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*AHR Forum*  
On Being Heard:  
A Case for Paying Attention to the Historical Ear

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WRITING IN 1612, THE English anatomist Helkiah Crooke offered his readers a complex, if unoriginal, account of human hearing as a function of the ear and the brain. Sound, he explained, is produced far from its destination, even when generated by the human voice. Oscillations of the air, resulting from “the percussion of two hard and solide bodyes,” must proceed from their initial source across what are often great distances to the opening of the ear. From there, they travel all the way down through the many parts of the middle and inner ear until they finally hit the auditory nerve, the true organ of hearing. Then there is still one final step. These initial impulses we call sound must be conveyed to the common sense, which acts as “Censor and Judge” because its job is to regulate the raw sensations produced by all the external senses. In the “privy-chamber of the soule,” as Crooke also pegged the space of common sense within the mind, the many bits of sound that greet us as we make our way through life are both coordinated with data acquired by other senses and sorted into particular notions worthy of human attention.<sup>1</sup>

Over the next hundred or more years, this essentially Aristotelian explanatory model slowly fell out of favor.<sup>2</sup> The business of hearing was reconceptualized, and the common sense, as a faculty of perception, eventually disappeared from depictions of the human brain altogether. But before we too hastily cast Crooke and his contemporaries into the historical dustbin, we should consider the long shadow cast

Previous, more expansive versions of this essay were presented at the History Department Workshop at the University of Maryland, the Eighteenth-Century Workshop at Indiana University, the French Culture Workshop at the Humanities Center at Stanford University, and, in a very different form, the Enlightenment 2.1 conference at the University of California, Berkeley. My thanks to the organizers and discussants at all of those events for their many fruitful suggestions. I am also grateful to Rob Schneider, members of the *AHR*'s editorial board, and the other participants in this forum, foremost among them Jessica Riskin, for their feedback on earlier drafts and, equally, for their perseverance in seeing this forum into print.

<sup>1</sup> Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man. Together with the Controversies Thereto Belonging* (London, 1615). The key passages on the ear's structure and “the manner of hearing” are on 573–612 and 691–698. The trope of the common sense as censor and judge is cribbed from André Du Laurens's *Opera Anatomica* of 1595 and reappears frequently in both French and English accounts of the inner senses during the seventeenth century.

<sup>2</sup> See Penelope Gouk, “Some English Theories of Hearing in the Seventeenth Century: Before and After Descartes,” in Charles Burnett, Michael Fend, and Penelope Gouk, eds., *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgement from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1991), 95–113, which briefly situates Crooke—whose model is Aristotelian in its broad outlines but is supplemented by recent French and Italian anatomical learning—in the development of the theory of hearing.

over the modern Western world by such accounts of the voice, the ear, and the common sense. One way to think about them would be to build upon the claims of the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière regarding the effects of various “distributions of the sensible,” or perceptual boundaries, on the dominant political order, and to probe the connection between the auditory and political imaginations.<sup>3</sup> Crooke’s epistemology, after all, depended upon a recurring set of political metaphors in which the brain, or “Prince and King of all the rest,” is surrounded by a “royall Court” complete with “guard[s] of outward Sences,” “Councillors of state,” and even “spies” and “censors.”<sup>4</sup> The emergence of modern democratic political culture, with its foundational commitment to the idea of freedom of speech, depended upon a transfer of metaphors in the other direction: the appropriation of a particular and already politicized understanding of the work of the senses, and especially audition, to conceptualize, put into action, and ultimately delimit a new set of power relations.

Exploring the subfield that can be described as the history of hearing—its foundational assumptions, key moments, chief arguments, and potential contribution to the discipline of history more generally—is essential to making sense of this claim. Using as an example the seeming cacophony that followed the constitutional protection of free speech at the onset of the French Revolution of 1789, we can then begin to consider what it might mean to read the coming of modern democratic politics in terms that look back to Crooke’s integrative metaphors for the ear and the common sense but also forward to Rancière’s sensual political theory. The right to speak freely has an established history. Should not the right to hear and be heard have a history, too?

CONTEMPORARY HISTORIES OF SOUND and hearing often open with a lament that this subject matter has too long been ignored in favor of studies of the written word or of vision. But it is hard to take this complaint seriously anymore. Over the last two decades, auditory history has entered the discipline with a vengeance—at the intersection of the history of music, the body, technology, medicine, disability, the environment, and everyday life.

A few basic premises, many of them borrowed from cultural anthropology, provide a shared conceptual platform for these studies.<sup>5</sup> First, and most basically, it is

<sup>3</sup> In *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, 2004; orig. French ed. 2000), Jacques Rancière proposes that the tacit boundaries around not only what is sayable but also what is audible at any moment in time determine to a significant degree the dominant or “explicit” political order. For a related argument about the ordering of the senses and the ordering of the political and legal sphere, see Lionel Bently and Leo Flynn, eds., *Law and the Senses: Sensational Jurisprudence* (London, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, 453, 432. The representation of the mind as an ideal state or community, with different faculties serving different administrative functions, goes back to Plato’s *Republic*.

<sup>5</sup> On the anthropology of the senses in general, see Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia, 1989); Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures* (New York, 1993); Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, 1993); C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Memory and Perception as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago, 1994); Michel Serres, *Les cinq sens* (Paris, 1999); Kathryn Linn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002); and David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor, Mich.,

axiomatic that every culture produces different sounds, both natural and manufactured, musical and otherwise. These sounds, considered together, form what is variously referred to as an “auditory landscape,” “soundscape,” or “sonic environment” specific to that culture.<sup>6</sup> Second, these sounds—whether as initially novel and unexpected as a steam engine moving across the nineteenth-century countryside or as universally recognizable as a crying baby—are perceived, hierarchized, regulated, manipulated, and endowed with meaning differently in different places and at different times. This results in varied “regime[s] of listening,” which is to say different forms of auditory experience or modes of auditory attention dependent not only on the sounds themselves but also on the specific interpreters and their settings.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the very act of hearing and remembering sound can be imagined in a variety of ways. Doctors trying to understand the functioning of the ear, composers arranging sounds in novel configurations, philosophers or theologians exploring the human subject, and ordinary people making sense of their own sound-based activities are likely to come to different conclusions about how hearing happens or what listening is. Such conceptions also shift across time and space. This variety in both perception and interpretation exists not because our bodies can change overnight; almost all scholars acknowledge the role of certain biological constants—namely, the voice and the ear—in this story. But they also insist that basic auditory perception, as well as the kind of hearing we call active listening, is historically variable; it depends on incidental and deliberate changes in technology, the environment, aesthetics, and social relations and is also generative of those changes. Hearing as a form of sense perception is, in this literature, a cultural effect as much as a physiological one. Even as simple a question as what rises to the level of music or sinks to the level of noise turns out to be largely socially and ideologically determined, a question of prevailing standards of taste and toleration as well as habits of attention.

For historians, the project of reconstituting the sounds of the past and their reception and uses poses obvious difficulties. We are forced to confront the poverty of the language that we possess for talking about sound.<sup>8</sup> We must also face the poverty of our evidence, a problem that is particularly acute—given not only the fleeting experience of hearing but also the fugitive quality of sound—for the study of eras prior to the invention of recording technology. Even today, as Douglas Kahn

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2003), and his edited volumes *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto, 1991) and *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford, 2005). For anthropological or ethnographic work devoted specifically to hearing, see Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004), especially his introduction, “But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound and the Senses,” 1–20; Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia, 1982); and Barbara Keifenheim, *Wege der Sinne: Wahrnehmung und Kunst bei den Kashinawa-Indianern Amazoniens* (Frankfurt, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> The key source for the emergence of “soundscape studies” is R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York, 1977), reprinted in Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vt., 1993). For a newer twist on this notion, see Peter A. Coates, “The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise,” *Environmental History* 10, no. 4 (October 2005): 636–665.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York, 2008; orig. French ed. 2001), 15.

<sup>8</sup> See the classic essay by Roland Barthes “The Grain of the Voice,” in Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), esp. 179.

points out, “[sound’s] life is too brief and too ephemeral to . . . occupy the tangible duration favored by methods of research.”<sup>9</sup> But innovative historians have, in recent years, turned to sources ranging from the built environment to the punctuation of texts to uncover clues to the experience of audition in the past.<sup>10</sup> What scholars agree upon is that these traces, considered collectively, provide a window onto their subjects’ passions, social relations, means of establishing and conveying knowledge, conceptions of time and space, distribution and marking of power, even senses of body and self. They are, as the influential historian of the senses Alain Corbin has repeatedly argued, vital keys to discovering how people in other eras navigated their world both practically and imaginatively.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, so many distinct historical studies involving sound, audition, or auditory knowledge now exist that we can begin to construct something like a grand narrative for the ear, at least for Western Europe and North America.<sup>12</sup> Even leaving aside the development of what has been formally labeled “music,” there is a full account of Western modernity here, beginning in the era of Helkiah Crooke. Let us sketch its broad contours.

Despite perennial Christian fears of the seductions of the eye, the old Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses, with sight at the top, survived the Reformation intact.<sup>13</sup> But as Crooke himself suggests, early modern Western subjects generally conceived of the body’s senses in interconnected, networked terms. And it was widely accepted that all five external senses played vital, complementary roles in human existence.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce R. Smith offers a fascinating account of the range of sources one might use for reconstructing the history of hearing, from maps and building design, to period musical notation, to graphic signs and typefaces within literary texts; Smith, “Listening to the Wild Blue Yonder: The Challenges of Acoustic Ecology,” in Erlmann, *Hearing Cultures*, 21–41. For examples of historical applications of the latter type of source, see Roger Chartier, *Publishing Drama in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1999); and Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, Calif., 1993).

<sup>11</sup> For Corbin’s own account of his efforts to produce a history of the senses, see Alain Corbin, “Charting the Cultural History of the Senses” (1990), in Howes, *Empire of the Senses*, 128–139; Corbin, *Time, Desire, and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, trans. Jean Bissell (Cambridge, 1995; orig. French ed. 1991), esp. 181–195; and the collection of interviews with Corbin published as *Historien du sensible: Entretiens avec Gilles Heuré* (Paris, 2000). On the implications of Corbin’s project for historians, see Christophe Prochasson, “La politique comme ‘culture sensible’: Alain Corbin face à l’histoire politique,” *French Politics, Culture and Society* 22, no. 2 (June 2004): 56–67; and Sima Godfrey, “Alain Corbin: Making Sense of French History,” *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 381–398.

<sup>12</sup> The closest to this project to date is Robert Jütte’s necessarily schematic but ambitious *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn (Cambridge, 2005; orig. German ed. 2000), in which the history of hearing figures prominently. See too Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2007), 41–58; as well as his edited volume *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens, Ga., 2004), though it does not draw lines between the various (primarily American) case studies. Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Auralities* (New York, 2010), appeared too late to be incorporated into this account.

<sup>13</sup> On Christian conceptions of hearing, see David Chidester, *Word and Light: Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse* (Urbana, Ill., 1992); and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000). For the early Western intellectual history of the sensorium, and especially hearing, see Anthony Synnott, “Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx,” in Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*, 61–76; Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1995); Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kablitz, and Alison Calhoun, eds., *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames* (Baltimore, 2008); and especially Burnett, Fend, and Gouk, *The Second Sense*. Constance Classen emphasizes the geographical and temporal specificity of this trajectory—including the idea of hearing as one distinct sense among five—in *Worlds of Sense*.

Not surprisingly in a primarily non-literate world, audition was deemed particularly important to the transmission of information, whether metaphysical or mundane. As Crooke explained it, “The use of the Sense of Hearing according to Aristotle . . . is to acquire or get knowledge or wisdom.”<sup>14</sup> Hearing was also, in both the Catholic and the Protestant traditions, considered essential to faith. Religious instruction and access to divine truth, that vital prerequisite for salvation, were thought to depend upon the ear (which goes a long way toward explaining the early clerical preoccupation with inventing alternative means to communicate with the deaf).<sup>15</sup> Attention to sound was even considered useful in the cure of diseases.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, daily life in early modern Europe depended upon acute attention to a variety of sonic phenomena, from gossip in the marketplace to the regular pealing of bells.

Taking such examples into account, the great French historian Lucien Febvre proposed in the 1940s that early modern French people had experienced and imagined the world to a much greater degree at the level of sound (not to mention taste and touch) than modern people do. To avoid anachronistic readings of the distant past, historians had to recognize this difference. Then, in Febvre’s telling, they had to re-quicken their ears.<sup>17</sup>

Febvre’s claim and counsel have both been enthusiastically adopted in recent years by historians of early modern Europe and its colonial outposts.<sup>18</sup> According to a host of specialized studies, prior to the late eighteenth century, French people, whether rural or urban, were attuned to myriad now-forgotten sounds, including charivaris, Te Deums, and a host of noises from the street, from people hawking goods to animals being slaughtered in the open. Renaissance Londoners similarly formed what literary critic Bruce Smith calls shifting “acoustic communities” organized around various “soundmarks,” including parish bells, the speech of different nationalities, horse and foot traffic, and the sounds of trades being practiced or products being sold. And these commonplace sounds took on heightened significance—relevancies we have now largely lost—as they met early modern ears. North American colonists, for example, gave portentous meanings to the sound of thunder, as well as to the unfathomable speech of native peoples. They also manifested an intense desire to regulate who could say what to whom—and to guard against what they categorized as dangerous forms of “noise.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, 612.

<sup>15</sup> On the early history of the education of the deaf, see Susan Plann, *A Silent Majority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550–1835* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice: Language, Deafness, and the Senses—A Philosophical History* (London, 1999); and Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Calif., 2001).

<sup>16</sup> On the uses of music in early modern European medicine, see Penelope Gouk, ed., *Musical Healing in Cultural Contexts* (Guilford, 2000); and Gouk, “Music, Melancholy, and Medical Spirits in Early Modern Thought,” in Peregrine Horden, ed., *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity* (Guilford, 2000), 173–94. On medicine and the senses more generally, see W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds., *Medicine and the Five Senses* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass., 1982; orig. French ed. 1942), 424–437, on the “sensory underpinnings” of early modern thought.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003), which opens with the blunt statement “Sound was more important to early Americans than it is to you” (ix).

<sup>19</sup> On the auditory landscape of early modern France, the key book is Jean-Pierre Gutton, *Bruit et sons dans notre histoire: Essai sur la reconstitution du paysage sonore* (Paris, 2000). On the noises of the street in France from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, see also Claude Gauvard and Altan

But what of modernity? At some specific moment—often the late seventeenth century, as an older narrative focused on Europe would have it—the story of audition ostensibly took a new turn. Partly as a result of Descartes' challenge to Aristotelian understandings of cognition, the idea of a common sense faculty, or any other internal sense sorting through a host of random sense impressions and arriving at firm judgments, began to disappear from both psychology and studies of human physiology.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, according to this schema, the external senses became increasingly conceptually distinguished from one another. In Michel Foucault's terms, "The eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in their eternal competition, hearing was both theoretically and practically denigrated, in favor of the growing ascendancy of vision.

Scholars have come up with a host of explanations for this perceived change. The rise of literacy and print culture disconnected speech from reading and writing—to the advantage of the visual. That which was oral was increasingly tagged as untrustworthy (as in the legal category "hearsay") or backward and pre-rational.<sup>22</sup> Concurrently, in the realm of science, observation became the preferred path to sure knowledge. The empiricism of the eye replaced the ostensibly more subjective, more spiritual, and, ultimately, more primal ear.<sup>23</sup> What is more, the civilizing impulse, so

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Golkalp, "Les conduites de bruit et leur signification à la fin du Moyen Âge: Le charivari," *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 29, no. 3 (1974): 693–704; Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1979); Farge, *Effusion et tourment, le récit des corps: Histoire du peuple au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2007), 55–76; F. Billiet, "Le paysage sonore dans les rues d'Amiens (XVIe et XXe siècles): Incidences sur la sociabilité," in Alain Leménorel and Alain Corbin, eds., *La rue, lieu de sociabilité? Rencontres de la rue: Actes du colloque de Rouen, 16–19 novembre 1994* (Rouen, 1997), 387–405; and Jean-Rémy Julien, "Paris: Cris, sons, bruits: L'environnement sonore des années pré-révolutionnaires d'après *Le Tableau de Paris* de Sébastien Mercier," in Jean-Rémy Julien and Jean-Claude Klein, eds., *Orphée phrygien: Les musiques de la Révolution* (Paris, 1989), 39–60. On the noises of the early modern European city more generally, see the exceptional article by David Garrioch, "Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns," *Urban History* 30, no. 1 (2003): 5–25, in which Garrioch argues for the endurance of this auditory system until the late nineteenth century. On early modern England and its own distinctive auditory culture, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago, 1999); D. R. Woolf, "Speech, Text, and, Time: The Sense of Hearing and the Sense of the Past in Renaissance England," *Albion* 18, no. 2 (1986): 159–193; and Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (New Haven, Conn., 2007). On early America, see Rath, *How Early America Sounded*, as well as the brief sections on sound in Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore, 2003). There is also a large literature on oral culture in early America, including Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (Oxford, 1998); and Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999).

<sup>20</sup> On the effects of Cartesianism on understandings of the workings of the senses, including the idea of a common sense, see especially Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (New York, 2007), 164–169.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1971; orig. French ed. 1966), 43.

<sup>22</sup> According to Bernard J. Hibbitts, between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, oral tradition came to play less and less of a role in English law governing customary property rights. At the same time, "hearsay evidence"—literally, evidence consisting in what the witness has heard others say about facts of which the witness him- or herself has no original knowledge—was increasingly refused in legal proceedings, and slander was marginalized as a legitimate cause of legal action. Hibbitts, "Making Sense of Metaphors: Visuality, Aurality, and the Reconfiguration of American Legal Discourse," *Cardozo Law Review* 16, no. 2 (1994): 262. On the status of hearing in modern legal proceedings, see Marianne Constable, *Just Silences: The Limits and Possibilities of Modern Law* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), esp. 171–173.

<sup>23</sup> On the centrality of vision to empiricism, see Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History*

famously identified by Norbert Elias as a key component of the rise of court society and the expanded state, worked against sound as well. Both at the level of the individual, who felt new pressure to control the outward manifestations of emotions and bodily habits, and at the level of polite social interaction, where new, more stringent codes of conversation and conduct held sway, sonic discretion became attached to social distinction. Keeping quiet emerged as a way of displaying good manners. The age of loud burping and guffawing familiar to us from Dutch genre painting had come to an end, at least for the upper classes.<sup>24</sup>

The Enlightenment can be understood both as a product of these multiple shifts in the direction of the visual and as the cause of further erosion in the prestige of hearing. As commentators in the field like to note, the term “Enlightenment,” like *Aufklärung*, *l'Illuminismo*, or *les Lumières*, has a visual rather than aural metaphor at its core.<sup>25</sup> The subsequent expansion of capitalism and consumer culture, with its emphasis on spectacle and visual dazzle, can be said to have simply finished the job that the *philosophes* began: it relegated hearing to an inferior cultural rung.<sup>26</sup> One line of inquiry thus still takes it as historians' charge to explain “how to understand the nature, causes, and timing of the shift from sound toward vision” in the modern era.<sup>27</sup> This is, of course, the historical counterpart to the long insistence, on the part of critics in particular, that the last two centuries are distinguished as a visual age, a world that revolves around techniques of observation, surveillance, commodification, and spectacularization.

Yet when it comes to print culture, or science, or commerce, or even the development of the modern state, many historians of North America and Western Europe now tell a considerably more complicated story, one marked by the persistence of all kinds of oral practices alongside the expansion of text.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a

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of *Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago, 2001), esp. 25; and Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004). But see also the contrary argument about the growing uncertainty of vision in Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1982; orig. German ed. 1939). On silence and sonic restraint as part of social etiquette, see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (1974; repr., New York, 1992), 214–216; and Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, eds., *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992).

<sup>25</sup> On the ocular dimension of the Enlightenment, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), esp. 83–113; as well as Rolf Reichardt, “Light against Darkness: The Visual Representations of a Central Enlightenment Concept,” *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998): 95–148; and Roland Mortier, “‘Lumière’ et ‘lumières’: Histoire d’une image et d’une idée au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle,” in Mortier, *Clartés et ombres du siècle des Lumières: Études sur le XVIIIe siècle littéraire* (Geneva, 1969), 13–59.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Donald M. Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago, 1982); as well as the introduction to Bently and Flynn, *Law and the Senses*.

<sup>27</sup> Rath, *How America Sounded*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Laura Mason has drawn our attention to the important and continued role of singing, oration, public oath-taking, and oral testimony in the courtroom during the French Revolution, most recently in “The ‘Bosom of Proof’: Criminal Justice and the Renewal of Oral Culture during the French Revolution,” *Journal of Modern History* 76, no. 1 (March 2004): 29–61. Jay Fliegelman and Christopher Looby, both writing on the American Revolution, detail the close and lasting relations between orality and textuality in the same period; see Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*; Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago, 1996). On the link in the late eighteenth century between cultural forms that appeal to multiple senses simultaneously and distrust for all existing modes of communication, whether visual or auditory, for their potential to lead to subjective interpretation, see Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language*.

new generation of historians now refuses to accept the idea that sound and its chief receptacle, the ear, became less important with the passage of time, or even Marx's famous claim that all the senses ended up alienated under industrial capitalism.<sup>29</sup> Rather, it is argued that as the Western soundscape changed under pressure from other forces, the uses of hearing, the meaning invested in sound, modes of aural attention, and conflict over the noises of everyday life all evolved accordingly.

The twin processes of industrialization and urbanization clearly played a critical role. Between the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, city dwellers perhaps began to pay less attention to the sounds of nature. But new, typically endogenous or manmade noises, many of them mechanical, began to fill the sonic void. Steam engines, mechanical looms, streetcars: their auditory effects permeated the rural landscape, the interior of the factory, and, especially, the modern city street. At the same time, attitudes toward these unfamiliar sounds—indeed, toward all heard sounds—shifted as they entered private spaces, including that new form of dwelling, the densely populated modern apartment house. There, inescapable noise increasingly registered as a source of auditory distress (though John Picker warns us that the sounds in question were not always industrial, as in the case of the Italian organ-grinders, who were thought to constitute a key street noise problem in mid-nineteenth-century London). Hearing too much of the outside world, including the crowd in the street, challenged the idea of the home as a sanctuary from the public sphere. And as uninvited sound began to be perceived as disruptive, especially inside elite settings, noise levels and kinds of noise became new ways of distinguishing among classes, races, ages, religions, sexes, and occupational groups.<sup>30</sup>

Silence consequently took on new contours, too. It became a commodity, a form of luxury available only at the right price.<sup>31</sup> It also became the end result of the new discipline of the senses associated with prisons, factories, and especially schools, although it could simultaneously signal, as James Johnson points out, the kind of attentive listening that became characteristic of the nineteenth-century concert audience.<sup>32</sup> What is more, certain kinds of sounds, bells among them, remained inti-

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Sterne offers a sustained and well-reasoned critique of this historical approach to sound in *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, N.C., 2003), as does Leigh Schmidt in *Hearing Things*.

<sup>30</sup> On sound and noise in the Victorian city, see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford, 2003); and Peter Bailey, "Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Historian Listens to Noise," *Body and Society* 2, no. 2 (1996): 49–66, reprinted in Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, 1998), 194–211. On the nineteenth-century French city or town, see Olivier Balaÿ, *L'espace sonore de la ville au XIXe siècle* (Bernin, 2003); Gutton, *Bruit et sons dans notre histoire*; and Guy Thuillier, *Pour une histoire du quotidien au XIXe siècle en Nivernais* (Paris, 1977), 230–244. On the American city as well as countryside, see Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001), and the sections on listening in Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), both of which emphasize the link between dominant groups and the more exalted senses. On the distinctive sounds and listening practices of nineteenth-century African American culture, see Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> See Mark Slouka, "Listening for Silence: Notes on the Aural Life," in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York, 2004), 40–46. On the earlier history of silence, see *Le silence au XIX siècle*, Special Issue, *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, no. 10 (1994); and Alain Corbin, "Invitation à une histoire du silence," in Brigitte Mailliard, ed., *Foi, fidélité, amitié en Europe à la période moderne: Mélanges offerts à Robert Sauzet*, 2 vols. (Tours, 1995), 2: 301–309.

<sup>32</sup> James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995). On the growing silence of concert audiences, see too Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*, vol. 4: *The*



mately tied to the emotional life of communities insofar as they triggered memories and served as markers of family, faith, locality, region, or even nation.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, metropolitan and colonial governments alike soon discovered that the business of listening could be manipulated to great effect for purposes ranging from the development of national belonging and cultural dominance to eavesdropping and waging war. Think, for example, of the production of imperial pageantry as a form of “sonic spectacle” in turn-of-the-century British India.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, then, historians routinely stress the ways in which what *should* be heard—and even what *could* legitimately be heard by the human ear—became contested in the aftermath of the revolutionary era.<sup>35</sup> Hearing turned into a new kind of battleground.

Then a second wave of technological innovation, this time centered on the amplification and extension of sense experience for the purposes of enhanced communication, altered the nature of auditory perception once again. The rise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of mechanically reproduced sound, with its myriad potential applications in politics, the arts, and everyday life alike, had a transformative effect on both hearing and active listening.<sup>36</sup> In a 2003 study titled *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne rightly issues a warning against a kind of technological determinism that fails to recognize how earlier changes in listening practices and even understandings of the ear and hearing shaped the emergence of sound repro-

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*Naked Heart* (New York, 1995), 11–35. On the growth of attentive musical listening, see Matthew Riley, *Musical Listening in the German Enlightenment: Attention, Wonder and Astonishment* (Aldershot, 2004). Garrioch sees connections between the development in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries of a distinct elite, urban musical culture, on the one hand, and official and unofficial attacks on street music and other noisy public activities, on the other; “Sounds of the City,” 24–25.

<sup>33</sup> The key work on this subject is Alain Corbin’s magisterial *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York, 1998; orig. French ed. 1994).

<sup>34</sup> See Tim Barringer, “Sonic Spectacles of Empire: The Audio-Visual Nexus, Delhi-London, 1911–12,” in Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford, 2006), 169–196. For a very different set of examples of the manipulation of mass hearing, in this case by the German state, see Nora M. Alter and Lutz Koepnick, eds., *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of Modern German Culture* (New York, 2004); Brian Currid, *A National Acoustics: Music and Mass Publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis, 2006); and in the realm of foreign policy, Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 2009). Peter Szendy, *Sur écoute: Esthétique de l’espionnage* (Paris, 2007), is an “archaeology” of auditory spying; and Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), chronicles military uses of sound. On state (and market) control of auditory experience more generally, the now-classic text is Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1985; orig. French ed. 1977).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Corbin, *Village Bells*; Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*; and Schmidt, *Hearing Things*.

<sup>36</sup> There is a vast literature (by historians, media specialists, and musicologists) on the development of recorded sound and the phonograph, the radio, and the talkie or sound film. Studies that concentrate on the effects of this technology on listening experiences or practices include Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History* (New Haven, Conn., 2000); Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds., *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Ray Barfield, *Listening to Radio, 1920–1950* (Westport, Conn., 1996); James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York, 2000); and Richard Abel and Rick Altman, eds., *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001), esp. chap. 2. On the social, political, psychological, and especially auditory effects of more recent technical breakthroughs in sound reproduction, see, for example, Michael Bull, “Soundscapes of the Car: A Critical Ethnography of Automobile Habitation,” in Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford, 2003), 357–374; and Jean-Paul Thibault, “The Sonic Composition of the City” (on the Walkman), *ibid.*, 329–341.

duction technology.<sup>37</sup> But it also remains indisputable that new, ultimately revolutionary kinds of listening (as well as new kinds of auditory stimuli) emerged partly as effects of the telephone, the phonograph and gramophone, the radio, the public address system, the microphone, the sound film, the telegraph, and the loudspeaker. One result was the growth of acousmatic listening, that is, the experience of listening to sounds apart from their original, visible source. Amplification and sound reproduction made it possible for sound to be perceived in a pure or, one might equally say, highly commodified form. Another effect was the spread of ambient listening as such commodified forms of music were increasingly pumped into the spaces of daily life and became the barely noticeable but ubiquitous background to a range of ordinary leisure-time and workplace activities. The passive, unavoidable apprehension of recorded music became the norm everywhere, from riding in the elevator, to visiting the dentist, to, indeed, shopping for sound recordings.<sup>38</sup>

At various moments in the last 150 years, these new communicative technologies provoked positively utopian aspirations centered upon the effects of new forms of hearing. Telephones, for example, promised to create intimacy without spatial constraints, uniting communities through the exchange of sound alone.<sup>39</sup> (Cell phones are still marketed on this basis today.) Similarly, fascists, socialists, and capitalists alike fixed on collective radio listening as an especially efficacious form of mass persuasion and education.<sup>40</sup> These audible technologies were also often spontaneously incorporated into more traditional forms of street life and celebration.<sup>41</sup> But new kinds of listening, as well as new kinds of sound, also produced novel anxieties, including medical ones. Intensely amplified popular music raised the specter of both nervous disorders and real hearing loss. Moreover, the same technology that promised to create new forms of community also introduced the possibility of ever greater withdrawal into private soundworlds, a worry that has resurfaced in recent years in discussions of the Walkman and now the iPod. Even older notions of the self were seemingly thrown into question by the changing effects of audition on individuals'

<sup>37</sup> Sterne, *The Audible Past*. Szendy, in *Listen*, makes a similar point about the role of intellectual property law in shaping both hearing and hearing technologies.

<sup>38</sup> On these categories, see the essays in Part II, "Modes of Listening," in Cox and Warner, *Audio Culture*. The article by Pierre Schaeffer on acousmatic listening (76–81) is particularly interesting. For a historical perspective on ambient listening, see Tim J. Anderson, *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* (Minneapolis, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> See Claude S. Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992); as well as Steven Connor's more wide-ranging *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> For a small sampling of the literature on radio and politics and the mass distribution of auditory propaganda in the twentieth century, see Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920–1940* (Baltimore, 2000); Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006); Gianni Isola, *Abbassa la tua radio per favore: Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nell'Italia fascista* (Scandicci, 1990); Inge Marssolek and Adelheid von Saldern, eds., *Radio im Nationalsozialismus: Zwischen Lenkung und Ablenkung* (Tübingen, 1998); and Klaus Arnold and Christoph Classen, eds., *Zwischen Pop und Propaganda: Radio in der DDR* (Berlin, 2004). There is also a growing literature on the different politics of mass listening in postcolonial contexts; see, for example, Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York, 2006), which focuses on contemporary Cairo.

<sup>41</sup> See Adrian Rifkin, *Street Noises: Parisian Pleasure, 1900–40* (Manchester, 1993); and Rosemary Wakeman, "Street Noises: Celebrating the Liberation of Paris in Music and Dance," in Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward, eds., *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500* (Aldershot, 2007), 219–237.

lives and bodies.<sup>42</sup> As early as 1888, the German Association of Public Hygiene passed a resolution calling for stronger measures to protect individuals' senses of smell and hearing from assault.<sup>43</sup> The "din" of modern life was on its way to becoming oppressive noise pollution.<sup>44</sup> By the early twentieth century, one can speak of one final effect of the advent of altered experiences of hearing: the rise of new kinds of professionals whose job was to use urban planning techniques, architectural acoustic design, behavioral modification, and even the law to regulate or contain unwanted sound.<sup>45</sup> These experts should be seen as participants in an ongoing struggle to distinguish between what constitutes dissonance and what might be considered a beneficent and beneficial use of sound.

This story is mirrored quite directly by the changing history of music and its production and reception, not least in the course of the twentieth century. The fabled tale of the rise of the cultural avant-garde over the last hundred years similarly depends upon the breakdown of the performer and audience dichotomy; a refusal to distinguish neatly among music, sound, or even noise; a love/hate relationship with new technology; and a rejection of longstanding distinctions between the different arenas of the different senses. There are contemporary cultural critics who argue forcefully that the present moment marks only the newest stage in the modern dominance of the visual.<sup>46</sup> But the emergence of ever-newer media, including those that offer the prospect of sensory recombination, and the related explosion of hybrid forms of art and music, including so-called "sound art," easily spawn counterarguments.<sup>47</sup> If nothing else, the transitional auditory landscape in which we currently reside should stimulate us to keep rethinking the broad outlines of this narrative of the sonic past—and the role of the ear and hearing within history more generally.

LET US, THEN, CONSIDER ONE WAY that this schematic story might be extended and potentially enhanced. Recall once again Helkiah Crooke and his vision of the brain

<sup>42</sup> See Steven Connor, "The Modern Auditory I," in Roy Porter, ed., *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1997), 203–223. According to Connor, "The new instability of the modern self, its understanding of itself in terms of its interception of, and by, experiences, events and phenomena, rather than its reception or perception of them, is frequently embodied in terms of sound, and in particular electronically broadcast sound, rather than of sight" (208–209).

<sup>43</sup> Jütte, *A History of the Senses*, 183.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Dan McKenzie, *The City of Din: A Tirade against Noise* (London, 1916).

<sup>45</sup> On noise abatement campaigns in the early twentieth century, 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, no. 1 (2001): 37–70; as well as Lawrence Baron, "Noise and Degeneration: Theodor Lessing's Crusade for Quiet," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 1 (1982): 165–178; and Raymond W. Smilor, "Toward an Environmental Perspective: The Anti-Noise Campaign, 1893–1932," in Martin V. Melosi, ed., *Pollution and Reform in American Cities, 1870–1930* (Austin, Tex., 1980), 135–151. On the rise of acoustics as a response to a new desire to rationalize and control sound (i.e., avoid noise), and the subsequent effects on taste, see Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

<sup>46</sup> See David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), at the level of theory; or Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996), for claims about practice.

<sup>47</sup> The standard history of the emergence of sound art is Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*. On "the prospect of sensory recombination and transformation" offered by new technology and its potential effects in the future, see Connor, "The Modern Auditory I," 221.

as a palace, the ear as a royal guard, and the common sense as a judge and censor. In many recent studies of hearing's history, politics functions largely as a backdrop, one of a series of abstract forces that shape the conditions of sound reception either incidentally or as a result of conscious manipulation by those in power. But as Crooke's metaphors remind us, politics is always, in large part, inseparable from communication. And communication is necessarily bound up with power relations. Taking auditory and perceptual metaphors seriously—that is, reading them in conjunction with an actual and ever-changing “heard world”—offers the possibility of making the history of efforts *to be heard* or *to get a hearing* a fundamental aspect of the story of the emergence of modern political culture.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, it moves us one step closer to bringing the emergent field of sensory history into direct contact with the history of politics.

Our test case is one of the turning points in the general narrative of modernity. That is the legal protection of speech—the physiological counterpart to hearing—which accompanied the start of the French Revolution. The abandonment of pre-publication censorship in summer 1788, formalized in the second article of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789 as a right to “the free communication of thoughts,” has, despite its limitations and subsequent reversals, long been celebrated in hindsight as a vital step toward the establishment of self- or democratic governance. It has come to represent the turn toward public judgment and opinion as a foundation for law-making. It has also been seen to mark the culmination of the civil libertarian strain of the Enlightenment and the triumph of the idea of the reasonableness of the individual subject.<sup>49</sup>

In its moment, though, the dismantling of the royal censorship apparatus was experienced quite differently: as a visceral explosion of human-produced sound. Contemporaries remarked immediately and repeatedly on the outpouring of voices, both famous and obscure, that crowded an expanding public sphere in the form of gossip, speeches, orations, oaths, debates, and songs, as well as printed matter such as newspapers, handbills, posters, and pamphlets of every sort. “Everyone is talking,” reported one astonished observer after a trip to the newly opened Palais Royal in

<sup>48</sup> On how metaphors shape and constrain our perceptions of the world, the classic text is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980). On the particular significance of bodily and sense experience to figurative language, see Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago, 1987). Political and legal language, with its focus on communication, makes especially heavy use of such metaphors; see Hibbitts, “Making Sense of Metaphors,” and, as a historical example, Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770–1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, Calif., 1997; orig. French ed. 1993). Less attention has been paid to the fact that the metaphors used to describe sense experience are necessarily derived from other areas of experience, including forms of governance and commerce, as in the case of Crooke and many of his ancient predecessors. My interest is in the figurative as well as actual relationship between these two spheres, the sensual and the political. And I follow Michael Walzer in assuming that the evolution of dominant metaphors is connected to changes both in what is to be explained and in what referents are available for use, even if (as Corbin reminds us) linguistic formulas related to the senses typically stay in place well after certain practices or even knowledge come to an end. See Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

<sup>49</sup> On traditional philosophical justifications for free speech (to which the free-speech legislation of the early French Revolution has often been assimilated), see Frederick Schauer, *Free Speech: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Cambridge, 1982), 15–72; and Kent Greenawalt, “Free Speech Justifications,” *Columbia Law Review* 89 (1989): 119–155.

the spring of 1789.<sup>50</sup> The same seemed to be the case whether one turned up at cafés, on street corners, in living rooms, or at marketplaces across the nation. This avalanche of self-expression, proponents suggested, was a public riposte to centuries of imposed silence and secrecy, qualities that soon became potent symbols of a despotic past.<sup>51</sup>

But here is where we need to turn to questions of reception and consumption as well as production, which is to say, the history of listening as well as speaking.<sup>52</sup> For what Frenchmen soon discovered in practice (thanks, in part, to the prodding of a new class of journalists and rabble-rousers created by the liberation of speech) was what twentieth- and twenty-first-century proponents of deliberative democracy from Hannah Arendt onward have repeatedly emphasized in theory. All those people talking in 1789 found that subjects truly turn into citizens neither at the moment when abstract rights are bestowed upon them nor at the moment when some kind of consensus emerges regarding the common good. Rather, true citizenship entails becoming a full participant in the intersubjective game that is politics. Furthermore, this activity involves not only getting to speak (i.e., having “a say” or “a voice”), but also being actively and attentively heard. In Arendt’s terms, “communicability,” the starting point of public life, depends on “a community of men who can be addressed and who are listening and can be listened to.”<sup>53</sup> This assumption—that real political freedom results from interactions among equal citizens in which speaking *and* listening are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing—also lies at the heart of what some contemporary legal scholars refer to as “listeners’ rights” and as “the right to be heard.”<sup>54</sup>

The problem was that what occurred in 1788–1789 had none of the qualities of

<sup>50</sup> Marquis de Ferrières, *Correspondance inédite (1789, 1790, 1791)*, quoted in Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2002), 127.

<sup>51</sup> On the effects of the deregulation of speech and the press in terms of increased public expression at the start of the Revolution, see Raymonde Monnier, *L’espace public démocratique: Essai sur l’opinion à Paris de la Révolution au Directoire* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> There is not much free-speech literature that takes up the role of the attentive listener, the other half of the speaking-listening equation, but the following are suggestive: Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (New York, 1990); Amit Pinchevski, “Freedom from Speech (or the Silent Demand),” *diacritics* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 71–84; and the discussion of “the Stoic notion of the listening citizen” in John Durham Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* (Chicago, 2005), 130–135.

<sup>53</sup> Arendt did not write extensively about either listening or hearing as a specific practice. See, though, her suggestive remarks in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago, 1992), quotation from 40; as well as Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963); and Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1998), esp. 57–58. Insofar as much of her work concentrated on the activity of politics and on what citizens do and how, a few contemporary political theorists have expanded upon Arendt’s arguments to make a case for the centrality of listening within democratic political life; see, for example, Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), esp. 173–175; Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996); and James Tully, “The Agonic Freedom of Citizens,” *Economy and Society* 28, no. 2 (May 1999): 161–182.

<sup>54</sup> American legal theorists, following Alexander Meiklejohn’s vision of self-government as something akin to a traditional town meeting in which “each [man] has a right and a duty to think his own thoughts, to express them, and to listen to the arguments of others” and in which “no suggestion of a policy shall be denied a hearing,” sometimes also argue for the extension of free-speech rights to listeners. These claims can take the form of arguments for “the right to hear” (meaning the right to read, listen, see, and receive communications or otherwise obtain information) or for “the right to be heard” (meaning the right to an audience for one’s ideas or speech). Neither rubric is, however, central to a

a reasoned dialogue or an exchange among equals. Nor did it suggest the imminent emergence of a single, collective public voice. Cacophony was more like it, as everyone seemed to be shouting, whether literally or figuratively, at once. *Cri de la douleur*, *Cri de la vérité*, and *Cri de la justice et de l'humanité*: these were the sonically exaggerated titles of the pamphlets of the moment.<sup>55</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the radical deregulation of the conditions of public speech, the question of how to make oneself, or one's associates, audible above the din—indeed, of how to get anyone to actually listen—surfaced almost immediately. Clearly it was not going to be enough simply to create physical proximity or to exercise one's right to make a lot of noise. One had to be actively, intentionally heard and attended to in order to make any difference at all.

This distinction became apparent first within the walls of that extraordinary experiment in parliamentary politics, the National Assembly, formed in the summer of 1789. The twelve hundred or so deputies who gathered in the cavernous *Menus Plaisirs* at Versailles and then the *Salle du Manège* in the Tuileries immediately confronted the practical problem that they could barely see or even hear each other, at least without standing on benches and screaming at the top of their lungs.<sup>56</sup> Some tried to remedy the problem by establishing procedural rules to counter what the Comte de Mirabeau described as “everyone in the French manner, wishing to speak before they listen.”<sup>57</sup> Other commentators demanded an architectural solution or sought technical improvements at the level of sound itself, proposing devices such as megaphones and speaking platforms intended to “facilitate the passage of sonorous rays” in spaces too large for the kind of direct democracy—literally, a show of hands under a tree—once imagined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>58</sup>

It was, however, the represented even more than the representatives who understood in the first years of the Revolution that the right to talk had not been translated into a right to be heard. For if not all the deputies could manage to garner equal auditory attention on the floor of the assembly hall, the problem of attracting

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classical liberal defense of free speech in which the speaker is paramount. See Meiklejohn, *Political Freedom: The Constitutional Powers of the People* (New York, 1965), 24, 26–27.

<sup>55</sup> As Vincent Milliot explains in *Les “Cris de Paris,” ou Le peuple travesti: Les représentations des petits métiers parisiens (XVI–XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1995), 315–345, the word *cri* was appropriated and inflated by the authors of revolutionary political pamphlets and journals destined to be hawked on the street (in competition with other publications and political positions) and also used as a means of popular mobilization. The pamphlets mentioned above all date from 1789.

<sup>56</sup> The best source on this question remains Armand Brette, *Histoire des édifices où ont siégé les assemblées parlementaires de la Révolution française et de la première république* (Paris, 1902), 204–206, 233–234. On the meeting hall of the National Assembly as “très sourde” and the presumed negative impact of this fact on political debate, see the *Journal de Paris*, no. 285 (October 12, 1791), cited *ibid.*, 205–206.

<sup>57</sup> On the establishment of procedural rules for speaking in the National Assembly, see Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), esp. 214–218.

<sup>58</sup> *Mémoire sur les moyens: 1° de communiquer sur-le-champ au peuple, occupant les dehors du lieu où se tient l'Assemblée, les délibérations qui y sont prises; 2° de se faire entendre dans une grande assemblée* (Paris, October 1789), reproduced in part in Jacques Guilhaumou, *La langue politique et la Révolution française: De l'événement à la raison linguistique* (Paris, 1989), 151–155. The three complementary machines proposed were a kind of megaphone for intensifying the voice (to be called “le porte-parole du peuple”), an enormous board on which the same sentiments could be represented graphically for those at too great a distance for audition, and a platform for making visible the physical presence of the orator in his role as the people's spokesman.

the ears of the powerful proved that much more daunting for ordinary people—especially those with less status as public speakers, less access to any public platform or medium, less facility with words, and often less welcome messages to convey. Frustration with sonic inequality seemingly almost immediately produced an intense desire on the part of anonymous crowds to reverse the expectation that they (alone) would listen passively to all that transpired. Instead, new citizens tried repeatedly to force the experience of listening on others. How else can we explain the continual concerted effort of the *menu peuple* to make their presence felt aurally as well as visually in the galleries of the various early revolutionary assemblies?

Arthur Young, like other English observers, described with considerable horror in May of 1789 not only the “want of order” among the deputies of the Estates-General themselves but also the “noisy expressions”—the hissing, the clapping, and other “grossly indecent” forms of noisemaking—that issued from ordinary people gathered in the assembly hall eager to “over-rule the debate and influence the deliberations.”<sup>59</sup> Others depict an indignant crowd bent on keeping up the auditory pressure by means of whistling, booing, singing, shouting down enemies, cheering, chanting slogans, and even beating drums both inside the meeting hall and out in the surrounding streets.<sup>60</sup> Street actions, too, starting with the storming of the Bastille, had a deliberate, and oft-noted, sonic dimension.<sup>61</sup> Such noisy behavior had little to do with free speech per se. Popular politics in the early years of the Revolution might best be understood as a collective effort by ordinary people to make themselves heard by whatever means they had at their disposal. In this, French revolutionary crowds set the pattern for all subsequent revolutionary protests, right up to the massive collective key-chain shaking that broke out in Prague’s Wenceslas Square in 1989 and quickly became one of the great symbols of the Velvet Revolution.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, the emphasis on making one’s voice count in the new communicative

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Young, *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789: Undertaken More Particularly with a View of Ascertaining the Cultivation, Wealth, Resources, and Natural Prosperity of the Kingdom of France*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1794), 1: 125 (June 15, 1789).

<sup>60</sup> On the impact of the crowd in the meetings of the National Assembly, see Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*; and Patrick Brasart, *Paroles de la Révolution: Les assemblées parlementaires, 1789–1794* (Paris, 1988), 69–78. David Garrioch depicts public insults in an earlier era as a similar kind of auditory performance conducted primarily for the benefit of the audience; “Sounds of the City,” 20. Peter Hoffer, writing on the American Revolution, also describes mobs and demonstrators engaging in “sensory warfare,” including violations of “aural etiquette” and “auditory terrorism,” although he draws too strong a distinction between a sensory people, on the one hand, and a political class invested in cold, rational natural rights language, on the other; *Sensory Worlds in Early America*, 218.

<sup>61</sup> In his fascinating “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,” William Sewell cites the following account from the *Révolutions de Paris* of the aftereffects of the storming of the Bastille: “Applause, an excess of joy, insults, imprecations hurled at the perfidious prisoners of war, all were mixed together; cries of vengeance and of pleasure leapt forth from every heart.” See Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), 250. Sewell, however, takes this passage to be evidence of the heightened emotion that was characteristic of revolutionary events, whereas I see it as part of a process, beginning early in the Revolution, of turning crowd noise into an aspect of the mythology of revolutionary events.

<sup>62</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, an observer, recounted the spontaneous gesture of the hundreds of thousands of Czech citizens who gathered in Wenceslas Square in November 1989: “They all take their keys out of their pockets and shake them, 300,000 key-rings, producing a sound like massed Chinese bells.” See Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of ’89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York, 1990), 96. A decade later, in the late 1990s, thousands of whistle-blowing protesters amassed repeatedly in the streets of Belgrade, the capital of the former Yugoslavia, to oppose the regime of

order soon became figurative as well, a question of the rhetoric of popular *porteparoles* in the relative silence of print. The great radical journalist Jean-Paul Marat was especially successful in the first years of the Revolution in stirring the popular classes to indignation by framing the present moment as a drama of failed communication. In Marat's repeated telling, "the most frightful tyranny is that which imposes silence on the *patrie*."<sup>63</sup> This, of course, had been the condition of the Old Regime, when most of the work of government had happened behind the sound barrier of closed doors.<sup>64</sup> Then the people had been forced into a passive role as receptacles of information, their own cries continually rejected by a king who refused to listen in return. The issue for Marat was that despite the public's newfound right to make noise, and the theoretical importance of this noise to the formation of the national will, little in practice had changed. Even the members of the Parisian municipal government, Marat reported, continued to "close their ears to my voice" and to "turn a deaf ear, to maintain silence" in response to his repeated and serious charges.<sup>65</sup> The same went for his complaints and objections before the National Assembly, where the president, in trying to "make them heard," had "his voice stifled" by opposing factions.<sup>66</sup> Hence Marat's continual demand starting in late 1789 was no longer that the people be allowed to speak, but rather that their voices, or often cries of distress, be recognized as such, that they be able—in his frequent phrase—"se faire entendre," to make themselves heard. Marat kept up a steady demand that the general public remain present and audible in the meeting space of the Assembly even as the galleries shrank in size in the Manège and toleration for the presence of observers declined.<sup>67</sup> More abstractly, he argued repeatedly that both the king and the people's currently "inaccessible" representatives be compelled to heed what they heard and that those who persisted in being "deaf to the voice of justice" or "deaf to the voice of duty" be purged from the national body.<sup>68</sup>

For Marat, democratic governance had nothing to do with moderating between, or even taking seriously, diverse points of view. His ideal was the rule of a consensual national will, not the endless dialogue and negotiation imagined by some modern

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Slobodan Milošević aurally as well as visually—suggesting the continued appeal of this form of political opposition.

<sup>63</sup> Jean-Paul Marat, "Dénonciation contre Malouet" (August 1790), in Marat, *Les pamphlets de Marat*, ed. Charles Vellay (Paris, 1911), 212.

<sup>64</sup> There is a large literature on secrecy and the absolutist state; see, for example, Robert A. Schneider, "Disclosing Mysteries: The Contradictions of Reason of State in Seventeenth-Century France," in Gisela Engel and Jonathan Elukin, eds., *Das Geheimnis am Beginn der europäischen Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 159–178, on the paradoxical rise of "publications" in praise of deception, mystification, inaccessibility, and secrecy or silence, coupled with both aural and visual surveillance, as elements of good statecraft.

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Paul Marat, *L'ami du peuple*, no. 18 (September 28, 1789), in Marat, *Oeuvres politiques, 1789–1793*, ed. Jacques De Cock and Charlotte Goëtz, 10 vols. (Brussels, 1989–1995), 1: 203; and "Appel à la nation" (July 1790), in *Les pamphlets de Marat*, 130. Compare some of the other radical journals of this moment, including Stanislas Fréron's *Orateur du peuple* and Nicolas Bonneville's *Bouche de fer*, whose very titles announce their desired role in this drama.

<sup>66</sup> Marat, "Appel à la nation" (July 1790), in *Les pamphlets de Marat*, 135.

<sup>67</sup> Marat, *L'ami du peuple*, no. 29 (November 5, 1789), in *Oeuvres politiques*, 1: 262; see too his comments in the same journal in no. 351 (January 25, 1791), *ibid.*, 4: 2133–2135.

<sup>68</sup> Marat, *L'ami du peuple*, no. 14 (September 24, 1789), in *Oeuvres politiques*, 1: 185; Marat, "Supplément de l'offrande à la patrie" (April 1789), in *Les pamphlets de Marat*, 40; Marat, "Appel à la nation" (July 1790), *ibid.*, 122.



theorists of democracy. But the reciprocity of listening (and not just speaking) was, for Marat, essential to the actualization of both popular sovereignty and new notions of equality—or what the political theorist James Tully, two centuries later, would call “intersubjective recognition.”<sup>69</sup> And Marat, like many of his contemporaries, articulated this need largely through metaphors of deafness and audition, figures of speech that would remain fundamental to modern political struggles long after the actual sonic landscape changed.

It was, though, precisely this kind of rhetoric—and its success in creating an ever more multivocal public sphere at the same time as demands for unity grew—that produced a second recognizable effect at the time of the French Revolution. This was a subsequent public call for a collective return, at the level of metaphor, to what had once been considered the final stage in the hearing process, or “common sense.”<sup>70</sup>

Public pleas for the reintroduction of common sense (generally in the guise of *le bon sens* rather than *le sens commun*) began to make themselves heard in late 1790 and into 1791, principally among moderates within the new political establishment.<sup>71</sup> These were men who accepted in theory the idea of free speech as a basic right of man and vital protection against tyranny but who also found themselves increasingly alarmed by the scale and pitch of an extraparliamentary political culture in which, from every direction, in the words of one anti-Jacobin journal, “one hundred mouths open at once to vomit out lies.”<sup>72</sup> What they hoped to accomplish in producing and distributing (largely for free) journals and pamphlets with titles such as *Le crieur de bon sens et patriote* (The Patriotic Crier of Good Sense) and *Mon patience est à bout: Un mot de bon sens* (My Patience Is at Its End: A Word of Good Sense) was, paradoxically, to reduce the polyphony of revolutionary culture and, by focusing on hearing, mitigate the dangerous effects of free speech.<sup>73</sup>

In all of these texts, *le bon sens* stood first for a minimalist, quotidian way of

<sup>69</sup> Tully, “The Agonic Freedom of Citizens,” 174.

<sup>70</sup> It is important to note that common sense is here used (metaphorically) in a way that is closer to Crooke than to Arendt. That is, common sense is imagined less as a communal faculty that allows for reasoned dialogue between opponents (as Arendt was to propose almost two centuries later) than as a “censor and judge” in the context of a world overflowing with too many discordant, hostile, misleading, undifferentiated, and potentially dangerous sounds. On the history of this concept, see Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011).

<sup>71</sup> *Le Sens Commun, no. 1er: Idée générale de l'état de la France*, a journal whose one issue dates from 1790, is an exception. The term “common sense,” or *le sens commun*, was too closely identified with Tom Paine—who is the explicit reference point in this publication—to have been politically neutral in the context of the French Revolution. But contemporary dictionaries define the terms *le bon sens* and *le sens commun* as synonyms insofar as both stood by the end of the eighteenth century for a basic human capacity to make “sensible” distinctions, not for a specific Aristotelian faculty.

<sup>72</sup> *Le crieur de bon sens et patriote*, no. 4 (February 3, 1791). Ironically, the motto of the journal was “Ecoutez-moi, je suis votre Ami.”

<sup>73</sup> Among journals, *Le crieur de bon sens et patriote*, nos. 1–15 (January 30–February 14, 1791), was followed soon after by *Le bon sens: Réflexions libres sur les affaires actuelles*, no. 1 (February or March 1791), and then *Le stationnaire patriote aux frontières, ou l'appel au bon sens*, nos. 1–18 (July 11–November 3, 1791). The value of *le bon sens* was touted in pamphlets, too, from *Tirez le rideau: La farce est jouée* ([Paris], October 1791) and *L'appel au bon sens* ([Paris], August 1791), both of which were extracts from the *Stationnaire patriote*, to the anonymous *Mon patience est à bout: Un mot de bon sens à MM. les dénonciateurs des prêtres nonjureurs* (n.p., 1791). Jacques Guilhaumou notes the frequent recourse to the idea of *le bon sens* in moderate propaganda of this moment, but he does not link this term to a politics of hearing or common sense; Guilhaumou, “L'élite modérée et 'la propriété des mots' (1791): Propagation et usage des mots dans l'opinion publique,” in Winfried Busse and Jürgen Trabant, eds., *Les*

apprehending and talking about reality. Knowledge was to be reduced to nothing more than the ordinary person's direct sense experience and a style of expression that did not betray the elemental quality of such perceptions. One anonymous anti-Jacobin propagandist devoted an entire pamphlet in 1791 to depicting an imaginary "Society of Friends of Good Sense" in which the only rule was that all speechifying was to be purged of "sophisms . . . metaphors, antitheses, the smallest excesses of warmth . . . emphatic phrases, new locutions, exclamations, outrageous exaggerations," and any other "*tours de force*."<sup>74</sup> The idea was that such a stripped-down approach to communication could not fail to result in the collective agreement of all people, with the exception of the imbecilic, perverse, or crazy. But *le bon sens* was envisioned not only as a foundation for perception and speech. It also became a standard by which to clarify, assess, and filter the myriad opinions in circulation, or to establish what might today be called extralegal or "constitutive" censorship.<sup>75</sup> The echoes of Crooke are obvious. Although there were counterrevolutionary pamphleteers who wrote longingly, at least for rhetorical effect, of a future world in which people simply would no longer possess ears, the moderate attachment to an imagined "sovereign tribunal of good sense" was never about a kind of self-imposed deafness.<sup>76</sup> Rather, the goal was to push the "sensible" public to make aural discriminations, to hear through the hyperbole, obfuscations, and exclamations of popular journalists, club members, and what one ephemeral journal called "charlatan preachers in the streets . . . to whom the people rush to listen."<sup>77</sup> And this desire must be seen as part of a concerted effort by a tenuous new ruling elite to control the nature of politics by restoring (to use Rancière's term) an established "distribution of the sensible," or informal limits around not only what gets articulated but also what gets actively heard and attended to in the first place.

Of course, this plea for the return of a normativizing good or common sense did not actually succeed in early revolutionary France. It neither ended the cacophony associated with freedom of expression nor created a consensual, unitary public voice. On the contrary, such pleas only generated further animosity around the question of who had the authority to determine or to impose what version of common sense. By late 1792, the revolutionary government had begun, ironically, to restore a formal, regulative censorship apparatus, in part based on the claim that a consensual and impartial common sense was no longer anywhere to be found.<sup>78</sup> This oscillation

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*Idéologues: Sémiotique, théories et politiques linguistiques pendant la Révolution française* (Amsterdam, 1986), 323–342.

<sup>74</sup> *Le greffe patriotique de la Société des amis du bon sens* (Anthropolis [Paris], n.d. [ca. March 1791]). Compare Joseph Addison's remarks in *The Spectator*, no. 126 (July 15, 1711), where a similar club is imagined. On the context for this earlier English recourse to the trope of common sense, see Rosenfeld, *Common Sense*, chap. 1.

<sup>75</sup> On this idea, which is most fully developed in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, see Sophia Rosenfeld, "Writing the History of Censorship in the Age of Enlightenment," in Daniel Gordon, ed., *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment: New Perspectives in Eighteenth-Century French Intellectual History* (New York, 2001), 117–146.

<sup>76</sup> *Un philosophe virois aux prises avec le sens commun, par un catholico-républicain* (n.p. [Délivrande], 1793–1794), 12; *Le stationnaire patriote aux frontières, ou l'appel au bon sens*, no. 15 (October 5, 1791), 5–6.

<sup>77</sup> *Le bon sens: Réflexions libres sur les affaires actuelles*, no. 1.

<sup>78</sup> On censorship during the later phases of the Revolution, see Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789–1799* (Durham, N.C., 1990), esp. 171–177. The Paris Commune led the

among different modes for regulating what is heard—that of the market, that of tacit norms associated with common sense, and that of a punitive legal system—also became part of the dance of modern political culture. The challenge now is to integrate this history with the better-known story of the struggle over speech. It is time to begin the process of constructing a truly political history of the senses.

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way by banning counterrevolutionary newspapers in late 1792. The Convention followed in 1793 with a series of ever more punitive measures directed against hostile journalists and printers. The legal limits of freedom of the press and expression were subject to repeated modifications over the rest of the revolutionary era.

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