limitations of the novel's form, somehow escaping Woolf's notice despite their similar programs, a program encapsulated by one of the narrators of his novel *Cane* (1923): "I talked, beautifully, I thought, about an art that would be born... I recited some of my own

things to her. I sang, with a strange quiver in my voice, a promise-song” (48). His attempts at expanding the novel’s capacities also took into account the new facts of the modern world; he wrote the poet Lola Ridge about his attempt “to blend the rhythm of peasantry [sic] with the rhythm of machines” (*Letters* 123). Toomer, who had decided to become a composer before embarking on his writing career, forbade excerpts of the poetry, drama, short stories, and sketches comprising *Cane* to be published in anthologies since the novel was an “organism” and ought not be “dismembered, torn to bits” and that his “hodge-podge of verse, songs, stories, and plays,” as one critic put it, required “the concentrated force of a volume” (“Said” 102; Margolies 39; *Letters* 46).<sup>108</sup> *Cane*, Gorham Munson said at the time, was “the record of his search for suitable literary forms”; reviewing the work in progress, Waldo Frank noted, in a letter to Toomer, “the start of a true Form [sic], but that... form is not yet here,” recommending a “freer form of narrative” and counseling against “the mere direct lyric” (“Significance” 262; *Brother* 35, 36). Toomer was, as he would later recall, “working on all the main forms” (“Years” 117). In response to Frank’s assessment above, Toomer felt “my form is slowly crystallizing,” a form that he would write James Weldon Johnson some years later was the “result of racial blendings” (*Brother* 38; Toomer, “Letter” 106).<sup>109</sup>

In art, his desire to yoke together the main forms of his life would lead him to attempt to fuse what Frank called the “book’s chaos of verse, tale, drama”; in life, it led

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<sup>108</sup> Woolf felt similarly about the book she was writing in 1924, a year after *Cane*’s publication, *Mrs. Dalloway*. She wrote T.S. Eliot, who was soliciting material from her: “[T]he novel is getting too interwoven for a chapter broken off to be intelligible” (*Letters III* 106).

<sup>109</sup> In this letter, Toomer was denying Johnson the right to include any of his work in an anthology that would single him out as a particular race, since he felt, above all, he was an American.

him to attempt to reconcile his mixed-race background through the spiritual teachings of the Armenian-born mystic George Gurdjieff (“Foreword” 118). As he told Johnson, the latter influenced the former, which he himself observed in a letter to journalist and publisher Claude Barnett, the year of *Cane*’s publication: “My style, my aesthetic, is nothing more nor less than my attempt to fashion my substance into works of art,” or, more succinctly, from *Cane* itself: “making folk-songs from soul sounds” (*Letters* 160; 17). Ralph Kabnis, Toomer’s acknowledged stand-in in the novel,<sup>110</sup> struggles with “shaping words t fit m soul” and longs to “develop [dreams] in words” (109, 81). His creator, “the man in love with life in toto, passions, vices, sorrows, despairs—all of life,” expressed his desire upon his move to New York to the poet Georgia Douglas Johnson to get it all out “on the cool surface of a white sheet of paper” (*Letters* 5).

To make an attempt at capturing all of life on that sheet of paper, with its flat surface, he exposed his material to what he would call, both in his correspondence and criticism in the run-up to *Cane*, “dimensional transformation.” What he means by this is never explicitly spelled out, but one can cobble together some sense of it through what it is not: “vicarious experience” or excessive aestheticization; “the reality of perception” or mere sensibility (47; “Gale” 18). A dimensional approach makes use of life, as art must, but it bears witness to struggle and the budding of consciousness and evokes emotion generally and, at times, horror (*Letters* 98; “Gale” 18). Toomer recognized the novel for his time must offer “a personal all-around experience of the world”—a dimensional

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<sup>110</sup> In a letter to Frank, Toomer stated baldly that “Kabnis is me” (*Brother* 102). He wrote Kenneth Macgowan that “Kabnis” was “really the story of my real or imaginary experiences in Georgia” (*Letters* 151).

experience (“Years” 119). It reads, quite frankly, not unlike Conrad’s conception, and Ford’s elaboration of, literary impressionism, namely, a direct recording of the world without unnecessary embellishment and a fidelity to one’s own experience.<sup>111</sup> “[F]idelity to the wondrously pure vision in you,” Frank wrote, was the only way for Toomer to “achieve your form” (*Brother* 36). The goal of that form was, as he would reflect in a 1930 essay, “to essentialize experience, the concentrated kernel of the thing; to spiritualize experience” (“Craft” 44). As a spiritualizer or “poetic realist,” he tries to “lift facts, things, happenings, to the planes of rhythm, feeling, and significance” (“Earth” 20). In other words, he records faithfully by giving the kernel, the core of experience, and then transubstantiating that material such that he brings out the halo or fringe that gives it meaning, aligning him, by way of William James, with Conrad and Woolf.

Toomer’s dimensional transformation, true to himself and to his age, is a form of impressionism for the world of electrical recording and the age of machines, for a man in whom “phrases and melodies still surge up” even after abandoning music for writing and for whom “the only healthy, the only art attitude” was to embrace the power and “deep organic functioning” of the electric world (Letters 32; “Munson” 19). For Woolf, form was the thing that ordered emotion, and that “the ‘book itself’ is not the form which you see but emotion which you feel,” and this feeling, in *Between the Acts*, is frequently communicated through the affective and vibrational power of sound in itself (“Re-reading” 126). On the peripheries of these novels, one written as the world recovers from

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<sup>111</sup> In his assessment of the literary scene of the early 1920s, W.E.B. DuBois writes of how Toomer, “an artist with words,” impresses “not with Dutch exactness, but rather with an impressionist’s sweep of color” (219).

war in a country whose demographics are changing irrevocably as a result and the other as the world trembles on the precipice of another war in a land soon to be under siege, gestures made toward the auditory dimension reveal, against the odds, a world-to-come beyond the machinations of the powers-that-be.

*Stereophonic Play: Between the Acts*

If *The Great Gatsby* was Fitzgerald's wireless fantasy, as I argued in the previous chapter, *Between the Acts* is—in the pageant, of course, but throughout, too—Woolf's stereophonic play,<sup>112</sup> continually engaging and immersing the reader in a fully conceived, beautifully rendered field of sound. While planning *Between the Acts*, Woolf was hoping to just write a short novel that would distract her from the arduous work of her biography of Roger Fry—"don't, I implore, lay down a scheme; call in all the cosmic intensities," she writes in her diary—but ultimately, while remaining a brief work, it becomes a concise consideration of many of the themes she spent a lifetime writing about. As much as a "day in the life," of people and places, *Between the Acts* is the life of the day, and of many days prior, through a poetic, scientific state-of-the-art simulation of the aural landscape that is, has been, and—with some luck, with war on the horizon—will be England. Through this particular amalgam, Woolf calls upon her audience to hear the novel as well as read it and to focus their attention on the importance of noises poised on the periphery, of human hearing ("the drone of the trees"), yes, but also of the future (the drone of airplanes) (10).

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<sup>112</sup> This phrase, "stereophonic play," is taken from Cuddy-Keane's introduction to the novel, wherein, dealing with the myriad ways of critically understanding Woolf's use of allusions, she makes reference to Roland Barthes' argument of how a text "engage[s] the reader in stereophonic play" ("Introduction" liv).

*Between the Acts* begins by setting the soundscape; the windows are open to the garden, we are told, but this is less for the sights than for the sounds let in. Amid the conversation being had by the guests—and, it is worth noting, the silences—one hears a cow coughing and a bird chuckling,<sup>113</sup> both of which serve as fodder for conversation (3). From the start, interchange between man and nature, so crucial to the success of Miss La Trobe's pageant, is foregrounded. Beyond the garden and immediate lands, sounds many many miles away are on the minds of those present that June night, like, for instance, the sound of the sea. Lucy Swithin, sister of family patriarch Bartholomew Oliver and keeper of the faith, relates a story of how, despite that great distance, "one can hear the waves on a still night. After a storm, they say you can hear a wave break"—if one is only willing to listen, one can tune in those far-off, much-missed waves breaking the silence (20).

Closer to home, the rooms of Pointz Hall, too, are resonant with sound, with walls that can talk, what Toomer calls "sleeping singers" in "Theater," speaking aloud mid-slumber (*Cane* 51). "Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent," Woolf's narrator transcribes. "The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was" (26). Miss La Trobe's pageant takes us back into time, from the medieval period and up to the present day, but the seeming silence of the home, foreshadowing the staging to come, takes us back into deep time through its song, back before "the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans" (4). Like sonic dark matter, silence weaves its way through the novel, inaudible yet essential, often mutely prophesying what is to come in the book. It blends in with the

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<sup>113</sup> Mrs. Haines asks if the bird is a nightingale, but is told they do not travel that far north (3). Later on in the novel, Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is misquoted by the gathered company (38). It is fascinating that *Between the Acts*, like *The Great Gatsby*, signals a commitment early on to sound by referencing nightingales, all voice and nothing more, as in Plutarch.

talk and the space creating atmosphere, the narrating recognizing silence as a distinct voice “adding its unmistakable contribution to talk” (27).

What might be thought of as the narrator’s enhanced listening, to things not traditionally credited with voices, is complemented by an immersive listening, a focus on sound-as-sound with little regard for meaning. Ending her day with a drink at the public house, a spent Miss La Trobe “listened”: “Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning—wonderful words” (144). On this day, “words raised themselves” and “ceased to lie flat in the sentence” (50, 41). At the beginning of the novel, words rise and their sounds, concretized, encircle Isa Oliver and her love-interest, the gentleman farmer Rupert Haines: “The words made two rings, perfect rings that floated them, herself and Haines, like two swans down stream” (4). The words that fashion the circles around Isa and Haines are those of Lord Byron’s, given weight and grain in their recitation from memory by her father-in-law and Oliver family patriarch, Bartholomew. Sound works on us in ways that defy the eye, yet rattle us at the core of our being and determine the paths our lives might take, but nevertheless Isa finds herself “pegged down on a chair arm, like a captive balloon, by a myriad of hair-thin ties into domesticity” (13).

Perhaps it is the luxury of old age, but Lucy finds herself with no such problems, her having nobody but, as is suggested, “no body” either (80). *Between the Acts* is a novel that is interested in no body, in particular, as all have their parts to play and the players are always shifting. Offering a snap critical interpretation of the pageant, Reverend



Streatfield observes that “few were chosen; the many passed in the background,” but that, in the end, “we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole” (130). Such a passage is facilitated by oscillation, by those tingling, tangling, vibrating circles, strings, and threads, made of sound matter, as heard and felt, yet unseen, in this selection: “Over the tops of the bushes came stray voices, voices without bodies, symbolical voices they seemed to [Isa], half hearing, seeing nothing, but still, over the brushes, feeling invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices” (103). The collective body speaks as one voice, which possesses no body. As with Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, voices are disaggregated from bodies, yet retain their functions, and contain lives of their own, as at the conclusion of *Where There’s a Will There’s a Way*, the pageant’s play-within-a-play: “[A] voice exclaimed.... The voice stopped. But the voice had seen, the voice had heard” (95). It is capable of speaking, not to mention seeing and hearing, but not of being seen itself, found only through acoustic location, as with the voice identified solely as being behind Isa’s back (72). The voice that sees and hears produces uncanny effects: “Yet somehow they felt—how could one put it—a little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup; as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn’t settle” (102).

This unsettled feeling of floating unattached occurs, too, in the novel’s form, accomplished through its dipping into forms of poetic and dramatic address. *Between the Acts*’s embrace of intertextuality makes it something of a collective production made of many voices and may prevent the reader from ever getting too absorbed by the work, distracted by its allusions. More than that, however, poetry, particularly its rhythms, is

integral to the novel's sentence-level DNA, Woolf writing in her diary of the book's "obsessive" rhythm and how she "heard it, perhaps used it, in every sentence I spoke" (*Diary V* 339). The exaltation of poetry, to use Woolf's phrase, leads her characters away from the prosaic, exemplified by Isa's mental composing of verse,<sup>114</sup> just as it keeps her book from becoming mired in the purely novelistic. Drama, too, is just as disruptive—although reductive, one could read the novel's prose as being simply exceptionally long stage directions—particularly when the drama is itself being disrupted, by the natural elements that mute its words and the audience that interacts with it. These genres perform work on the novel but are, at the same time, worked on by the novel. It denies poetry its transcendence by immuring it in prose and offering theater a figurative form of interiority by making a show of how its speech and, moreover, its message, are unheeded. The novel of the future, if *Between the Acts* is indeed a prototype, disrupts accustomed habits of novel reading by oscillating between genres and voices and documenting how they all affect each other.

And *Between the Acts* is indeed a novel teeming with voices, literal and figurative, poetic and theatrical—but also mechanical. This last is seen in the "megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking" voice "no one knew" and the collective voice's analogue, "the other voice, the voice that was no one's voice"—that is, the gramophone (127, 123).<sup>115</sup> As with those disembodied voices Isa encounters on her stroll, the gramophone's

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<sup>114</sup> Isa recites fragments of poems to herself throughout the novel, but Woolf composed entire poems for her, the remnants of which survive as fragments in the Monks House collection at the University of Sussex. In one darkly ominous poem, given Woolf's fate, Isa claims that, at a wishing well, she would wish "[t]hat the waters should cover me, / of the wishing well" (*Verse* 4).

<sup>115</sup> Very little of the criticism of *Between the Acts*, even by authors interested in voice and sound like Mark Hussey and Rachel Duplessis, deals with the gramophone, whether the strangeness of its personification or

voice is at times only half-heard, because of the wind and because of mechanical failure, and is never seen, hidden from sight like Miss La Trobe herself. The gramophone possesses what La Trobe desires, and what Woolf advocated in her criticism, namely, impersonality, a voice that was nobody's voice. La Trobe's records are not stereophonic—that would have to wait until the end of the war not yet begun—but through the impersonal voice of her gramophone they contribute to the surround sound (“a triple melody”) into which the audience was “folded,” as the machine “gently stated certain facts which everybody knows to be perfectly true,” while the “view repeated in its own way what the tune was saying,” and the “cows... were saying the thing to perfection” (92). The gramophone's voice is a part of the collective but at the same time regulates its harmony, keeping it from splintering into “scraps and fragments,” one of the novel's constant refrains, drifting into the novel by way of Shakespeare and Woolf's diary and reappearing in variations (84).<sup>116</sup> “The audience was wandering, dispersing,” the narrator relates. “Only the tick, tick of the gramophone held them together” (105).

Initially, the machine makes the relatively innocuous sound “chuff, chuff, chuff,” with only the clock on the wall described as ticking (54, 24). In one paragraph, “chuff” gives way to “tick,” after which Bartholomew mutters, “Marking time” (57). Its mechanical properties render the gramophone, in a manner of speaking, a time bomb, one that triggers unhappy associations, perhaps accounting for the following fragment of

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Woolf's fixation on its noises. It is often treated just like another voice among many, like the lowing of the cows.

<sup>116</sup> “The fractions of her faith, orts of her love, / The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greasy reliques,” Shakespeare writes in *Troilus and Cressida* (V.ii.184-85). On May 31, 1941, Woolf wrote in her diary, “Scraps, orts & fragments, as I said in PH. which is now bubbling—I'm playing with words” (*Diary V* 290).

speech: “Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord...” (136). No longer creating harmony, the gramophone introduces a sour note, its tick becoming, near the end of the pageant, “maddening,” much as it was to Joseph Conrad (120).<sup>117</sup> Woolf noted an instance in her diary of such an unhappy association, while in the midst of the war, when the sound of nature was mistaken for something far more sinister: “A great thunderstorm. I was walking on the marsh & thought it was the guns on the channel ports. Then, as they swerved, I conceived a raid on London; turned on the wireless; heard some prattler; & then the guns began to lighten: then it rained” (*Diary V* 288). The sound of thunder becomes the sound of guns and, from that, her imagination creates a scenario of London under siege. The sound of guns, in her essay “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (1940), is rendered as “pop pop pop,” onomatopoeia that would be at home in the cackle, rattle, and yaffle of *Between the Acts* (173; 124). Like “chuff, chuff, chuff” and “tick, tick, tick,” “pop pop pop” is rhythmic and vibratory, containing the barest traits of sound, only gaining meaning when association allies it to a referent.

The most ominous sound emitted in *Between the Acts* is another noise Woolf writes about in “Air Raid,” the “zoom” of the airplane that “may at any moment sting you to death” (175). In *Between the Acts* this “zoom became a drone,” lingering over the remainder of the novel, “severing” Reverend Streatfield’s concluding word, cutting it in two (131). This malevolent counterpart to the gramophone, holding its operator’s body hostage instead of liberating it like that latter device, taints it by association, its drone

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<sup>117</sup> Woolf herself was familiar with the discord the noises produced by a gramophone could create. She writes her brother-in-law Clive Bell of how Roger Fry and his companion Helen Anrep “were pretty crusty together the other night, as Helen heard in a wheeze in their gramophone, which Roger could not hear” (*Letters IV* 279).

becoming synonymous with a world in thrall to machines and the invisible forces that set them in motion. As a generator of noise, the gramophone ceases to be a vessel for the voice and instead becomes tethered to that which threatens to silence all voices. “The aeroplanes, I didn’t like to say it,” an anonymous voice in the novel says, “made one think” (135). Immersive listening, in its attention to the pure traits of sound, produces unimagined questions – things that might not otherwise have been anticipated – but also *unimaginable* questions, things that defy all reason.

The airplane’s drone sounds through the end of novel, but the plane itself appears on the very first page, Bartholomew giving an account of what the land looks like aboard one (3-4). A little later, searching for the right word to explain the pulse of the thread between herself and Haines, Isa remembers “the infinitely quick vibrations of the aeroplane propeller that she had seen once at dawn at Croydon” (11). It is admired for the perspectival change it provides and for the power in its mechanism, and is viewed by Woolf herself, during happier times in July 1927, as one of the harbingers of the end of wars over territory: “I said, recalling the aeroplanes that had flown over us, while the portable wireless played dance music on the terrace, ‘can’t you see that nationality is over? All divisions are now rubbed out, or about to be” (*Diary III* 145). Yet During discussions after the pageant’s end about Streatfield’s summation, the communal voice affected by the drone, a body politic and sonic, asks, “And if one spirit animates the whole, what about the aeroplanes?” This thread is taken up by other voices, who mostly see the planes as minatory, something to eliminate the whole rather than animate it, who say: “If the worst should come—let’s hope it won’t—they’d hire an aeroplane, so they

said” (134). The plane is escape and transcendence but also deliverer of untold destruction. The plane is there “to vex us,” and to make one reconsider one’s safety: “And what’s the channel, come to think of it, if they mean to invade us?” (124, 135). Such lines were likely written during the “[m]any air raids” of August 1940, as Woolf feared invasion, against which thoughts of *Between the Acts* acted as “a concentration—a screw” (311). If the past is represented by the silence of Pointz Hall’s room and the present is sonorous, the immediate future is a return to silence, or worse still, as she puts it plainly in a letter weeks before her own death: “We have no future” (*Letters VI* 475).

“The future is disturbing our present,” Isa thinks during the pageant, the work of the megaphonic and gramophonic “voices from the bushes” described as “oracles” (79, 57). What the pageant suggests, especially in the chorus’s song of how “palaces tumble down,” is that the world won’t listen, or cannot, whether because the “breeze blew gaps between their words” or the “words died away,” inaudible (95, 96). But perhaps it is just the case that no one knows what to listen for or whom to heed. Aware of the sinister sounds behind the seeming placid surface, represented in her diary as a “kind of growl behind the cuckoos & t’the other birds,” and sensitive to the menacing vibrations that presaged the drums of war, Woolf wrote in *Between the Acts* a novel about the frailty and allure of voices, which join us together and yet die away so easily, and the suggestiveness of vibration, which can drive us mad and lead us to think the unthinkable (*Diary V* 293). Woolf’s goal was to invent a new form, one that accommodated the content of both the modern world and the world that would have to be rebuilt, as the ending of Miss La Trobe’s pageant foresees. Meaning, as such, is to be located in the interstices, the places

in between, and the novel's representation of betweenness is rooted in the oscillation of vibration—from novel to poetry to drama, from anonymity to individuality to collectivity, from cow to gramophone to airplane, from what was to what's now to what's to come. In other words, meaning is found in the places where, too frequently, “no one was listening,” the narrator’s assessment of the response to this speech given by young Phyllis Jones early on:

Gentles and simples, I address you all (she piped)  
 Our act is done, our scene is over.  
 Past is the day of crone and lover.  
 The bud has flowered; the flower has fallen.  
 But soon will rise another dawning,  
 For time whose children small we be  
 Hath in keeping, you shall see,  
 You shall see.... (66)

And, in the novel, one’s ability to see what lies ahead is not by looking toward the dawn on the horizon but by keeping close to the ground, with an ear for the chuffs, ticks, and drones. There is, as Lucy understands it, a harmony being played out beneath all that we see; if silent to us it is nevertheless audible to “a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head.” Or to the ear of an author like Woolf, who remaps a soon-to-be shattered society and remodels literary form based on what she has heard, and shares with the reader, as her final gift, hope. Lucy concludes: “All is harmony could we hear it. And we shall” (119).

### *Field Songs: Cane*

Jean Toomer’s form, and his later spiritual pursuits that led him to set writing aside entirely, was fueled by a “hunger for wholeness,” the apt title of Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge’s biography of the man. In a collection of aphorisms written in

1931, Toomer, defining himself as being “of no particular race,” wrote that he was instead “preparing a new race,” and one can hear the rumblings of that new race throughout his lone novel, usually coming from the soil, at infrasonic frequencies (*Essentials* 24). If Woolf was substituting the “I” for a “We” in search of a new method but also a new collective vision of society, Toomer was just trying to imagine what a “we” would look like, a vision of blacks and whites integrated but also a harmonization of folk and modern, man and machine, lyric and prose.<sup>118</sup> A record of its time, Toomer is trying to imagine this “we” at the height of the Great Migration, a time when African Americans are leaving the South in droves for northern cities like Chicago and Washington, D.C., locales in *Cane*, responding to the demands for labor exacerbated by World War I.<sup>119</sup>

Rather than try to reconcile all of these antinomies, Toomer, in a sense, cordons off his zones of conflict. He offers a reading practice for his novel, one that is suggested by a letter to Frank in which he claims the novel’s design is a circle and another, years later, in his collection of aphorisms, when he claims, “I am of no special field. I am of the field of being” (*Brother* 85; *Essentials* 24). The novel is circular, in that it follows the cycles of morning and night and birth and death, but that circle also is an enclosure, bounding an acoustic field of study, a soundscape. Switching the attention away from music and to sound generally—and from the binary to an open field—allows one to take

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<sup>118</sup> Of course, by utilizing call-and-response in sections of *Cane*, Toomer has always already substituted “I” with “We,” or as Barbara Bowen puts it, building off the poet Michael Harper, “the blues audience hears ‘we’ when the speaker says ‘I’; communal response for the blues singer, as for Barlo, confers the authority to speak” (17). Moreover, there are moments of communal responsibility narrated through the “we,” as in “Becky,” and also places where the reader is very earnestly interpellated, as in “Fern” (*Cane* 10, 20).

<sup>119</sup> According to James Noble Gregory’s *The Southern Diaspora* (2005), 204,382 African Americans left the South between 1900-1910, a number that doubled between 1910-1920, and nearly doubled again the next decade (330). Toomer, who took up a temporary position as a principal at a school in Sparta, Georgia in 1921, performed a reverse migration.



full account of the genres at play, and the auditory effects the protagonists are immersed in, opening up a world with multiple entry points and of unimagined questions. The genres, as a contemporaneous review had it, “are fused into a spiritual unity,” resulting in a book that need not be “intellectually understood,” but rather “emotionally, aesthetically felt” with “all... five senses keenly alive” (Gregory 374). Despite its many component events the soundscape is a field of interactions, as is *Cane* despite its discrete parts. *Cane*, redolent with the smell of the many cane fields within, becomes a field of being, a field of formal experimentation, but also a sound field, an acoustic environment.

For Toomer to fashion his substance into art, as he wrote Barnett, he needed to find his form, a struggle faced by the protagonist of the play that closes the volume, Ralph Kabnis. Kabnis desires that he should be the face of the South and that he would sing of it, “my songs being the lips of its soul,” which is an image featured earlier in the poem, “Song of the Son,” the poet voice there hoping “[t]o catch thy plaintive soul,” that is, the soul of the soil (81, 16). The south, soil, and substance captured in Toomer’s art is voiced through song and sound. This is seen from the very beginning of the book, in the refrain that opens the novel, in the short story “Karintha,”<sup>120</sup> a refrain that is repeated twice, with minor variations, and infects the first sentence of the story. The new form required a new kind of reading, the technique for which one develops as one proceeds, but also with some assistance from the author. According to a note from Rudolph Byrd

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<sup>120</sup> Excerpted from Toomer’s play *Natalie Mann*, “Karintha” came with instructions from Toomer when it was first published in *Broom*: “To be read, accompanied by the humming of a Negro folk song” (“Karintha” 83). Its inherent musicality did not escape the attention of Gil Scott-Heron, who many years later set the story’s words to music for a track appropriately called “Cane” on his 1978 album with Brian Jackson called *Secrets*.

and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in the Norton edition of the novel, Toomer's use of two or three periods throughout the book (not to be confused with ellipses) are meant to indicate a "pause in the reading" (*Cane* 5).<sup>121</sup> Just as the imagined folk-song, the refrain, and the pauses of "Karintha" shape one's reading, the two poems that follow that story, "Reapers" and "November Cotton Flower" (a phrase from "Karintha"), prepare the ground for the sketch "Becky." Later, Toomer's adaptation of the African American spiritual "Deep River," quoted on the page like a poem in the story "Rhobert," reappears as the song being played by a band in the following story, "Avey."

"Karintha," too, foregrounds the attempt to accommodate multiple sounds in a single space, to credit with voices those things we consider silent, and to strike an equivalence between voice and noise, as when the breathing of a church shouter is likened to "the sound of the evening winds that blow through pinecones" (90). Like the greater range of frequencies being detected and recorded at the time, Toomer's extreme sensitivity to voice dismantles a hierarchy that privileges the human voice in favor of an arrangement that, as with what will become stereophonic reproduction, acknowledges all sounds have a place within the soundscape, have a place within "the chorus of the cane"—in other words, Toomer is attuned to the grain of the voice and the voice of the grain (17).

Like the opening of *Between the Acts*, *Cane*'s very first page documents the sounds coming the landscape, one in which secret prayers are overhead, Karintha's

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<sup>121</sup> One finds no similar guide for what to make of his use of parentheses, but in a story like "Carma," especially, it makes one consider one's approach. The work as a whole is very much of a case, as with poetry, of how the use of the page orders one's reading.

running is likened to “the sound of the red dust,” and the hush at dusk is heard, only to be broken by Karintha’s shrill, high-pitched voice (5). Throughout, leaves are “rusty with talk” and trees “walls are sleeping singers,” singing is of “canebrake love and mangrove feastings” and melodies are of “cane and corn,” and the “whole countryside is a soft chorus” (14, 54, 71, 54, 96). In just the third paragraph of the story “Blood-Burning Moon” alone, the protagonist Louisa sings, hounds yelp and howl, chickens cackle, dogs bark, roosters crow, and “women sang lustily,” all at the appearance of the titular moon (31, 31-32). Bodies, too, are substances fashioned into “glorious songs,” or, as is the case in “Carma,” “[s]he does not sing; her body is a song” (71). There is a real temptation to treat these instances as mere simile, but I would counter that, when taken as a whole, Toomer begs us to consider taking this language literally, to imagine such a world where bodies, and beyond, are at base audio-spatial forms, as well. After all, who knows but that “pines shout to Jesus,” if we could only hear it? (10).<sup>122</sup>

These sounds fill the environment and crowd the page, at times feeling expansive, as with the song that rises “above the sacred whisper of the pine” in “Georgia Dusk”—much like the heaven-bound words so often rising in *Between the Acts*—and at other times creating claustrophobia, like the opening of “Kabnis” and the night winds that intrude through the cracks in the wall with “the weird chill of their song” (17, 81). Life is understood as happening amid these sounds, not taking precedence over them; frequently

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<sup>122</sup> In “Esther,” the preacher Barlo commands the gathered throng, “Open your ears,” at which there is a break and the narrator explains how, years later, “Esther was told that at that very moment a great, heavy rumbling voice actually was heard. That hosts of angels and of demons paraded up and down the streets all night” (25). In “Kabnis,” Ralph wonders whether the others with him are hearing that, as quoted above, “the whole countryside is a soft chorus...” (96).

the narrators across the novel observe the backdrop of gossips (“Fern”) or music (“Avey”), humming and hushing (“Esther”) or church singing (“Kabnis,” where a shriek sets off a chain reaction by adding the hum of bronze mantelpieces to the chorus) (21, 48, 24, 90). What R. Murray Schafer calls soundmarks, sounds of a community that make its life unique, announce themselves and are heard by all, like the sawmill’s whistle indicating closing time (carrying over from “Carma” into “Georgia Dusk”) and the “crude music” of the valley’s railroad engines and the town bell (14, 17, 46, 98). The novel’s ear tunes in both high and low frequencies (squeals of rats, secret prayers, “soft settling pollen,” “a spray of pine needles”), sounds coming from the ground (“Box Seat”) and those moving toward the horizon, like the “choruses above the guinea’s squawk” in “Carma” and the rising cantor’s song in “Fern” (17, 22, 14, 19).

This ear, and my concept of immersive listening, is perhaps best embodied by Father John in “Kabnis,” of whom Kabnis himself says, “The old man is a good listener. He’s deaf; but he’s a good listener. An I can talk t him. Tell him anything” (113). Along with the speaker of “Harvest Song,” whose “ears are caked with dust of oatfields at harvest time” and yet still strives to hear despite his deafness, and Dan in “Box Seat,” Father John embodies an approach from Toomer in which sound is felt physically, as vibration and rumbling, but also affectively, as in Goodman’s mode of vibrational affect (69). There is much to admire in the lyrics of the folk songs throughout the novel, thus their being quoted, but the traits of sound, whether the grain of the voice or the groan of the valley, have a power in and of themselves, which perhaps too frequently escape notice

or go unrecorded, a vibratory feedback loop between a singer and her surroundings only unearthed through an immersive listening.

The two pieces in *Cane* that best exemplify Toomer's method are, perhaps not coincidentally, the two longest pieces,<sup>123</sup> both of which feature a protagonist who finds himself out of touch with his surroundings,<sup>124</sup> one titled after a privileged position from which to watch a show and the other originally meant for the stage: "Box Seat" and "Kabnis." Dan Moore, "born in a cane-field," finds himself in "Box Seat" in Washington, D.C, which is at the same time the "bastard of Prohibition and the War," as observed in the poem "Seventh Street," and home to gated, middle-class boardinghouses off of Thirteenth Street like the one where Muriel, Dan's love interest, lives (57, 41). Dan tries to sing, to "produce tones in keeping with the houses' loveliness," but his voice is hoarse and shrill and he cannot bear the sound of it (57). He credits his failure to the fact that the house belongs to a Mrs. Pribby, a symbol of the town and, here at the intersection of North and South, an emblem of adapting to Northern urban life with its lo-fi soundscapes and of forgetting the folk. "No wonder he couldn't sing to them," he thinks (58).

Modernity is a tyranny of eyes, of judgment, from the Pribbys of the world who think Dan must be trying to break in to this house to the collective eyes of the audience at the theater.<sup>125</sup> The rural, folk South, as portrayed in "Box Seat" and elsewhere in *Cane*, is

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<sup>123</sup> Incidentally, these two are also the pieces that DuBois singled out as being his least favorites: "'Box Seat' muddles me to the last degree and I am not even sure that I know what 'Kabnis' is about" (220).

<sup>124</sup> Several times in his 1930s autobiographical fragments, Toomer mistakenly writes "*Cain*" instead of "*Cane*," a misspelling that is pertinent to these two pieces as both Ralph Kabnis and Dan Moore, like the Biblical Cain, are in some sense marked men, wanderers, forever divorced from communion with the land.

<sup>125</sup> In "Esther," Esther's eyes "hardly see"; Dorris in "Theater" is said to "have no eyes" (27, 54). The only eyes that truly see are those that are blinded or half-blinded, as with Father John or Dan, respectively, as the latter is described toward the end of "Box Seat." As the poem "Prayer" has it, succeeding "Box Seat," "A closed lid is my soul's flesh-eye" (68). That the novel begins with a poetic invocation of dusk in "Karintha"

one of ears, mouths, tongues, and lips—"the flesh-notes of a forgotten song," a phrase repeated in the story, and with variants elsewhere in the novel—and therefore of physical contact and vibration (57, 60). No "[p]eeping-tom" is Dan; "I'll never peep," he says to himself. "I'll listen. I like to listen." What he hears is "something vibrant from the earth" that "sends a rumble to him" from "the earth's deep core," "the mutter of powerful underground races" and the "next world-savior... coming up" (58). What he does not hear, and what Muriel fails to hear also, are Muriel's thoughts and misgivings, like his own, set off by Toomer as though he were writing a play, preceded by colons.<sup>126</sup> By doing this, rather than resorting to free indirect discourse, Toomer relies on dramatic convention, showing us that here are words that each longs to have heard, but whether because of an absence of sensitivity or because of the presence of the walls of respectable houses, are audible to the reader but not to their fellow players, thereby foreclosing on mutual understanding.

As a way of remembering his literal and figurative roots, Dan "places his palms upon the earth to cool them," just as in "Harvest Song," a poem that follows, the reaper "beat[s] my palms, still soft, against the stubble of his harvesting" (63, 69). Something is coming up from the ground, some bountiful harvest, and while in "Box Seat" Dan is simply thought to "see crazy," his ears might work just fine (66). In "Kabnis," Ralph, as mentioned earlier, wonders if what he hears real, as well, tormented by the beauty of the

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and frequently makes use of that time of day when the sun's last rays fade and artificial light has yet to be turned on. In "Fern," the narrator tells us, "Dusk hid her; I could hear only her song," and how Georgia dusk, the title of the poem preceding the story, makes one feel that "things unseen to men were tangibly immediate" (21).

<sup>126</sup> A similar technique is utilized in the preceding story, "Theater," also set in D.C., and again emphasizing the obstacles that prevent our innermost thoughts from being understood.

“hills and valleys, heaving with folk-songs” that are just beyond his reach (83). He is, in the eyes of the prophetic Lewis, “suspended a few feet above the soil whose touch would resurrect him” but at some level, Ralph refuses to accept this (96). He is a teacher at a school in Georgia, neither at home in the North, where the eyes and words of white men have made his soul “some twisted awful thing,” or in the South, where he alternately fears being lynched and is set on edge by the “shouting” in the churches (109, 89).

Ralph longs for self-definition, to make real his idealized self, the dream that is Ralph Kabnis. Lewis, a kind of high-fidelity Kabnis who is “what a stronger Kabnis might have been....issuing sharply from a vivid dream,” tells Ralph that “[l]ife has already told him more than he is capable of knowing. It has given him in excess of what he can receive,” or, for that matter, what he can translate or reproduce (95, 99). “God,” he says at the opening of the play, “if I could develop that in words,” and, to his credit, he never ceases trying (81). To a party assembled at his friend Halsey’s workshop, during the play’s climax, he says, “[A]h, but sometimes theyre beautiful an golden an have a taste that makes them fine t roll over y tongue” (109). Such words do not, however, capture the spectrum of who Kabnis is, no matter how simply he hopes to explain himself to others. When pressed by Lewis, he says, “I’m Ralph Kabnis. Aint that enough f y?” Lewis asks him to confront Father John, the muttering would-be prophet who lives in Halsey’s cellar, “symbol, flesh, and spirt of the past,” but Kabnis retorts that Halsey is not his own past, since his “ancestors were Southern blue-bloods,” but also black, as Lewis reminds him. “Can’t hold them, can you?” Lewis replies, as he proceeds to rattle off the many binaries at work in the novel: “Master; slave. Soil, and the overarching heavens.

Dusk; dawn. They fight and bastardize you.... Split, shredded: easily burned” (106).

Kabnis is representative of an aphorism Toomer would pen some years later: “We are split men, disconnected from our own resources, almost severed from our Selves, and therefore out of contact with reality” (*Essentials* 59).

“Licker [having] released conflicts in Kabnis and set them flowing,” Ralph has his most powerful, cathartic moment toward the end of the play. “Those words I was tellin y about,” he says, “they wont fit int the mold thats branded on m soul,” a mold he refers to as “form” in the same speech (109). Existing form, as Woolf foresaw, could not contain the new content modern had to write about; the crisis within Ralph is a crisis of identity, first and foremost, but it is also a metaphor for Toomer’s struggle to put down on the cool surface of the page all that was within him. *Cane* attempts, rather than to fit the mold, to break it instead, and, for the transcendence that eludes Kabnis, one must look at the book’s entire design—to hear this circular sound-field stereophonically; to understand the place of each of its constituent parts—rather than to take the conclusion of “Kabnis,” a defeated and hungover Ralph, as somehow the last word.

When closely examining all of the pieces and their effect on one another, one sees the circularity of Toomer’s design assert itself. Karintha “has a child [fall] out of her womb onto a bed of pine-needles in the forest,” her fate unspoken and unknown; the following poem is called “Reapers,” their job just underway, the death of the field rat striking an ominous note (6). The book’s final poem, “Harvest Song,” sings of that particular undertaking, but the reaper here is “too fatigued to bind” the oats he has collected (69). The ensuing story, “Bona and Paul,” the first Toomer wrote and another



based on his life experience, has Paul, a black man who is able to pass, looking out of his window at university in Chicago and his mind traveling back to Georgia: “A Negress chants a lullaby beneath the mate-eyes of a southern planter. Her breasts are ample for the suckling of a song. She weans it, and sends it, curiously weaving, among lush melodies of cane and corn” (71). Enchanted by the “color and the music and the song” of the evening, not to mention Bona, a young white woman, Paul recurs to that same image. As he leaves the restaurant where the two of them dined with friends, he sees something in the eye of a black doorman that he feels he needs to address; Paul tells him that “something beautiful is going to happen,” that some long-promised harvest, some song to save them all, will arrive, only for him to discover that Bona has left (77). Salvation is always just out of reach, forever deferred.

“Bona and Paul” gives way to “Kabnis,” and the book’s final third; the play opens with the “weird chill” of a song that the night winds, “vagrant poets,” of Georgia sing, which Kabnis listens to “against his will”:

White man’s land.  
Niggers, sing.  
Burn, bear black children  
Till poor rivers bring  
Rest, and sweet glory  
In Camp Ground. (81)

Again, the song, of Toomer’s own composing though availing itself of imagery from spirituals, gives little hope except in death. Yet this song is re-sung in the play’s fifth part, this time not just to a helpless Kabnis, but also to the reader, shifted into frequencies she can detect, interpellated by the narrator says: “Hear their song.” It is now described as a “womb-song to the South” and, rather than vagrant poets, the winds are now the

“breathing of the unborn child” within the same “Negress” figure from “Bona and Paul,” her soft, pregnant belly the night sky that “throbs evenly against the torso of the South” (103). This unborn child may be the prophet foretold, ready to come down from the heavens in a melody or rise up from the earth as vibration, perhaps to avenge those who have for long suffered beneath that same old song. “Kabnis rises,” we are told, at the end of the play but only bodily, to begin a new day, not, as he tells Halsey’s sister Carrie, “th soul of me,” which “needs th risin” (113).

Similar to Isa and Giles in *Between the Acts*, Ralph’s ultimate fate goes unwritten. Night has given way to day, a “gold-glowing child” that sends a “birth-song slanting down gray dust streets and sleepy windows of the southern town” (115). Karantha’s child may be the savior—or she may turn out like Becky’s mixed race children, grown up “sullen and cunning” (10). As Toomer wrote in a later essay, “[The black man] is about to harvest whatever the past has stored, good and evil” (“Emergent” 51). It is an “about to” that never comes to fruition in *Cane*; as Charles T. Davis argues, “Toomer is not prepared to explore completion or to celebrate a triumphant ending—nor was this his intention—because completion would mean nothing less than the promise of a redeemed America, a fusion of North and South” (34). But just like Woolf’s work, Toomer’s novel is not one to be read conventionally, the end understood as being “The End.” The best that he can offer, to render this unredeemed world formally, is the circle of his design—enclosing a multitude of genres, recording a plurality of voices, vibrations, and songs, and spiraling like the movement of dialectics—and what comes with it, nothing more than the prospect of a new day.

### *Conclusion*

The first publicized attempt at electrical recording was made by two British tinkerers, Lionel Guest and H.O. Merriman, of a burial service for the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey. On Armistice Day 1920, this service was relayed by telephone wires to their recording machine setup in a nearby building. Such an endeavor was only made possible, Roland Gelatt relates, due to the breakthroughs made in microphones and amplifiers during World War I (219). The technology of war was responsible at once both for the killing of soldiers and for the recording and disseminating of their mourning, an example of Steve Goodman's claim about the availability of sound technologies to be steered in unintended and unimagined directions. "Music..." Jacques Attali writes, "is intuition, a path to knowledge. A path? No—A battlefield" and this chapter contains its fair share of casualties, of those who gave up the fight and those who never had a chance (20).

Alan Blumlein, the engineer with the greatest personal claim to having invented stereophonic recording, never lived to see his ideas applied. This was due in part to other ideas of his, those developed while working for the British government. Blumlein and others worked on a radar system called H2S, the first capable of scanning the ground, identifying targets at night or in inclement weather. On June 7, 1942, exactly two years before D-Day, Blumlein and a number of others died during a test of the radar system when the plane carrying them crashed in the West Midlands. His innovations in the field of entertainment, spurred on by an annoyance with the cinema's inability to deal

effectively with sound, led him into military work and that same sky, from which he would never return.

Toomer, too, would carry on no further experiments; Frank had advised, “Keep yourself warm underneath, in the soil, where the throb is,” but Toomer ended up seeking transcendence, abandoning the novel and pursuing his quest for wholeness and harmony instead in mysticism (*Brother* 37). Writing in the third-person, an experiment with non-identification, in notes from September 1925, two years on from *Cane* and amid his studies of Gurdjieff, Toomer describes his situation: “His good psychological digestion is cheating America of a great (?) [sic] literature. For owing to it, a line suffices for that process which otherwise would need a novel” (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 143). He puts it more directly in a 1930 autobiographical manuscript: “To me, life itself is the greatest material. I would far rather form a man than form a book” (“Reflections” 19). That anyone expected another *Cane* was, for Toomer, one of the “queer misunderstandings of my life” (“Years” 123) He would abandon the South entirely, a region becoming ever more hollowed out by migration, with those resonant songs now but echoes. After having been so passionately engaged with the outside world—described in one review as a writer whose “emotions had out-run his expression”—Toomer opts out of the struggles of his time, becoming a Quaker and, thus, a pacifist, in time for World War II and choosing, according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Rudolph P. Byrd, to pass for a white man during the fight for civil rights (Gregory 375; lxx).<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> “It is our carefully considered judgment, based upon an analysis of archival evidence previously overlooked by other scholars, that Jean Toomer—for all of his pioneering theorized about what today we might call a multi-cultural or mixed-race ancestry—was a Negro who decided to pass for white” (lxx). For that analysis in full, see their introduction to their Norton Critical Edition of *Cane* (lxvi-lx).

Woolf, as is known all too well, committed suicide, throwing herself into the river Ouse on the morning of March 28, 1941. On the verso of a draft typescript of *Between the Acts* is a typescript of one of Woolf's final stories, "The Symbol" (1941), the premise of which has a woman writing a letter to a loved one, which is interrupted by a great tragedy outside of her window.<sup>128</sup> Toward the end of the story, there is a selection that seems to sum up the sacrifices of all of the aforementioned: "'They died,'" the woman writes, "'in an attempt to discover...' There seemed no fitting conclusion" (5).<sup>129</sup> It is as bleak a finale as a journal entry, contained in a manuscript notebook for *Between the Acts*, entitled "London in War." "The individual is merged in the mob," Woolf writes. "It as if [sic] the song had stopped—the melody, the unnecessary, the voluntary" (5). For Woolf as a writer, as much a slave to her audience as Miss La Trobe, her greatest fear—one that the war might make possible—was the loss of resonance, of a public receptive of, and responsive to, art whom she might imagine as she composed.<sup>130</sup> It is a fear that followed her to her death; in one of her final diary entries, she wrote, "There is no echo in Rodmell—only waste air" (*Diary V* 357). A failure of echo location, to have the sound waves generated by oneself reflected back at one, is the end of art, and the end of civilization.

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<sup>128</sup> In the spirit of her attempts to produce pure sound, Woolf has a moment in this story that brilliantly indexes a disastrous moment, an avalanche killing climbers, signaling that which is beyond representation: "The pen fell from her hand, and the drop of ink straggled in a zig zag line down the page" ("The Symbol" 5).

<sup>129</sup> The particular page from *Between the Acts* that backs this quote has Lucy saying, near novel's end, "And we musn't, my brother says, thank the author" (140). There is something deeply poignant about this pairing, about the painful, difficult, and thankless work involved in pursuing and furthering art.

<sup>130</sup> As she writes in *Three Guineas*, "In the first place let us draw what all letter-writers instinctively draw, a sketch of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Without someone warm and breathing on the other side of the page, letters are worthless" (3).

Such a fixation on endings, however, goes against the arguments made within this chapter, and within the novels themselves. Miss La Trobe, reflecting on what had transpired in the play's wake, is temporarily gripped by triumph, but this is a passing emotion:

Her gift meant nothing. If they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts; If the pearls had been real and the funds illimitable—it would have been a better gift. Now it had gone to join the others.

‘A failure,’ she groaned, and stooped to put away the records. (142)

This lament is not dissimilar from those expressed by Joseph Conrad, the great impressionist who so often thought himself a failure because the work of art failed to live up to the idea, the impetus, the initial vision. For La Trobe, the song has stopped, but there remains some resonance for the remainder of the evening, echoes of the day's events; unwinding at the public house, “[s]he raised her glass to her lips. And drank. And listened” (144). Interpreting the response Dan Moore receives from the earth when he puts his ear to the wall in *Cane*, Barbara Bowen writes, “For Dan, . . . hearing a response so strongly confirms the self that it denies discontinuity and allows a vision of lasting renewal.” The ability to imagine “continuity with the past,” heard so often in both novels as voices from the past speak low into the ear of the present, “enables [one] to imagine regeneration in the future” (13). La Trobe, for whom “another play always lay behind the play she had just written,” listens and soon loses sight of the world around her, and has a vision of “two scarcely perceptible figures” and a tree “pelted with starlings,” the same tree she hid behind all day long, one earlier described as “bird-buzzing” and “bird-vibrant,” a tree that “became a rhapsody, a quivering cacophony, a whizz and vibrant

rapture, branches, leaves, birds syllabbling discordantly, life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree” (144, 142).

“She heard the first words,” and so there would be more art, and civilization would rebuild, even if it is “to be built by... orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves,” but perhaps scraps arranged along different lines than before (127). In a small leather-bound notebook from 1938, Woolf wrote a five-part schema dated October of that year, above which appears the letters “PH”;<sup>131</sup> the third part was labeled “The War,” but was struck through and replaced with “Love,” and is followed by “Art” before “End” (Notebook 5). Even if art seems to have momentarily failed us, even if the new-world messiah seems to be tarrying for far too long, it will survive the war, there will be another dawning. As long as civilization has a pulse—continues to vibrate and be vibrant—and is mindful of it, we may remain, to play on Woolf’s rendering of the gramophone’s final words, in the betweenness of unity and dispersity: un-deceased (136).

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<sup>131</sup> In the spirit of full disclosure, this “PH,” given the quality of Woolf’s handwriting, could just as well be an “RF,” for *Roger Fry*, the book she began the day before *Between the Acts*. While *Between the Acts* doesn’t consist of chapters of parts, the pageant does, and there are complaints by the audience about the Army being left out, and *Roger Fry* has eleven chapters, not five (107, 134). Either way, the central point does not change, Woolf choosing love over war.

Marked Territory and Marred Interiority in Muriel Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means*,

George Lamming's *The Emigrants* and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*

Modern life has many advantages not available 25 years ago, but it also has some disadvantages, one of which is noise. We produce it inside our homes, outside our homes, in the air and even underground. Electronic devices and modern home appliances do the job inside, while modern transportation and industry set up a din outside, to say nothing of the noise we humans produce ourselves. All this noise adds up to an almost unbearable situation at times, which makes insulation against noise equally as important as insulation against heat and cold.

—Stanley Schuler, "Building Quiet into Your Home" (1956)

A special reference must be made to the disturbance from neighbours' radio and television sets, record players, and tape recorders, which are sources of frequent complaint. Ultimately, the best remedy for this disturbance is sympathy and consideration between the people concerned.

—*Report of the Committee on the Problem of Noise* (1963)

'Right, son, you go off and get a nice cup of chai for yourself and then type all that filth and rottenness out with a clothes-peg on your nose, three copies.'

—Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)

In the epigraph above taken from Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*

(1962), a police officer instructs a transcriber, who had just taken shorthand of the confessions of the novel's protagonist, Alex, to protect his nose as he types up the official copy for Alex to sign. We do not know for sure whether Alex used his teenage argot (nadsat) or used the Queen's English, but for the sake of argument let us say that, using the language of his set, he recounted, as he himself says he did, "the ultra-violence, the crasting, the dratsing, the old in-out in-out" (71). Understood this way, there is something more fearsome about the language he uses to describes the events—"[o]dd bits of rhyming slang.... gipsy talk,.... [Slav] roots"—than the events themselves (114). The transcriber looked "a bit faint" after filling numerous pages with Alex's account; even in



its transliterated afterlife on the page, nadsat remains quite literally noxious, unhygienic, and something to be guarded against (71).

This putrid, pervasive dimension of sound—a filth and rottenness that can only be shut out with suitable protection—is one I will examine in this chapter. Attempts to stamp out stench and control noise have historically been linked, Karen Bijsterveld found, as many of the latter’s combatants borrowed strategies from the former’s successful campaign in the nineteenth century. Stench was identified as “the seed of contagious and dangerous disease by an elite that managed to intervene deeply in private households” (3). Noise, however, proved far more difficult to define and measure and, moreover, never rose to a “robust enough status of societal danger” to warrant such interventions and therefore fell outside the regulatory powers of authorities (24). Yet numerous studies would show that, for example, noise takes a toll on the brain over time by raising the pressure placed on it (“Pressure” 21). However, if one complained about noise in the 1930s, it was seen, as a champion of the cause of noise abatement Sir Henry Richards wrote in *The Journal of Royal Society of the Arts*, as a “sign of neurosis.” Repulsion by stench and by noise, he believes, should all be one: “It is not a crime to be sensitive to foul smells..., nor do I esteem my sensibility excessive if I shrink from the torture of the Klaxon any more than when I feel repelled by a foul smell...” (628). He concluded that the “disease” of noise was “getting out of hand,” something one sees firsthand in the novels under examination herein (632).

In this chapter, I continue focusing, as in the last chapter, on the soundscape, that of an urban England of World War II, the post-war period, and the unspecified future<sup>132</sup>—Muriel Spark’s *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954), and *A Clockwork Orange*, respectively, authors who originated in very different parts of the British Empire. In that previous chapter, the human was bracketed so as to hear what the soundscape might say; here, she is reintroduced so that we might see the effects of that same soundscape on its populace. The city soundscape, unlike that of the English countryside in *Between the Acts* (1941), is what R. Murray Schafer calls “lo-fi,” that is, one where “(t)here is no distance; there is only presence. Everything is close-miked. There is cross-talk on all the channels, and in order for the most ordinary sounds to be heard they have to be monstrously amplified” (25).<sup>133</sup> Monstrously present sound such as this works on the mind and the body, not vibrationally as in the previous chapter, but epidemiologically, the seed of a hazardous, widespread disease. Unlike Steve Goodman and his concept of audio virology, the spread of the sonic through affective contagion, I want to entertain more seriously the pathological connotations of a word like “disease” (196). Once in control of her audio technology, the individual finds herself in

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<sup>132</sup> The location of *A Clockwork Orange* is never mentioned, and as Geoffrey Aggeler has observed, the novel, right down to the names of its characters, was as influenced by England’s youth gangs and slang as it was by the Russian *stilyagi* Burgess and his wife encountered on a trip to Leningrad in 1971 (134). That said, Leningrad reminded Burgess of his native Manchester, or possibly Salford, and in a 1973 audio recording of the novel, Burgess affects an accent—different from his own—far more Mancunian than Muscovite (Burgess, *Time* 42).

<sup>133</sup> A similar quote is used in the previous chapter, with the major difference between the two being the change in adjective, from “increasingly” to “monstrously.” The source of this quote is the original article from 1973 that Schafer revised in 1976 for *The Tuning of the World*. Schafer’s decision to tone down the language in the revision is an unfortunate muting of that earlier moment’s immediacy.

the post-war era infected and infiltrated by sound, the loud twentieth century inflicting itself upon her senses, nerves, thoughts, and relations with others.

In each work, we see its immediate effects on the psychology of characters, forced by economic conditions to live in close proximity with one another, as indexed in their discourse. In Spark's novella, a reflection on life near the end of World War II set in a hostel for young working women living away from their families in London, this can be seen most innocuously, in the way that the hostel had been "infected by the Air Force idiom current amongst the dormitory virgins" (34). In Lamming's *The Emigrants*, a novel following over the course of two years the qualified successes and disappointments of a group of West Indian émigrés to London in the early 1950s, it is apparent in a self-hating outburst by one of the titular subjects, who has internalized what his former colonial masters have said about him and his people, which made him feel "as though it were some one [sic] else within him who had spoken" (64). The onomatopoeia and repetition that stipples the surface of Burgess's Alex's first-person account of his attempted re-education by the state in the "not very distant future," too, gives evidence of this, as in his rendering of the "clack clack clacky clack clack clackity clackclack" of a typewriter (*TS* 1; *Clockwork* 20). Like a cancerous ear worm, these infections proliferate heedlessly and frenetically, vengeful versions of the refrains found within the opening pages of each novel, that otherwise serve to anchor the texts.<sup>134</sup> What I will argue here is that, in all

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<sup>134</sup> For Spark, this would be her opening sentence, "Long ago in 1945," a clause that returns to end the novel (this applies, too, to the poetry recited throughout by Joanna Childe) (1, 120). For Lamming, it is the line "We were all waiting for something to happen," which reappears in the closing paragraphs as "Something was bound to happen" (5, 281-82). Lastly, for Burgess, it is "What's it going to be then, eh?" which appears at the beginning of each of the novel's three parts (1, 75, 130).

three of these novels, written by authors with great auditory imaginations,<sup>135</sup> economically- and sonically-disadvantaged characters struggle with maintaining control of their own narratives, living in cramped and overcrammed spaces, their interiors and interiority breached by outside forces beyond their control. Transcendence, ultimately, is only found either by surrendering control (Lamming's Miss Bis), going mad (Spark's Selina and Lamming's Higgins), risking death (Lamming's Dickson), or all three (Burgess's Alex).

By the mid-1950s, the defensive strategy of soundproofing at last becomes relatively affordable for middle-class consumers, giving homeowners the ability to soften, with varying success, the "disadvantage" of noise, as my first epigraph puts it. Demarcating interiors and exteriors is precisely what soundproofing enabled one to do; it had the double benefit of shielding one's own private exchanges while at the same holding at bay cacophonous contagion. Peaceful, private interiors were not for everyone, however, since for much of its existence soundproofing was the privilege of the well-off individual and not of the citizen. State-of-the-art insulation could be found, for example, in modernist mandarin Greenberg's Central Park West apartment, where he moved in 1960. Upon visiting, Caroline Jones observed how his space, and other machines for living just like it, were specifically engineered "to separate and define their interiors from

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<sup>135</sup> In addition to her poetry and novels, Spark also wrote radio plays, collected in *Voices at Play* (1961). Lamming, a young poet so drawn to Conrad because of the latter's "tonal quality," was a broadcaster for the BBC World Service's *Caribbean Voices* program (Munro and Sander 7). Burgess, a talented and prolific composer, told the *New York Times Book Review* in 1970, "I wish people would think of me as a musician who writes novels, instead of a novelist who writes music on the side" (Clemons 2).

the actual machines producing unprecedented acoustical onslaughts from vehicles in the street below” (399).<sup>136</sup>

Possession of such well-defined boundaries is not a surprise for someone like Greenberg, a critic among whose most famous pronouncements must be the following, from “Towards a Newer Laocoön” (1940): “The arts lie safe now, each within its ‘legitimate’ boundaries” and “The arts, then, have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated, and defined” (41-42, 42). A “notion of purity” had taken hold, but had long reigned in Greenberg’s private life, as Jones persistently argues, a man she claims had experienced formative bouts of “bodily shame” (41; Jones 396).<sup>137</sup> “For Greenberg...,” she writes, “smell and odor were to be colonized by hygiene, channelled for higher purposes of seeing and being” (396). Transcendence required regulation of the body, an intervention into its most intimate processes.

But what is to be done with the impulsive, involuntary flows of bodies? Burgess’s Alex—while in prison, but before his treatment—finds one thing that he’s sorry for doing: vomiting on the floor of his cell in front of cellmates who had just beaten him. “Sorry, brothers,” he says, “that was not the right thing at all. Sorry sorry sorry,” for

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<sup>136</sup> Living in a quite different New York apartment some years earlier was Ralph Ellison. Hemmed in by an uproar on all sides in his ground-level apartment, he writes of how he had a choice: “[I]t was either live with music or die with noise,” and so he used his arsenal of audio equipment as armament (60). His neighbor above was a singer; in her voice, reminiscent of Conrad’s encounter with the phonograph, he hears reflected back at him his own failings as an author: “If she sang badly I’d hear my own futility in the windy sound, if well, I’d stare at my typewriter and despair that I should ever make my prose so sing” (62).

<sup>137</sup> Jones bases her argument on, among other things, Greenberg’s visceral response to a 1946 retrospective at the Modern Museum of Art of Georgia O’Keeffe’s “pseudo-modern art,” which he saw as a collision between modern art and “hygiene and scatology.” The museum’s experts “should have had at least enough sophistication to keep them apart” (“Review” 87). For more of her analysis of the relationship between Greenberg as embodied subject and his world-view, see her chapter “The Modernist Sensorium” in *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg’s Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (389-436).

earlier in the novel he says the one thing he cannot stand to see was “a [man] all filthy and rolling and burping and drunk,” particularly one “howling away at the filthy songs of his fathers and going blerp blerp in between as it might be a filthy old orchestra in his stinking rotten guts” (70, 13). Why should he find all of this shameful and disgraceful? Singing, like hiccups and presumably burping, would fall into the category of what Mladen Dolar calls the non-voice, “rising from the body’s entrails,” representing “the voice untamed by structure” (25, 32). It is a “bodily emission” and “bodily missile” that “lays... bare, discloses, uncovers, reveals [the] interior,” which has an “obscene” side (59, 71, 80). “One could indeed say,” he writes, “that there is an effect—or, rather, an affect—of shame that accompanies voice: one is ashamed of using one’s voice because it exposes some hidden intimacy to the Other” and “yield[s] power” (80). Alex is ashamed because, a “victim of the modern age,” he momentarily lost the ability to regulate his body, to administer his processes, just as much as the filthy old drunk (153). That which was emitted from the innermost of their beings, whether the song or the sick<sup>138</sup>—drawing attention to themselves through their odor and unpleasant appearance—are on display for all to see, their insides exposed. His regurgitation is not an expression of his interiority, but rather a symptom of a society that has worked him over, of his inability to speak purely for himself.<sup>139</sup> His acting out can be read as anxiety over his loss of an individual identity.

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<sup>138</sup> An analog to this aligning of song and spew can be found earlier in the novel when, after having punched Dim for interrupting the woman singing at the milk bar, Alex says it was like Dim was “singing blood” (28).

<sup>139</sup> Geoffrey Aggeler points out that “Alex” or “a-lex” means a “lack of words,” and that Alex, though articulate, is “wordless” in the sense that he experiences life directly, sensuously (173).

“[S]ymptomatic,” an unnamed Jamaican in *The Emigrants* says—that’s “w’at a class o’ doctor” calls it when a group of people, West Indians in this case, “start callin’ his name all the time, for all an’ sundry to know, watch out, him ain’t sure w’at his name is” (65). In Lamming, the emigrants are trying to express a group identity, but they have already been marked, so much so that they do not know who they are. At the risk of overworking a distasteful motif, I build further on the above diagnosis by excerpting more from the Jamaican, whose discourse makes an odd rhetorical maneuver:

[D]e great nations make plans for dese said islands. England, France, Spain, all o’ them, them vomit up what them din’t want, an’ the vomit settle there in that Caribbean Sea.... The great nations, England an’ the rest, them went on stirring the mixture, them stir that vomit to suit themselves, an’ them stir an’ stir till only Gawd knows how,... them stir an’ stir till the vomit start to take on a new life, it was like ammonia, get too strong for those who stirrin’ it.... that vomit feel funny, queer, where it settle. It want to find a stomach ‘cause it realise that it is expose’.... When other people say that them is neither one thing nore the other, but just different from every other complete thing, them get frightened, sometimes shamed... (66)

In this example, the vomit feels as though it needs to apologize for itself, for the offense given. Despite its having had no role in its own production, it feels as if it must apologize for its very existence, but as an emission of the non-voice this is impossible. Feeling exposed, it wishes to hide away, suffering like Alex from the tyranny of eyes, as seen throughout this dissertation (but especially in the second chapter), an organ that becomes sovereign through the severing and colonization of the senses by critics like Greenberg. The modern critic and the modern victim are here aligned in a certain self-loathing, a desire for purity, and a need for defined borders—between outside and in—and boundaries, between what one believes oneself to be and the attempts at self-definition by others.

In each of the above examples, a member of the so-called underclass is identified, either by themselves or another, as a variety of living, breathing filth, one that, in Lamming, has the audacity to give a name, a “good name,” to who they are (66). They have aspirations toward selfhood but are seen as having no right to it since, in a manner of speaking, they cannot afford it. Expressions of raw interiority and the unhygienic become linked as things greeted with scorn and shame, just as stench and noise were allied in the examples I began this introduction with, signaling the sonic realm as something, too, to be colonized, isolated. Yet, Greenberg believed that music, at least avant-garde music of the twentieth century, was itself a “pure art,” that is to say it had nothing to say about anything except itself. It had become a great example, something from which the other arts could learn, “not to ape its effects but to borrow its principle” (41). If the characters in these novels, not to mention their counterparts in modern life, were seeking to erect walls to keep the talk and noise of the world out, these novelists, against Greenberg’s prescription, were aping the effects of music so that their works might leap off the page and that their readers might hear these novels teeming with noises but also with voices, symphonies, calypsos, and popular standards. One way they achieve this, as I will show, is through the use of refrains, which dislodge themselves and drift from their point of origin and hunt and haunt the characters, attempting to rewrite their hard wiring and turn their bodies against themselves. The characters require, in the end, the epigraphic prescription of the Committee on the Problem of Noise, that is, sympathy, toward their plights, and consideration, of their right to self-expression (“Noise” 117).



*Interiors*

“SIR,” the composer Algernon Ashton wrote *The Spectator* in 1935, “What are the chief drawbacks in modern life? Surely ‘noise’ is one of the greatest. Who has not been unpleasantly aroused by the early morning jangling of milk bottles?” (19). Unlike later, avant-garde composers like John Cage, Ashton, 76 at the time of writing his letter, does not see musicality everywhere, instead he draws clear lines between the chamber music he himself mostly composed and the noises nesting at his doorstep. In the same year, Sir Henry Richards, chairman of the British Anti-Noise League, makes a similar complaint:

In quite recent years the internal combustion engine and the radio have brought with them not only an added quantity of sound but a different quality. To the rhythmical hum of a factory there is always possible a chance of adaptation, but the starting of a motor engine, the change of gears, the hoot of the horn are not rhythmical. They startle and alarm. Nor does the modern house protect us from either inside or outside noise like the very solid homes of our fathers. (626)

For both Ashton and Richards, there is something untranslatable about these noises, with their lack of fixed rhythms, something that prevents one from domesticating them. They cannot be heard as imitative, like birdsong, but rather they embody a shift in the character of sound, having become rife with clicking, scratching, and scraping. Both statements make reference to that year’s Noise Abatement Exhibition, the first of its kind, at the Science Museum in London.<sup>140</sup> The exhibition displayed a vast array of inventions meant to make humanity once more the master of the soundscape, and not mastered by it, from

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<sup>140</sup> Ashton’s take-away from the exhibit was that only rubber stood between us and chaos: “A visit to the Noise Abatement Exhibition which is being held in the Science Museum, South Kensington, until June 30th leaves me with the firm impression that rubber more than any other substance is one of the great factors in making modern life more silent.... Future generations may well put it on record that Mr. Dunlop, the father of the rubber industry, not only helped to make all wheeled things move faster and easier, but they may also say of him, ‘He made the world a quieter place in an age when industry and traffic threatened us with din’” (19).

slam-proof doors, wireless receivers that do not disturb the neighbors, and silencers for engines of all kinds.

Despite this unprecedented response, the problem of noise was not a new one, and Richards is one of the first to acknowledge that, while at the same time pointing out that noise “is continuous and pervading in a degree never experienced before” (626). Indeed, the first example of “sound-proof” is dated to 1884 by the *OED*, but privately it had been used even earlier, perhaps most famously in the correspondence of Thomas Carlyle, who undertook to have a soundproof study built in his London home in 1853 (“Sound”).<sup>141</sup> The dream, though, goes even further back, as he wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson on September 9<sup>th</sup> of that year: “Seriously, I had for 12 years had such a soundproof inaccessible Apartment schemed out in my head.” It was “a *last* desperate spasmodic effort of building,—a new top-story to the house, out of which is to be made one ‘spacious room’ (so they call it, tho’ it is under 20 feet square) where there shall be air *ad libitum*, light from the sky, and no *sound*, not even that of the Cremorne Cannons, shall find access to me any more!” (CLO 10.1215/lt-18530909-TC-RWE-01). The end product, however, as is often the case, fails to live up to the original conception, as he explained to his brother John about eight months later: “The place is far enough from being absolutely *deaf*, as promised: but it is certainly very quiet, beyond all other rooms (the squirting of my pen, and some rumbling of the east wind overhead, are *all* I hear at this moment)” (10.1215/lt-18540516-TC-JAC-01). In private, he puts on less of a brave

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<sup>141</sup> Returning, too, from the opening chapter is John Picker, who wrote at length about this, contextualizing it amid the rise of middle-class professional “brain-work” in Victorian London and the campaign against street musicians. For more, see “The Soundproof Study: Victorian Professionals, Work Space, and Urban Noise” in *Victorian Studies* 42.4 (Spring 1999/2000): 427-53.

face, confiding in his journal, less than a week after the letter to John, that he must conclude that the room was a “*failure*, therefore, this; one of many” (CLO 10.1215/lit-18540516-TC-JAC-01). “To have an interior environment” that allowed one to forget the outside world with its noise and filth, Jenni Calder writes, was “a priority of middle-class aspiration” in Victorian times, but it would be left to future brain-workers, to use a term that gained traction during the era, to realize Carlyle’s long-gestating dream (15).

For example, Greenberg’s mid-century modern Central Park West home, Caroline Jones notes, was full of all of the cutting-edge technology of the “modern otological administration,” from a white noise generator to shag carpeting (399). All of these developments functioned as the obverse of the sciences that had for many years been developing ways of capturing, transmitting, and intensifying the auditory. In *The Emigrants*, the home of the Pearsons, a white English couple for whom family ties necessitates a grudging welcome to one of the titular West Indian *arrivées*, is an example of this otological administration. The living room is described as “an entire climate” and a “persistent rebuke” to their guest, Collis, like Lamming himself a Barbadian writer (139). It had a “silent pressure” that was “unbearable,” and likewise an “unnatural” silence “reign[ed] over the entire house” (142, 169, 143). Collis seeks the sanctuary of the lavatory so as to “rescue his sanity” (138). “If science had failed to silence the city,” Emily Thompson argues in *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2004), “acoustical technology could nonetheless create quiet places of refuge within it.” She is quick to point out, however, that the new sound of silence—not that of the “hi-fidelity” rustic soundscape, whose charms Carlyle nostalgizes for Emerson—is one experienced not by the people but

by private citizens (171). A reader of *Popular Mechanics* from likely a very different New York than Greenberg's, "annoyed" by the piano and other "objectionable" sounds made by his upstairs neighbors, asked if he might soundproof his apartment. He is told that, unfortunately, in 1955 the process remains "comparatively expensive," and that a partial treatment is all that is available to him, one that "will very likely reduce noise from above to the point where it is no longer objectionable" ("Clinic" 226). For manifold social and economic reasons, one's neighbors began to have a greater effect on one's own wellbeing—and some, as in this chapter's primary texts, had many more neighbors than others.

The interiors in these novels vary greatly in terms of their dimensions and composition, but, from hostel to barber shop to tower block, there is one commonality for their protagonists: overcrowding and all that results from that. To his annoyance, life at the hostel for Collis in *The Emigrants* is shot-through by the sound of radio, as is Jane Wright's at the May of Teck Club in *Spark*, who also has to deal with the "haggling bouts that took place" (145; 26). "Subliminal penetration" is how Dr. Brannom in *A Clockwork Orange* accounts for nadsat; the dormitory girls in *Spark*, who are so lacking in individuation that they always speak in one voice, have fits of "corporate laughter," which they picked up from their boyfriends in the RAF; the unidentified passengers in *The Emigrants* aboard *The Golden Image*, the ship taking them to England, are "unaware that they were repeating much of what Higgins and Tornado had already discussed" (114; 86; 84). The lack of agency exemplified by the inability to administer the soundscape surrounding oneself leaves the individual vulnerable, as shall be seen, to the attempts

made by others to regulate one's own self-definition, to alter the fictions one's existence depends on.

Countering this, though, there are moments in each work where one elects to receive or collaborate in a performance of some kind—whether of music, poetry, or storytelling—that serve to involve the individual in something larger than herself and her immediate surroundings, something elevating and uniting. At moments like this, the characters achieve a felicitous accommodation with their surroundings, harmony. But these prove all too fleeting and the price of permanent accommodation, as my readings will show, is dear, leaving one to concur with Alex when he says, “[W]hat I wanted now was get out of this mesto called HOME” (165). Building walls “erected by silence” is only a temporary solution in *The Emigrants*, and Spark’s Selina Redwood’s “high disregard of all surrounding noises” is but poor insulation (30, 75). Transience, too, is of little help; with the exception of *The Girls of Slender Means*, the characters all flit from interior to interior, from the “intimacy and warmth” of an emigrant hair salon in Lamming to “the great unearthly zoo” of Staja Number 84F, Tier 6 in Burgess, where cells intended for three instead house six (148; 40, 84). As if to foreground the sense of immuration in each, the novels move from room to room but without much view of the outside world, as though there were nothing but interiors—as though, as the emigrant Higgins fears, “beyond there was *no-THING*” (105). That novel’s representative of colonial authority, Frederick, a former District Commissioner in Nigeria, calls all open spaces of transit “arenas of judgment” (171). In many regards, then, one is better off staying inside, even if, like Carlyle’s “sound-proof” room, the walls offer imperfect

acoustic absorption, since it is better than the alternative. The page, too, offers a flimsy defense against authors intent on their work being heard; in the next section, I will bring out the affinity of each with sound and how they use it as a raw material to construct the resonant and reverberant forms of their respective works.

*Ear-Pieces*

Upon the suggestion of a BBC producer, Spark in 1957 turned her talents toward creating drama for the radio and in August of that year her first work for the medium, “The Party Through the Wall,” was performed. That play, set in a formerly private house converted into flats, dramatizes—and supernaturalizes—the situation that many sensitive to noise were experiencing in their homes. It concerns a Miss Ethel Carson, an older single woman seeking suitably soundless lodging: “It can’t be too quiet for me. No wirelesses? No babies? I sleep badly. I suffer from my nerves. No late parties in the house?” (229). She is in luck when she discovers that one of her neighbors is a doctor who so happens to “specialise in nerves,” a Dr. Fell, who also functions as the narrator (233). Spark plays with the format, having Miss Carson amusingly interrupt and interact with the narrator’s presumably non-diegetic narration, which on the page would have been resolutely for the reader’s ears only. Miss Carson, to her surprise, is kept up at night by the noise of a party being held in an apartment that, by all appearances, is occupied by Fell’s elderly invalid sister. Miss Carson, described as being “particularly alive to the invisible forces around us,” has it explained to her by Dr. Fell that what has really happened is that his “sister’s mind has been conveyed to yours, so that what you heard last night was an emanation, Ethel, from my poor sister” (244). When she complains to the housekeeper, Miss Carson

is told that there is no Dr. Fell—he is a voice and nothing more—at which point the listener realizes Miss Carson is being haunted.

Miss Carson has suffered from visual and auditory hallucinations, as much as the radio listener, both susceptible to invisible forces; at the end, Spark is simply reminding her audience of the bare facts of the medium, of its limitations but also of its ability to surpass them when the form is in the hands of an ingenious practitioner. One thing that unites the Scottish Catholic-convert poet, the Barbadian emigrant self-described “poet in the theater,” and the Mancunian composer and sergeant-major is that none of them began as novelists—indeed, in the case of Spark and Burgess, their first novels were not published until they were near 40 years-old (Munro and Sander 10). They brought to bear upon their narrative works a knowledge of how the ear functions when engaged with a wide array of genres. In *Voices at Play* (1961), the collection of her radio drama or, as the book’s sub-title has it, her “Ear-Pieces,” Spark writes in an “Author’s Note,” “The plays were written for the outward, and the stories for the inward ear,” that latter phrase echoing F. Scott Fitzgerald’s playwriting for the ear of the reader (v). Lamming, who ceased to write verse after completing his first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), told an interviewer, “I still write very much with my ear, very much an aural and visual prose...” (Munro and Sander 10). Burgess, in an “Epistle to the Reader” from *Napoleon Symphony* (1983), confessed—in verse, no less—his *idée fixe* with crafting “narrative prose / Made to behave like music” (348). In this section, I will show how these authors’ investment in sound led to the “inward ear” finding outward manifestation on the page.

Spark recounts in her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae* (1992) a foggy night in wartime London when she found her way home due to “good sound street-direction” on the part of a policeman who helped her on her way (145). Used here adjectivally, sound, of course, does not mean what I would like it to, but, in those days of black-outs and bombings, attention to sound meant remaining safe. Spark sets the scene in her first night in the city, the spring of 1944:

The train got in after dark and I put up at the Euston Station hotel. It was not long before the sirens wailed. I had so far only heard them on the newsreels. The fire-wardens were shouting from the streets to anyone who was not observing the black-out from the darkened windows. This was a period of intense incendiary bombing. It went on all night. (143)

Beyond mere survival, her ears would serve her in good stead professionally, as well. During the war, she worked as a Duty Secretary at Radio Atlantic, a propagator of “black” propaganda, that is, the station gave off the impression that it was operated by loyal German citizens—“[d]etailed truth with believable lies” (148). Part of her job required using a telephone called the “scrambler,” which had a continual “jangling noise” that made enemy interception of the calls quite difficult. “One learned to listen through the jangle,” she writes, recalling what, back in my first chapter, Jonathan Sterne dubbed “audile technique” with regard to the phonograph, the listener having to work with the recording in order to yield pleasure from it (152).<sup>142</sup> She worked with many people whom she only knew by voice. Years later, in New York, she encountered a man whom she felt as if she knew for some reason—and she did, but only through those nights working the scrambler, his voice having preceded the rest of him by decades (153).

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<sup>142</sup> Parenthetically, Spark notes how, when in India years later, the “ever-present radio music sounded to me just like that scrambler” (152).



Invisible voices and a phone that, if not exactly scrambled, had a bad line occasionally appear in the present-day frame of *The Girls of Slender Means*, in which Jane both spreads and gathers information about the apparent martyr death in Haiti of Nicholas Farrington, a poet manqué who during the war idealized the girls and their club. When Spark begins work on *Girls*, a reminiscence on those war days that she spent in lodgings not dissimilar from the May of Teck, she had had her last radio play, “The Danger Zone,” air on the BBC; had won the Italia Prize, along with Tristram Cary, for their musical adaptation of Spark’s *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) for the radio; and was overseeing the production of her only stage play, *Doctors of Philosophy* (1962), which was not well received. Amid all of this, works that literally spoke, it is no wonder that *Girls* is a book that “dance[s] and sing[s]”, a piece of printed matter that features repeated invocations to the reader to “listen.”<sup>143</sup> (Josipivici 34; 44-46). “A prose style is not just a decorator’s piece of icing on the cake,” Spark told *Partisan Review*, “it’s a form of expressing a theme that can’t be expressed another way” (445). The prose style one develops, she believes, delimits the kind of thoughts one can have, the kind of world one can depict. There was something for Spark, despite her experience across a breadth of genres and media, in the material of *Girls* that called for a novel, but a novel, I argue, that only could have born from this wealth of experience. The voice she settled on for herself was a style born of an “aural imagination,” of a poetic sensibility that “hear[s] inner

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<sup>143</sup> Over these pages, Rudi reads from Nicholas Farrington’s book so that Jane might know how bad it is and Joanna is offering an example of declamation to one of her pupils. Fittingly, “listen” is one of the few words Joanna speaks in the course of the novel that isn’t a recitation from the oeuvre of secular and saintly scribes.

voices—words, sentences—rather than seeing visualized scenes” (450). In other words, a style derived from an active inward ear, not an outward eye.

A poetic sensibility is predominant in Lamming’s work, as well, which has led, at worst, to accusations of his style possessing willful difficulty<sup>144</sup> and, at best, readers confused by his hybridity, “a rather silly sort of reader,” as Lamming himself describes them. “You used to get the comment: ‘Well, what’s he writing? Is he writing poetry or prose? What is this, is this a novel or what? Listen to this! Nobody writes prose like this!’” (Munro and Sander 10). Lamming, as a young man, was drawn to writers who also sustained similar criticisms—Conrad, for example. The attractiveness of Conrad was to be found in his “tonal quality,” in his “appeal to the ear” (7). *In the Castle of My Skin* was graced with an introduction by Richard Wright, who, in language that would be high praise for any acolyte of Conrad, commends Lamming’s “quietly melodious prose” for “render[ing] with fidelity the myth content of folk-minds” (vi).

Of the three novels in this chapter, *The Emigrants* is the most formally adventurous, seeming to riff on *Cane* (1923), if only unintentionally, but without the clear breaks between that novel’s various generic shifts. At moments, the text deploys the conventions of the theater, presenting extended dialogues, with little in the way of stage direction, between voices acknowledged only by their country of origin (58-70, 74-78). At others, the page takes on the appearance of modern poetry, typographically bold. There, as in the section marked off as “The Train,” unique in that distinction, the

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<sup>144</sup> J. Dillon Brown succinctly sums up the prosecution’s case while at the same time providing a strong defense: “Lamming’s writing style works within the prevailing British cultural boundaries while aiming to prevent readers from uncritically absorbing his books” (691).

characters are distilled to their voices and, when identifiable at all, are only so contextually (110-25). This section, about the trip of the emigrants from the dock to the city, contains a miasma of popular opinions about West Indians, as suffocating as the “thick choking mass of smoke” that greets the emigrants at the station, unattributable to a single speaker but undeniably in the air (123). In a manner similar to Woolf and Toomer, Lamming is able to record and register numerous voices through his recourse to multiple genres, enlarging an already sizeable cast of characters to include, by metonymy, the stances of entire nations. Adapting a sentence from later in the novel, “One voice,” that is, Lamming’s, “now spoke in four or five keys... about the others, the world...” (149).

Alex’s one voice in *A Clockwork Orange*, with its onomatopoeia, repetition, and long-vowel sounds of Russian loan-words, speaks in multiple linguistic registers and gestures toward an auditory supplement, of which, fortunately, *A Clockwork Orange* has many. There is, most famously, Stanley Kubrick’s film adaptation, but even setting that aside there is an early-70s audiobook recorded by Burgess himself; a play, for which Burgess adapted the novel and even wrote the music;<sup>145</sup> a play, adapted by the Royal Shakespeare company, called *A Clockwork Orange* 2004; and the typed manuscript itself, annotated by Burgess with illustrations and musical notation, the notes of which resemble exclamation points, as if Burgess so emphatically wished for his novel to be more than just read (*TS* 65).

In *Napoleon Symphony*’s “Epistle to the Reader,” Burgess writes:

I was brought up on music and compose

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<sup>145</sup> At the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange: A Play with Music* (1986), Alex and his droogs “sing, freely adapting the Scherzo of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony” to incorporate the novel’s repeated refrain, “What’s it gonna be then, eh?” (5).

Bad music still, but ever since I chose  
 The novelist's métier one mad idea  
 Has haunted me, and I fulfill it here  
 Or try to – it is this: somehow to give  
 Symphonic shape to verbal narrative,  
 Impose on life, though nerves scream and resist,  
 The abstract patterns of the symphonist. (348)

A young Burgess composed his first sonata in 1945, more than a decade before the publication of his first novel. Music had gotten to him as a pre-teen, especially Debussy; “sinuous, exotic, erotic,” the flute solo of *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un Faune* (1894) was “an instant of recognition of verbally inexpressible spiritual realities, a meaning for the term *beauty*” (*Music* 17). His “mad idea” may have been born at this moment, the rest of his writing career an attempt to reproduce for others the sensation born that Saturday night in Manchester. Before committing to the novel, Burgess made an attempt at the stage, perhaps thinking that only the living word could emit such electricity, but his *The Eve of Saint Venus* (1951) would go unpublished, although adapted into a novella in 1964.<sup>146</sup> Short on stage directions, but long on speeches leaden with arcane references, Burgess’s flair for hyper-evocative language is already on display—“Come here, you clusterfist, you chichy caffard, you slipshop demisemiwit”—but he had yet to find his métier (1).

Colorblind, Burgess also found in Debussy “an auditory compensation” for his “impaired colour sense,” suggesting a mingling of the senses that may have inflamed his

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<sup>146</sup> *Eve* shares with Spark’s “The Party Through the Wall” an auditory haunting, or possession. The goddess Venus is believed by one of the main characters, Jack, to have possessed a vicar brought in to exorcise her. “[T]he station is jammed, an alien signal is coming through,” Jack says, but the vicar counters, “The devil is working on you, making you mishear” (78). This is a problem suited for the stage, since an audience—well, an audience versed in Latin—would be able to judge for themselves whether the vicar was reciting Lucretius or the *Rituale Romanum*.

linguistic imagination (*Little* 107). His use of Russian in *Clockwork* also provided him with an occasion to reflect on the bond between sound and substance, a seeming variety of synesthesia in which sounds produce images, as in the following example: “The English word [for breast], in which four consonants strangle one short vowel, is inept for that glorious smooth roundness,” and so, in *A Clockwork Orange*, it becomes “groody,” from the Russian “grud” (*Time* 38). In an “ear-catching performance,” Burgess’s choice of words, then, become a compensation for the novel’s impaired sense of speech; Alex’s narrative is full of long “o” sounds, especially—the word for ear, perhaps appropriately, is “ooko”—and so “boohooohoo,” instead of crying, speaks to the inward ear (Pritchard 527; *Clockwork* 3). But it also does more than that, as it specifies a particular kind of crying and also at the same time distances Alex from sentiment (similarly, his use of the simile “like” keeps the world at arm’s length). This playing with language, inspired by a love of sound, also accomplishes meaning that can only be captured on the page, as witnessed in Alex’s mother welcoming him back to his “owwwwwwme” (173). Only on the page can we see the pain inherent in home that fuels his disavowal of such a concept.

All three novels take maxims like “There’s no place like home”—the kind of received wisdom people express without giving much thought to—and hold them up to interrogation, questioning whether they really are sound advice. In my readings of the novels, I will use the appearance of refrains such as the aforementioned as a point of departure for considering the refrain more widely, as something that doggedly, persistently returns, against one’s control, but also in its Deleuze and Guattarian sense, as a repetitive and cyclical sonic vector of deterritorialization—a repetition with a

difference. Sound, according to the two, has the strongest force of deterritorialization since sound “invades us, impels us, drags us, transpierces us.” As the characters in these novels learn, sound can work for good or ill, “[e]cstasy or hypnosis” (348). Elements of the three works repeat problems from novels I have already written on, but these riffs deterritorialize those concerns, repeat them with a difference by amplifying the original, usually by concretizing the abstract, and thus demonstrating how the accretion of time inevitably alters that which came before. Audio technology, from its inception, has deterritorialized sound, as has been shown throughout this dissertation, yet the measure of control that kept sound in check was gradually lost as noise became further intensified and amplified. Control, whether over the sounds in their own immediate environment or over their own narratives, is something sorely absent in the lives of the characters, or is only available at a premium. In this chapter, we see what happens when the sound of others hits home and home is defenseless.

*Noises-On: The Girls of Slender Means*

“My ears have a good memory,” Spark would have a character say in *Loitering with Intent* (1981), and *The Girls of Slender Means* brims with evidence of her own phonographic memory (18). Passages like the following are representative of the way in which the reader gets the lay of the land at the May of Teck Club:

They sat in the recreation room at the other end of which, cornerwise by the open French window, a girl was practicing scales on the piano with as much style as she could decently apply to the scales. The music-box tinkle was far away enough, and sufficiently dispersed by the Sunday-morning sounds from the terrace, not to intrude too strongly on Rudi’s voice, as he read out, in his foreign English, small passages from Nicholas’s book in order to prove something to Jane. (42-43)

Over the next couple of pages, Joanna's elocution lessons and the chattering of the dormitory girls are added to the soundtrack. So dense is its "collective euphony" that one's sense of the space is acquired through a kind of echolocation; the voice of Joanna Childe, a rector's daughter and elocutionist, "frequently echoed" throughout the house, now in the recreation room, now on the third floor (20, 13).

This is Spark's own attempt to render simultaneity, something Woolf aims for again and again in *Between the Acts*, and it is overwhelmingly auditory:

The number and variety of muted noises-off were considerable. Laughter went on behind the folded doors of the first-floor dormitory. Someone was shovelling coal in the cellar, having left open the green baize door which led to those quarters. The telephone desk within the office rang distantly shrill with boy-friends, and various corresponding buzzes on the landings summoned the girls to talk. (66-67)

Future "prophetic gossip-columnist" Jane Wright's "brain-work proceeded against the background echoes," and against which she often railed (62, 32). Screams and other noises would "penetrate" the house and were so significant and vexing in the daily life of the space that, in Spark's choice of language, they are embodied, "descend[ing] the staircase" (90, 93). However, Joanna's "good voice" is something everyone can get behind, in a way that they fail to do for Churchill's own good voice as it wafts from the wireless (4, 72). Her voice's "vibrations brought tone and style"; the portentous lyrics she recites, chiefly Gerard Manley Hopkins's *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1918), are something of a dark joke between her and the knowing ear of the reader, "the words for the right day" being her habit (5, 107). In the wake of the explosion, the girls were "possibly less frantic and trembled less" because of her voice, not "the actual meaning of her words" (107).

From the present-day frame of 1963, one refrain, but not a poetic one, is used throughout to reconnect the girls, now scattered around the globe: “I’ve got something to tell you” (3, 10, 48). Jane Wright repeats this line four times in the novella, as she calls up the women she once knew when they all lived together, long ago in 1945, to break the news of the death of their former familiar, Nicholas Farrington, in Haiti. A number of the women have a difficult time remembering exactly who he was, this news clearly having the greatest import to Jane given that she was enamored of Nick, but one of them convinces her that there could be a “good story for your paper” in it, and so the brief present-day telephonic interludes in the novel become a kind of *Citizen Kane*-like attempt to get to the bottom of things (11).

In the most literal sense, these interludes are refrains as they are heralded by a phrase that repeats throughout the novel, but, more than that, they represent both a literary device and a return of the repressed. In a book dense with poetic recitation, from Hopkins to Wordsworth to Tennyson, these refrains and the many others scattered throughout the book operate as a kind of punctuation. They bookend reflections and provide a pause, through a temporal detour to the present of 1963 or the early nineteenth century of the Romantics, before the narrator delves headlong once more into the main story, itself bookended by V-E Day and V-J Day. Moreover, the mere fact of Jane calling about the death of a man who was a part of the life of the club dredges up the trauma of the death of the club, the explosion of a presumed-dormant bomb in the hostel’s garden that brought about Joanna’s end and the relocation of the rest of the residents.



Refrains in *Girls* are introduced and then float through the novel before gaining real traction, becoming internalized by the narrative, passing through various tonal and signifying registers before they are muted, an exemplar of this being what are known as the Two Sentences. While Joanna has her poetic refrains, Selina Redwood, the most desirable woman in the house in eyes of the male visitors, has her Two Sentences, part of a correspondence course on poise she purchased for five guineas. She repeated them aloud twice daily, as the course “believed strongly in auto-suggestion,” at 8:30am and 6:30pm, and the club by and large silenced its wirelasses and talk out of respect. The Two Sentences are as follows: “Poise is perfect balance, an equanimity of body and mind, complete composure whatever the social scene. Elegant dress, immaculate grooming, and perfect deportment all contribute to the attainment of self-confidence” (39). Later in the novel, Nick, having fallen in love with Selina, asks Jane to tell him what it is she says about poise; without missing a beat, Jane responds automatically and stops herself, perhaps out of annoyance of having a living situation so lacking in privacy that she has unwillingly memorized the sentences herself, uttering, “Oh, Christ” (54). Having passed from Selina to Jane to Nick, the latter “remind[s] himself that poise was perfect balance” during an exasperating dinner at the club with a military man (59).

Even the narrator herself becomes infected by the refrain, announcing Selina’s appearance at the top of a stairwell with the first two clauses of the first sentence, pages before the Sentences reach their apotheosis (75). The novel’s typography prioritizes the voices of the canon and the voice of Churchill by setting off and italicizing their words. Toward novel’s end, with Selina “finishing off her evening’s disciplinary recitation,” the

last of the Two Sentences becomes enshrined in those rarified ranks, rising from dialogue to become embedded in the narrative's pride of place (84). Naturally, there is no place left to go after that but down, and so is the fate of the Two Sentences. Selina repeats them to herself as, during the conflagration that claims Joanna's life, she re-enters the blaze so as to save the Schiaparelli dress, which had been communal property but which, in life beyond the May of Teck, she saw as rightfully hers. When last Selina is seen in the novel, some weeks after the fire, she is screaming uncontrollably, the Sentences seemingly having deserted her, thereby divesting her of her insulation (116).

The novels of Spark, Lyndsey Stonebridge has observed, are "acutely alert to the dangers of hearing what we think we want to hear," of the corrosive influence, as seen above, of auto-suggestion (458). It is a danger, as seen in my chapter on Fitzgerald and Zora Neale Hurston, that people succumb to far too easily, especially when it advances their own interests. But what I see as the novel's primary repetition with a difference of an earlier argument involves, in Spark's staging of the power of voice and a clash between the canonical and mechanical voice, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Marlow's complaints about being unable to reproduce the voice of Kurtz for his audience, the key to understanding everything, mask the fact that Conrad has constructed a narrative that more faithfully captures that voice than even the best recording technology at the time could have. Additionally, the "authentic" voice of an orator like Kurtz is juxtaposed with the rote, mechanical voices of the colonial servants of empire that Marlow encounters along the way. Despite Jane's priorities, *The Girls of Slender Means* is not a story about what horrors led Nick on his mission, one not of "civilizing" but of

Christianizing, or to his death in Haiti. Rather Nick, if anything, functions as a Marlow to Joanna Childe's Kurtz: he is deeply fascinated by her voice and determined to see that it should live on. Yet, in Spark's telling, against Nick's romanticization, the human voice is now only one of many vessels of verse, and at times must defer to her competition, and machines are humanized through their congress with humans and vice versa.

Like Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, Joanna's person and her voice are treated as two different entities. Nick notices "a handsome bright-cheeked fair-haired girl standing, drinking down her coffee fairly quickly," and despite being told that she is the elocutionist, apparently fails to connect the body with the voice he has heard reciting Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867). He observes to himself that she is "orgiastical in her feeling for poetry" and further severs the connection between body and voice by suggesting that poetry "takes the place of sex for her, I think." These thoughts are kept for his notebooks, indicating that he might someday make a story out of her (66). The elderly residents of the club inform Nick that Joanna does not read, rather she recites by heart; at one point she is described as "mechanically reciting," which corresponds perfectly with his image of her as "a proclaiming statue" (106, 73). Jane is "overcome by a deep envy of Joanna," rooted, she determines, in Joanna's seeming "disinterestedness, her ability, a gift, to forget herself and her personality" (94) Her impersonality, a trait championed by T.S. Eliot and desired by Virginia Woolf, makes Joanna a perfect medium for poetry—that and, as Nick surmises, the fact that she did not know life, which allowed her to speak so "sexually and matriarchally as if in the ecstatic art of suckling a divine child" (72). In many ways, Joanna, a storage machine, might as well be the Edison

phonograph from the epigraph of my first chapter, which, in a 1906 recorded advertisement, “said,” “I will retain your songs or words, and repeat them to you at your pleasure” (“Advertising”).

This comparison between women and the mechanical is, I should note, not limited to Joanna. After Jane’s delivery of the question “What’s is your *raison d’être*?” falls flat, Nick looks at her “as if she were a speaking machine that had gone wrong,” like a human who somehow failed the Turing Test (31). Nor was the comparison a one-way street, as machines are not infrequently depicted as something more. For example, the wireless, and not popular singer Vera Lynn, is described as singing “A Nightingale Sang in Berk’ley Square” (38). It lays claim to human vocal chords as its own and is then credited with their shifts in tone and tenor; when in possession of Winston Churchill, it “reason[s] humbly,” “roar[s],” becomes “sad and slow”—it “put [Joanna] out of business as it were.” The wirelesses become a chorus, one after another blaring forth, joining together to speak “their simultaneous Sinaitic predictions” (72). Nick envisions Joanna, instead of being sad at this turn of events, recognizing her kindred, “given up to the cadences of the wireless as if it did not matter what was producing them...” (73). Instead of anxiously dramatizing a clash between the writerly voice and the mechanical one, as in Conrad, Spark literally stages such an encounter, one depicted less as clash than as communion, reflecting the evolving attitudes toward technology. Spark deterritorializes Conrad’s concerns so as to celebrate noises-off and sounding out, but to reject his anthropocentrism.

In a further riff on *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow lacks the technology to give his audience Kurtz's voice, Nick procures from a government office the machine capable of storing the stirring voice at the center of the club and the novel, Joanna's. The recorder's sensitivity is such, the warden of the club warns, that it "apparently registers the drop of a pin" (89). The chapter fades out as Joanna begins to recite, leaving the recording process itself unrecorded. There is little, presumably, sensitive about Nick's undertaking; given the degree to which he has stressed that Joanna's voice trumps the material that she recites, his recording, at some frequency, is an attempt to steal a small part of her soul. His recognition of this may be nearer the surface than not, as earlier in the novel he acknowledges "how he was imposing upon this little society an image incomprehensible to itself" (58). Catching one of the girls unaware, exposing her with his inside knowledge that the girls all share a Schiaparelli dress, he tells her, "You look beautiful"; celebrating the "beautiful aspects of poverty" he has no real share in, Nick is effectively the equivalent of the modern-day man on the street who tells women to smile (74, 49). Nick, the only character in the novel with entrée into the world of books, revels in one of society's refrains at the time—"all the nice people in England were poor"—and attempts to rewrite the script of a house full of women, in a celebration of his own sensibilities (1).

Nick begins to get closer to Jane in the first place so that she might illuminate him about "the mysterious life of the May of Teck Club." Her response, based on actual lived experience: "It's just a girls' hostel... that's all it boils down to" (51). And yet the sights and sounds of the club exacerbated Nick's poetic sense "to a point of

exasperation,” until he could not see the club as anything but “a microcosmic ideal society” representing the “beautiful heedless poverty of a Golden Age” (58, 52). The house was held together by “the graceful attributes of a common poverty,” which did not “arrest the vitality of its members but rather nourished it” (70). Jane, however, wonders if the whole “rigmarole of his interest” was nothing but “his desire to sleep with Selina,” the microcosm of the microcosm (53). I would actually go a bit further, suggesting that, despite Selina’s unstinting pulchritude, part of Nick’s interest in her was to stamp on her his “aesthetic and ethical conception,” to rewire her internal and eternal repetition of the Two Sentences so as to allow for an acceptance of the beauty of poverty: “[S]he, too, should accept and exploit the outlines of poverty in her life.... He wanted Selina to be an ideal society personified...” (77).

Selina ultimately betrays this ideal when she returns into the burning club to rescue the dress, a sight that prompts a Damsascene moment for Nick, who crosses himself involuntarily at the horror of this “vision of evil,” leaving something of whom he once was on that rooftop (105, 118).<sup>147</sup> In a later phone conversation with one of Joanna’s students, Jane is told that Nick’s conversion may have been down to “Joanna’s example” (118). Joanna is the only girl to perish in the blaze, having told Nick, on the day of the recording, “I dare say I’ll die here,” her own words seemingly as prophetic as those she recites (86). That good-hearted Joanna should die is unfair but also in keeping with the book’s internal logic: She was the only one of the young girls who did not seem to be

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<sup>147</sup> The narrator goes out of her way to point out that Nick “could not trust his memory” as to whether this actually did happen, but that it “seemed to him, in recollection, that he did” (105). Nick’s memory, naturally, lacks the permanence of a recording, but like a cassette tape, it is something he can record over, altering his constitutive fictions to fit the present moment.

waiting for a better opportunity to come along; in “the new order of things” after V-E Day, she had committed herself to a structure not built to withstand outside forces, like, as it turned out, both the Conservative government of her “competition” Churchill and the House of Schiaparelli (10). As the building grew in instability due to the explosion, Joanna’s “lips and tongue continued to recite compulsively the litany of the day, but her voice had weakened,” so much so that the girls trapped with her “turned their ears more fearfully and attentively to the meaning of the skylight noises” (108, 107). Transpierced by the noises outside, Joanna is permanently put out of business, the transcription of her recitation of the litany fades out elliptically before she can finish uttering the psalm, an unspoken “Lord, hear my voice” (109). “Make me thy lyre”: Joanna’s recitation of Shelley sums up her life well. Like Churchill’s voice, claimed by the wireless, it was as if her vocal cords too belonged to something else—to a stringed instrument, plucked by the poets of the past, her life lived through the language of others.

*Under English Eyes: The Emigrants*

Within *The Emigrants*, a hostel also factors heavily as both a refuge and a meeting-place and is described similarly: “The tables were arranged over the floor very much as they would be in a public eating place, and the piano in one corner with the uneven buzzing of the voices gave the place a certain conviviality” (174). This buzz “lift[ed] uncertainly” amid the silence of conversation; an always active self-awareness of the presence of others controlled what one could say and how one might communicate (178). Lamming is attentive to the soundscape of the spaces he evokes, always aware that his action is happening against a larger backdrop and that, in the first section of the novel, his

narrator's tale is directly affected by it. The narrative plucks refrains from the ether, isolates them, and thereby transforms these verbal addresses and invocations into structural devices or occasions for contemplation. For example, the novel's little-employed first-person narrator, at a pier in Guadeloupe on Good Friday, is infected to refrains from the crucifixion being read at a service: "The service continued while I sat on the pavement outside the café repeating in silence the words that had always moved and puzzled me most. My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me" (17). His rumination on these words and the crucifixion itself yields early on a theme crucial to the novel, the relationships between different bodies: "[T]he resurrection which was not a pure assertion of spirit but an equal ascension of blood and bones had given the body a new meaning." The final sentence in his narration, until the very end of the novel, is "Father Into Thy Hands I Commend My Spirit" (24). In "The Train," the otherwise innocuous and everyday instructions of the train conductor—"WILL PASSENGERS TAKE THEIR SEATS PLEASE," "WILL PASSENGERS KEEP THEIR HEADS WITHIN THE TRAIN"—take on a more sinister tone with their repetition and when colored by the text that passes between each iteration, foreshadowing how so many of the emigrants are at risk of losing their heads in England (118). Meanwhile, a warning like "PASSENGERS MUST NOT OPEN DOOR BEFORE ORDERS" becomes threatening, a subtle reminder of the ways in which the emigrants' lives will continue to be administered well outside of the colony. Moments like these, spread throughout the novel, are jolting, hailing the reader who would seem to be safe, on the other side of the page.



Music, “an aphrodisiac of sound,” is far more benign, whatever the space, “seeping slowly in and out of bodies, desiring closeness” and “sail[s]” people together (277, 208). Throughout the novel, there is an intimacy between the individual and their instrument, but, like *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), the wider community is built up through storytelling, a fully collaborative process. Jokes were extended so that they became “a kind of convivial horseplay”; someone “giggled and the giggle passed faintly from one to the other” (35, 45). The Strange Man, a stowaway who was on the outs for his pessimistic view of survival in England, is brought into the circle, although he feared it was a trap, but with “less effort than they had anticipated” he had become, through his tale, “one of them.” It was “a little triumph” in a novel with very few of them (89).

Just as its characters are dispersed throughout London, *The Emigrants* also lacks a fixed center for its storytelling: an unnamed first-person narrator is in place for about thirty pages of the novel; dramatic convention allows the characters to speak for themselves, unmoderated; poetry gives a voice to everything and no-one, at once; and third-person omniscient carries the balance. Finding a through-line is therefore difficult, but a narrative dotted with repeated phrases offers a life-line. A refrain that unites most of the novel, a transversal passing from voice to voice, appears in variations throughout, beginning as “We were all waiting for something to happen” in the first-person section, insinuating itself into the third-person in fragmented form as “waiting for something to happen,” and, after much delay, resurfacing at the end of the novel, bent but unbowed in the face of overwhelming evidence in its belief that “[s]omething was bound to happen,” even if the action of the novel was about to cease (4, 25, 281-82). Like the movement of

the Two Sentences in Spark, opinions and concerns ascribable to no determinate figure, after simmering in the narrative, bubble over and emerge from the mouth of a man, whether it is when Mr. Pearson asks Collis, “Why do so many of your people come here?” or when Higgins says aloud what the narrator has twice repeated, “The Governor is a hell of a man,” referring to the former RAF man whose nickname explains exactly his centrality to the group both on the ship and in England (141, 80). Sometimes a phrase is said so often that no one can remember the original referent, such as “Every man want a better break” (33, 34, 50). “They were all in search of the same thing which in a way they couldn’t define,” the third-person narrator claims, “A better break” (86). It has a pernicious power, its spread luring more and more emigrants to uncertainty in England, “a better break” being the name they give to that unnamable ache at their core for something more than they have been given.

That unfulfilled, deeply-felt yearning is enough to designate it as sharing spiritual propinquity with Toomer’s *Cane*, but with its generic restlessness and ingenuity that kinship extends to the formal plane, as well. With its hopscotching of genres, *Cane*, too, lacks a narrative center, but, as I argue, when one reads it as a stereophonic whole rather than as a linear progression patterns form, characters re-emerge, language and imagery repeat, and a many-tongued nature asserts its primacy. African-American characters who themselves migrated, from the South to urban centers, find themselves at a loss when trying to acclimatize themselves to the city and miss the rural harmony they left behind. In *The Emigrants*, Tornado serves warning aboard *The Golden Image* about how different

England will be from the countries they are leaving behind, and it starts, literally, at home:

The way the houses build was that people doan' have nothing to do with one another. You can live an' die in yuh room an' the people next door never say boo to you no matter how long you inhabit that place. It ain't like home as you think. I tell you you only got to see how they house build to see what I mean.... An' what all you here goin' learn for the first time is what it mean to live yuh own own room alone without knowing a single soul in any of the other hundred. (75)

The roar of silence proves just as menacing as the cacophony of modernity to those conditioned to a different temperament and way of being. At the end of the novel, hounded from every room he attempted to make home but which were never more than a “dungeon,” Dickson seeks consolation in a “brief valley of earth, blanketed with dead leaves” (267). England is a place where emigrants, it is said more than once, “completely forget who they are...,” the same accusation Dan Moore levels at Muriel in Toomer’s “Box Seat” after she has moved to Washington, D.C. (152).

The movement of people notwithstanding, circulation in Toomer is purely figurative, verbal material recurring and accruing across the span of the novel. The premonitory and minatory rumbling underground and the wafting whispering of the winds never reach a frequency audible to any but the highly sensitive. Nearly every character in *The Emigrants*, however, is hunted and haunted by something in their past, regularly reaching them by telegraphic and telephonic technology, pursuits raised to a fever pitch, incapable of being silenced. Each becomes deeply unsettled and the news makes establishing roots in England an impossibility. Higgins, one of the few aboard *The Golden Image* with a plan, finds himself with an undetermined future when he receives a letter informing him that the cooking school he had planned to attend will be closing;

cruelly, this letter literally follows him, the “wind carr[ying] the letter down the deck, a soiled rag of evidence that did not matter” (91). Collis, a writer, is identified by a man on board and told, “A writer’s work is public property.... every word you use can be a weapon turned against the enemy or inward on yourself...” (101). A telephone call that comes while Collis is visiting demonstrably upsets his host, Mr. Pearson; Frederick is shaken by a telephone call, too, and then by a telegram (141, 159, 171). Phillip, a student on a law scholarship, has impregnated a white woman, which at that time was enough to jeopardize his future and he struggles with “the voices prolong[ing] their dialogue in his head” (239). Characters presumed dead return by the end of the novel—all in all, Dickson sums up everyone’s predicament: “The past was a rebuke” (268).

Arguably the novel’s most tragic instance of the looming past is the one that unites music, circulation, and refrains, namely, the calypso song written about one of the female emigrants, Ursula Bis, which drove her from her home in Trinidad. From its origins, calypso has been lyrically boasting and biting, more comic than anything else, but at times the tunes would be turned against the colonial masters. Initially, the authorities were unconcerned with the music, which was disregarded as so much “African ‘yelling’ or Creole ‘noise’”; once the songs began to be performed in English, though, many attempts were made to censor the lyrics (Hebdige 22). Calypso was and is, however, an equal opportunity offender, deflating pretension where it sees it. Miss Bis, as she is known in the novel, was from a pompous, well-to-do family and had become engaged to a white man named Fred, after breaking things off with a native Trinidadian;

when Fred absconds to points unknown, Miss Bis becomes a perfect target for the calypsonians. “It was just bearable till the rumors circulated,” the narrator writes:

And finally it became public property. In the calypso tent where the local minstrels use that kind of scandal as their raw material Miss Bis had become the subject of a calypso. The calypsonian had made a perfect story and everyone soon learnt through the calypso that Fred was a Russian Jew who organized cockfights on the Venezuelan border. On the last day of the Trinidad carnival the best calypso of the season, which for the occasion is called the road march, bore the title: No Love without Passport. (72)

Like Collis, Miss Bis becomes public property, only she did not get to author the words that made her such. The fallout from all this made it so that she had to leave Trinidad and change her name, to Una Solomon. She was exiled from her family as “[p]ublic rumour had become too great a pressure for them” (246). Whether through a recorded or live performance, Collis had heard about her before he had met her, Miss Bis having been transubstantiated into lyrics, melody, and rhythm so that her story might circulate more broadly. Telling Collis the story had “left her loose and free like a purged animal.... If he chose to circulate it to the others he might do so. She felt the whole thing was over, and she wasn’t going to cry over spilt milk” (81). Purged, with what had been making her sick now exteriorized for all perchance to hear, Miss Bis was ready for a better break.

Still, when in England, Miss Bis goes out of her way to avoid other West Indians, except for Queenie, a girl she knew from the voyage, so as not to be identified as the girl in the calypso. At night, she is tormented by the song and that past life; thoughts that are contained in a “cell” by day return to trouble her nights. To counter this, she repeats this refrain, her own version of the Two Sentences: “...never Ursula Bis. Wipe the name out. Now you’re beginning again, forget it. You’re Una Solomon. Una.... Una Solomon. Una,

not Ursula. Solomon, not Bis. Una, Una....” and the “name lulled her to sleep” (244).

Una meets a man named Frederick in England and they make plans to run off with one another; Frederick, it turns out, was Fred, who had “[i]ndirectly” murdered Miss Bis, but both individuals are so transformed by their experiences in England that they fail to recognize one another—a repetition with a cosmetic difference, the outcome of which the novel leaves unresolved (258). As the novel draws to a close, at Mozamba, the club owned by the Governor, a calypsonian announces “the calypso about the girl whose fiancé was a gamekeeper on his way to Venezuela,” but that girl is long gone, and so is the woman she was compelled to become.

Miss Bis in *The Emigrants* has someone speaking, or, rather, singing for her in words not of her own devising; her chief disappointment in life preceded her everywhere through the calypso. So broken down by England, her voice is described as “a recording machine,” her words as “intelligible sounds” (249). She looks at herself in the mirror and wonders if her family would even recognize her now, as Frederick failed to do. “I looked in the mirror,” she says, “and the strangest thing happened. I didn’t understand what was the matter. My eyes were all right, but I looked and looked, and I couldn’t recognize my face, I couldn’t. It wasn’t my face” (248). Collis confirms that this is more than just a psychological change, but all the same eyes are not all right in the novel (257). Eyes discriminate by failing to do so—“All of you are the same people,” a cop says of the gathered West Indians and Africans at the barber shop—and eyes alienate, as when Tornado’s eyes are said “to bore through [a] man” or Frederick feels “stare[d] out of existence” (159, 85, 171). Eyes control, Dickson made to feel “like an object under their

stare,” and characters lose control of their eyes, Collis sensing that “his imagination had taken control of his vision...” (205, 219).

Unlike in *Spark*, Lamming’s characters do not necessarily have to fear losing their voices, rather, silence proves their undoing, a robbery of their right to speak and to be heard that transforms them in the eyes of others as no more than objects. Tornado had warned the group of this; on the train, he points out an “ol’ geyser quiet in de corner like de whole worl’ come to a standstill,” which “is the way they is in dis country... no talk till you talk” (110). Asleep, “Collis and the Jamaican and Tornado looked like shapes of land growing out the deck,” the narrator claims. “By interrupting a process which made them other than what they seemed sprawled on the deck it would have been possible to convert them into objects” (82). In context, the process that animates them, of course, is life itself, and life for many of the characters is story, song—communication of some kind, all of the expressions of interiority England seems intent on muffling. Storytelling is an activity that unites the men on *The Golden Image*, bringing out creativity and bringing into the fold those on the periphery. The Governor is someone whom “[n]o one seemed to recognise... till he had spoken,” his voice preceding him but also having the effect of identifying him. He tells a story about his ex-wife “with relish that made the whole affair seem incredible,” and the men “were listening with a kind of greed to [his] story” (94, 44, 46). But, in England, even the walls of the homes have eyes, “neutral staring walls” that “forced them to see that each was caught.... It was here ... that each became aware, gradually, anxiously, of the level and scope of his private existence” (192).

Dickson is the one who suffers most under English eyes. A section narrated through his fragmented consciousness relates the circumstances that led him, as mentioned above, to find comfort in the earth, and it begins with a quotation of the opening couplet of Bourdillon's "Light" (1873) a.k.a. "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes." Dickson had been offered a room for rent above a white woman he had befriended on the ship. Dickson prided himself on his mastery of English, a manner Frederick that disliked, finding it "[t]oo precise, too correct" (158). Upon finding himself invited into the woman's apartment and plied with alcohol, he thinks that "out of them all she chose me" since "intelligence... can reduce all difference" and they spoke "the common language of a common civilisation" (264). To his horror, though, after stripping nude, he discovers that he was chosen because he is uncommon; exoticized and put on display for the woman and her sister, the former tells him that "they only wanted to see what he *looked* like." "They devoured his body with their eyes," as the narrator puts it, "It disintegrated and dissolved in their stare, gradually regaining its life through the reflection in the mirror" (266). From that point on, his life would become "a perpetual struggle to avoid eyes" in order to hold onto that restoring image of wholeness (267). He wanted to seek out the others he knew from the ship so that they could confirm him "that he was still there under his clothes, inside his skin," that the room that is his body is still occupied by sentience and soul (268).

The reader learns from one of the emigrants Lillian, who along with her partner Tornado had been holding on to Dickson's possessions, that Dickson became a nomad who "never stay one place" (237). Meanwhile, Higgins, whose dreams of becoming a



cook ended before he even arrived in England, was trying to get back home as a stowaway, having felt followed by the police and others ever since landing (236).<sup>148</sup> To the methods of control practiced by others—the imposition of narratives, the reprogramming of behavior, the oppression of unelected silence—the best *The Emigrants* can offer as a solution is a refutation of a fixed home in favor of a kind of perpetual motion, Dickson not staying long enough in one place to be marked and Higgins taking his chances trying to board ship after ship to get to a home he was unsatisfied with. After the hostel closes, and seven of the emigrants end up living in the same basement, one of their number, the Jamaican, says, “It seem we got to find a place one day, some new land where we can find peace. Not only the ones like me an’ you, but the student ones to. They got to find a place where they can be without making up false pictures ‘bout other places”—or even a place where they will not be made into false pictures, stripped of the agency to correct that wrong impression (195).

*Suspect Device: A Clockwork Orange*

The location of home, and the persistent idealized dream of such a place, is deeply contested in *A Clockwork Orange*. The structure that Alex returns to after his debauches is a tower block—Municipal Flatblock 18A, Apartment 10-8, to be specific, a structure known to house, as a clear class slur in the novel puts it, the “slummy bedbug” (68). It is a type of building, first constructed in England in 1951, that experienced a post-war development boom, layering family atop family with only a thin membrane separating those sharing floors (49). Alex’s only escape is through music, as he modifies his speaker

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<sup>148</sup> Higgins is pursued by the long-missing husband of Julie, the woman Phillip impregnates, adding to his paranoia, since Phillip has been using the name Higgins while in England, his father’s name (272).

system into less a sound wall than to mark his territory than a sonic womb in which he is immersed in Beethoven and his other favorite composers: “The little speakers of my stereo were all arranged round the room, on ceiling, walls, floor, so, lying on my bed slooshying the music, I was like netted and meshed in the orchestra” (32). Otherwise, he is subjected to the “sprawling and creeching and moaning” of someone attacked near his building, likely a nightly lament, and the noises of his parents, going about their business (31). “What gets into you all?” Alex’s “Post-Corrective Adviser,” P.R. Deltoid, asks him. “Is it some devil that crawls inside you?” (43). Dr. Brodsky, the man responsible for Alex’s re-education, presenting him after his treatment, sees only on Alex the marks left on him by his incarceration: “Prison taught him the false smile, the rubbed hands of hypocrisy, the fawning greased obsequious leer” (123).

What both fail to acknowledge, and what both would notice if they actually heard him out, is that what has gotten into him is the sound of the modern world, such that, tables having turned, his selfhood an inscription surface for an increasingly mechanized world, but also for the many others who wish to use him. For as much as Alex is a bad neighbor, he is at the same time a victim, which his narrative, with its repetition and onomatopoeia, makes clear: “I woke up real skorrry, my heart going bap bap bap and of course there was really a bell going brrrrr and it was our front-door bell. I let on that nobody was at home, but this brrrrr still ittied on.” In the dream preceding this, he hears a “very loud electric bell ringringringing”; illustrating one of the arguments of this chapter, he says that “this bell was like a sort of a pain too” (36). “Very strange” is how Alex describes it when he discovers a glitch in his code-switching, having “picked up” from

Deltoid a habit of ending his sentences with a “yes?” from when talking to his friends, or droogs, as he calls them (51). In that instance, at least he knows the provenance of the tic; when on display for government, he cries out, ““Am I just to be like a clockwork orange?” I didn’t know what made me use those slovos, brothers, with just came like without asking into my gulliver,” having clearly forgotten about the title of the book, and of the novel, that one of his victims had penned (127).

Getting inside of his “gulliver” is at the heart of the Ludovico Technique, the controversial treatment in *A Clockwork Orange*, which, by associating wrongdoing of all stripes with the sensation of severe nausea, compels Alex to be “good” without his quite understanding why. Ironically, enough, the novel’s dominant refrain, which opens all three parts of the novel and its epilogue, insists that one make a free choice of some kind: “What’s it gonna be then, eh?” (1, 75, 130, 180). Its movement follows the pattern established by the novels discussed above, passing from tongue to tongue. The first use comes from Alex himself, asking his droogs what their plans should be for the evening; in the second instance, these words issue forth from the mouth of the prison chaplain, asking the inmates what they will do, not for the night, but with their lives going forward; in the third, they become internalized by Alex, along with much else, who asks himself introspectively what he is to do with his life now that he has been “cured.” The final iteration is a *da capo*, Alex, now several years older and cured of being cured, is out with his new group of droogs asking them the question he started his story with, only this time, his patience wears thin. At the beginning of the novel, “What’s it gonna be then, eh?” is allowed to echo several times before Alex says, “Out out out out!” yet by the end he cuts

the question off with the same reply after only one further repetition, describing himself as feeling “very bored” (182). Alex’s real cure is, simply, that he has grown up and become tired of the lifestyle, presumably leaving someone else to ask the questions from now on.

Being young, Alex says, is like being an animal, but then he corrects himself, finding a more apropos point of comparison:

No, it is not just like being an animal so much as being like one of these malenky toys you viddy being sold in the streets, like little chellovecks made out of tin and with a spring inside and then a winding handle on the outside and you wind it up grrr grrr grrr and off it itties, like walking, O my brothers. But it itties in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing. (190)

Man being made into an automaton is, of course, in the very title of the novel, taken from East London street slang, meaning something odd, but adapted for the title of F.

Alexander’s book-within-the-book, in which “all lewdies nowadays were being turned into machines and that they were really... more like a natural growth like a fruit” (159).

Returning to the theme of compulsion, one sees it everywhere in the novel, from the repeated refrain of the bar denizens’ “God bless you, boys,” spoken “like they couldn’t stop,” to the reader’s forced learning of nadsat, a process Burgess believed would only take fifteen pages or so, “ferreting” its way in like the devil, who was believed by opinion columns to be responsible for the actions of Alex and his generation (55; *TS* 1; *Clockwork* 41).

Nadsat, one critic has said, “transcends specific word meanings... to stir the mind, the eye and the ear,” Burgess’s prose refusing to rest on the page, just as it is described in both Woolf and Toomer (Talbot 7). But, rather than either of those novels, the work I

believe *A Clockwork Orange* is on a continuum with is, perhaps surprisingly, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; the viability of such an affinity between two very different versions of modernism attests to the ongoing resonance of sound as a fundamental structuring element of narrative. In the chapter on her novel, Hurston, I argued, developed her narrator, which after only a few pages replaces Janie's first-person account with third-person omniscient and omni-audient, after her experience listening to the playback of the field recordings she had made on an expedition prior to starting the novel. Alex, too, feels the need to give not just the tale, but the sonic envelope it occurs within, giving both the word and the grain, to make one properly understand his world. Like Hurston's narrator, Alex is sensitive enough to record the "scribble scribble scribble" of pen on paper, resourceful enough to translate sounds like a "snaking" chain ("whisssssshhhhhhhhh"), and dutiful enough to make sure not a single "smash smash smash" goes unrecorded (177, 16, 10). The dynamism of performance, of Janie telling her story to a rapt Pheoby, makes Hurston's narrative what it is, and the entirety of *A Clockwork Orange* is just such a one-man show delivered to an imagined community of readers, Alex's "brothers and only friends," much like the novel John Dowell writes in *The Good Soldier* (119).

I would extend Esther Petix's claim that Burgess's novel was "so frightening that it demanded a new language," and that his moral and his language were inseparable by saying that, more than a new language, what he needed was a new voice (42). Specifically, he needed one in which we could hear the toll taken on the human psyche by the conditions of the urban poor in postwar England, in which sirens "howl like some bezoomny animal snuffing it" (*Clockwork* 65). Where Burgess departs from Hurston is

that, instead of having the particulars of the first-person retelling translated into a poetic language that would give the reader the experience to go along with the tale, Alex is, as a result of psychic and sonic violence, fused into being both recorder and recording, the sensory detail of his story written directly onto him, as into grooves on a recording. “He talks funny, doesn’t he?” a former droog’s wife says of him, but he has every reason to. His language is replete with smooth, globular long-“o” sounds, as mentioned above, but vibratory sounds like the “brrrrrr”s of “lipmusic” abound (191). After “o,” “z” may be the second most used letter in both the loan-words and onomatopoeia, the buzzsaw to the former’s butter-knife; as “o” factors into the words for the pleasurable (breasts, women, friends, sleep), “z” is material support for ripping (razrez), police (rozz), feeling upset (razdraz), and Alex’s least favorite things, dirty (grazhny) and soiled (grazzy).

In addition to his use of rhyming slang, onomatopoeia, and Russian, his narrative is also mottled with repetition, the function of which is unclear, but in its ambiguity it raises any number of possibilities. Is it like, so many Steinian roses, defamiliarizing, allowing us to understand what it means to “smash” something, or does the repetition of a word like “scribble” make us see how strange English words themselves are? Is it, as I read Kurtz’s “The horror!,” allowing us to focus on the meaning in its first use and how its sound contributes to its meaning in the repetitions? Is it all of these things and more, a tic, a symptom of a victim of modernity? As Alex asks, “[I]s not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting these big machines?” (40). After attempting suicide, and likely having his jaw wired shut, Alex tries to speak in the hospital, but all that comes out is “er er er” (172). Perhaps tired of growing up in a world

where, as a boy, everything he said was heard as “er er er,” Alex’s voice develops so that he might be heard above the otherwise riotous racket. Whatever the answer, just as Janie finds in Pheoby a tongue to tell her tale for her, Alex has his accomplices after the fact in his readership, whom he has compelled into understanding if not speaking his language—or, as he calls them, his “brothers,” the imaginary community he interpellates at the beginning and ending of his tale (3, 212).

This measure of control is an example of turnabout as fair play, since much of the time Alex is either used as a pawn by one group or another or is unable to react against his re-education, which leads to the most sensational instance of my argument about sound’s effects. After his release, Alex, having been driven from every other possible sanctuary, is taken in by F. Alexander, author of *A Clockwork Orange*, who sympathizes with the young man’s plight. One day, though, having carelessly slipped into nadsat, Alex’s “manner of voice pricks” the author, leading him to realize that it was Alex and his droogs whom earlier in the novel had brought about the death of Alexander’s wife (163). Knowing that one of Alex’s new susceptibilities is a former source of strength, Alexander locks Alex in his room, with classical music “pouring in all brass and drums and the violins miles up through the wall” (168):

And then, there I was, me who had loved music so much, crawling off the bed and going oh oh oh to myself, and then bang bang banging on the wall creeching: “Stop, stop it, turn it off!” But it went on and it seemed to be like louder. So I crashed at the wall till my knuckles were all red red krovvy and torn skin, creeching and creeching, but the music did not stop. (167)

To escape, Alex chooses defenestration and risks death, literally driven to attempt suicide because of sound. This was not his first such attempt; while undergoing the Ludovico

treatment, Alex tries to get out of having to experience those terrifying sights and sounds by knocking himself unconscious.

If Lamming's titular emigrants, whose voices also sound like "er er er" to authorities, are all seeking an undefinable better break, the characters in Burgess's near future want a better world. Alex's droog Dim looks to the heavens with wonder at the stars and planets, curious what might be on them; "There'll be life like down here most likely," Alex answers, "with some getting knifed and others doing the knifing" (18). A better world in the novel is one that seemingly is only accessible through death or drugs—to be "in the land," as it is described in the novel, courtesy of a narcotic known as synthmesc. "You lost your name and your body and your self [sic] and you just didn't care," "all above the body" with a "pale inhuman look, like [you'd] become a *thing*, and like [your] litso was really a piece of chalk carved" (3, 26). Not surprisingly, this is the kind of thing Alex does not go in for, that makes him sick to see, but after his treatment, and all of the privations that came with it, he indulges: "I felt I had got rid of everything—platties, body, brain, name, the lot—and felt real horrorshow, like in heaven" (141).

The body that he so wishes to transcend is also the specific target of his treatment. The scientists are not hoping to effect a change of mind in Alex; "Violence is a very horrible thing," Dr. Brannom tells him, "That's what you're learning now. Your *body* is learning it" (108, my emphasis). He will not be cured, he is told, until his "body reacts promptly and violently to violence, as to a snake, without further help from us, without medication..." (116). His only defense against this sensory assault is to try, as he did in



his home with music, to build a defensive sound wall around himself, “creech[ing] very gromky for them to turn it off, turn it off, and that like part drowned the noise of the dratsing and fillying and also the music that went with it all” (106). The treatment takes and is evident in the way that it has reconfigured his internal script, setting him off in search of sentences he could produce so as to prevent pain. Presented with a nude young woman, Alex has to fight his instincts and “think of some new like way of thinking about her before all the pain and thirstiness and horrible sickness come over me real horrorshow and proper.” As he begins to sing her praises in courtly language, he “could feel the sickness slinking back”; alighting upon just “the right slovo,” he offers, “Let me be like your true knight” (128).

During this exhibition, Alex cries out, “Me, me, me. How about me? Where do I come into all this? Am I like just some animal or dog?” (126). Yet even when he finds himself in the hands of those who claim to have his best interests at heart, he finds himself a puppet on a string, presented with statements written for him to sign off on, “a record of what they have done to you” (161). Just as his “enemies,” the state, reprogrammed his choice of words, his “friends” wish to do little more than ventriloquize through him. The F. Alexander group seeks to bring down the government and sees an opportunity in Alex. The former sympathizes with Alex, telling him that he has been turned into “something other than a human being.... a little machine capable only of good,” but all the same he is a machine, as one of the members of the group sees him, who will make “a superb device” (156, 163). Twice, he asks his benefactors what is to become of him, before finally being told that he is to be a “martyr to the cause of

Liberty.” “Stop treating me like a thing that’s like got to be just used,” he retorts, claiming that he’s not someone “you can impose on” (164). But they do, and Alex’s only choice is to wipe the slate clean by jumping out of the window. In the hospital, an official of the government, having arrested the F. Alexander group for what they did to Alex, presents him with something to sign. “I opened my glazzies up to sign,” Alex says, “not knowing what I was signing and not, O my brothers, caring either” (178-79). Still someone’s cog, but cured and restored to his previous pleasures, Alex had his music own machine once more and got to call the tune (“the glorious Ninth of Ludwig van”); netted by his creature (and creeching) comforts, Alex ceased to care who spoke for him so long as the Beethoven kept at bay the din and discourse of the world outside (179).

### *Conclusions*

In 1958, Clement Greenberg returned to one of his earlier essays, “The New Sculpture” from 1949, and revised it heavily as “Sculpture in Our Time,” adding a caveat to his use of one of his best-known recurring terms, “purity.” “Of course,” he writes, as though it were clear all along, “‘purity’ is an unattainable ideal” (56). As I showed in my opening chapter, “fidelity,” whether for Conrad or for Edison, was also an unattainable ideal; and so too is the notion of anything being “soundproof.” As John Cage discovered when visiting an anechoic chamber at Harvard in 1951, “THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SILENCE. GET THEE TO AN ANECHOIC CHAMBER AND HEAR THERE THY NERVOUS SYSTEM IN OPERATION AND HEAR THERE THY BLOOD IN

CIRCULATION” (51).<sup>149</sup> In his own “sound-proof” room, Thomas Carlyle could still hear the squirt of his pen and the rumbling of the east wind. Yet despite this unattainability, Greenberg maintains that “this does not diminish the crucial importance of ‘purity’ or concrete ‘abstractness’ as an orientation and an aim” (56). Thus, as an analogue to the phonographic fidelity war, there were what Emily Thompson calls the “coefficient wars” in the sales brochures of the 1930s, the absorption coefficient of soundproofing tiles being the measure of acoustical merit (193).

I should qualify the above by saying that there is no such thing as an *inhabitable* soundproof room—noise annoys, and even worse still, but complete silence kills. “One thing has not been solved in the construction,” UCLA psychologist Shepherd Ivory Franz writes about a soundproof construction in 1907 Utrecht, “viz. the ventilation of the room during a series of tests. The room is large enough to hold one person for, say, a half hour without discomfort from lack of oxygen” (5-6). The perfect soundproofed space, Lamming’s Tornado says, replying to the Jamaican’s earlier expressed hope of a new land, is “the grave. ‘Tis the only place you’ll find de peace you talkin’ ‘bout” (195). Death and transience are the examples I have provided so far as ways of dealing with a world set on disrupting or seizing control of one’s interiority. But there are other ways, in part because what counts as noise is highly subjective, a chief reason why it has been so hard to curtail. Joseph Conrad was tortured by the phonograph, but his wife enjoyed its music. Carlyle was undone by noise of street musicians, but his wife Jane, with her

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<sup>149</sup> Many people have disputed that these were the things Cage heard. According to David Toop, “Cage may have been hearing symptoms of tinnitus, or spontaneous otoacoustic emissions from his own ears, rather than the sound of his brain at work” (208).

husband away, sang a different tune in a letter to her brother-in-law: “But now that I feel the noise and dirt and discord with my own senses only and not thro *his* as well, it is amazing how little I care about it” (*CLO* 10.1215/lt-18520727-JWC-JAC-01). Free of the prism imposed on her by her husband and his sensorium, Jane Welsh Carlyle found herself perfectly capable of accommodating herself to the city’s soundscape.

Sometimes, such freedom would require one playing by a different set of standards, even unlawful ones, but morality, too, is often subjective. Miss Bis in *The Emigrants* felt that “[p]eople had always done something to me.... So I said I would act, I’d do something for the first time; here in England where it didn’t matter, because I didn’t really belong to it” (249). Miss Bis, her face unrecognizable to herself, went to a party and felt she was looked like as though she were a “leper.” “It made me feel naked, and at the first opportunity I left without a word to anyone” (248). Exposed, and having long been under heavy duress, Miss Bis decides to retaliate; her face no longer her own, in a country that she did not belong to, she kills her closest link to the past, her friend Queenie, incapacitated by alcohol, by turning the gas oven on and closing the door behind her (249). “I’d like to be... to be... different,” she confides to a friend, and in the end she and Frederick escape to Africa to “begin again” in “new roles,” Frederick hoping the return will rid him of his impotency (280, 253). The instructive part of Miss Bis’s story is the need to shake off how society sees oneself and how one sees the society, namely, England. The first-person narrator, who returns briefly in the novel’s final section, says that the problem for lost souls like Higgins and Dickson “was a feeling more conscious in some than others, that England was not only a place, but a heritage.” For

those left standing, including the unnamed first-person narrator, “England was simply a world which we had moved about at random, and on occasion encountered by chance” (237). The Governor feels similarly, expressed in a toast to both the future and England: “England, you don’t know me. I don’t know you” (271). Collis’s own answer is exilic, from England and from the West Indies: “I have no people” (280).

Escape for *The Girls of Slender Means* was through the fire escape and into the lives they chose for themselves in the postwar order. The story about a man who broke in through it once was one of the familiar refrains at the club—one of the elder residents “produced a better version of the story every time”—and the reason for its having been sealed off, delaying the rescue of the girls and dooming Joanna Childe (22). In death, Joanna’s voice is returned to her; Nick Farrington’s attempt to store it—and to stage a dramatic play-back—is foiled, in an amusing jab at the formidable power of technology, by wartime exigency, specifically, “economy regulations” that required its being taped over (111). Like Kurtz’s voice, Joanna’s is destined to live on only in literature, through Spark’s language, but it was just one part of the chorus that reverberated through the May of Teck. That structure, too, is freed from Nick; passing by it with Joanna’s father, it “looked now like one of the familiar ruins of the neighborhood....” “There’s really nothing to see,” her father says. Like his tape-recording, “it’s all gone, all elsewhere,” everything that Nick had invested so much time in attempting to shape in images recognizable only to himself (115). He himself will be reproduced in a news story in language to be chosen by Jane, who gathered orts, scraps, and fragments from news sources and her telephone conversations, and “lived to distort it in many elaborate

forms...” (47). Nick’s death was not an indescribable horror that must be kept from his loved ones; against the martyr story, Lady Julia reveals that he was “making a complete nuisance of himself.... and apparently he got what he asked for” and “he was a complete...,” with the last word left to one’s imagination (97, 98). That Nick left an impression on Jane is undeniable, but in the end Jane and, especially Spark, have the final say, upending his attempt to appropriate their narratives.

Liberation for Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* was as easy as putting away childish things, like the wind-up toy of youth. One has an early prefiguration of the young man Alex would become once he got Ludovico and youth out of his system when a woman begins singing at the milkbar:

[O]ne of these devotchkas—very fair and with a big smiling red rot and in her late thirties I’d say—suddenly came with a burst of singing, only a bar and a half and as though she was like giving an example of something they’d all been govoreeting about, and it was like for a moment, O my brothers, some great bird had flown into the milkbar, and I felt all the little malenky hairs on my plott standing endwise and the shivers crawling up like slow malenky lizards and then down again.

“Anyway,” he concludes, “I shivered” (27). The pure, unrecorded human singing voice, like a bird, is the opposite of the chaos and disorder represented by vomit, an interior given musical structure. For Alex, this is a presentiment of what it might be like to actually feel, and not, as he might phrase it, “to, like, feel.” In his closing, Alex informs the reader that he has ceased to listen to the bombastic classical of his early youth and has given in to the charms of the unadorned voice: “I was slooshying more like malenky romantic songs, what they call *Lieder*, just a goloss and a piano, very quiet and like yearny, different from when it had been all bolshy orchestras and me lying on the bed

between the violins and the trombones and the kettledrums.” There was “something happening inside me, and I wondered if it was like some disease...”; it was not the beginnings of nausea, however, but rather the cure, which only superficially resembles the disease: the seeds of the future, Alex dreaming of a room of his own, followed by a family (186). In the year after the novel’s publication, sympathy and consideration were touted by the Wilson Report on Noise as the solution for dealing with the noise problem; seemingly ready to practice both moving forward, Alex has maturity to thank for that.

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