

A sight for sore eyes, looking to the future, seeing the bright side. Nearly all the metaphors are visual. Seeing is believing, but don't believe everything you hear.

In recent years, however, the long-running tyranny of the visual is being challenged. Hearing has come to rival sight among the principal means by which we make sense of things. To a large extent this has to do with sonic saturation via technology. Fortunately there's more to this shift.

Stephen Handel put it this way: "Listening puts me in the world. Listening gives me a sense of emotion, a sense of movement, and a sense of being that is missing when I'm looking."

The immediacy of the auditory seems to be why Hegel found it more ideal, more dialectically effective than sight, regarding objectivity and interiority.

Sound may be difficult to define, and yet something called Sonic Thinking is emerging. Not philosophy about sound, but, somehow, thinking sound. Angus Carlyle asserted that "all sound is memory," which calls to mind Adorno and Horkheimer's striking proposition, "Every reification is a forgetting." Something is left out, enabling the hardening, the reification. As Carlyle had it, sound contains what otherwise gets forgotten.

As intentional objects of learning, sounds are more than secondary qualities. They are experiences, events. In one of his seminars, Gilles Deleuze referred to a correspondence where thought and sensation merge and "doing thinking" goes beyond representation and categorization. One approaches that kind of merging or connecting from, say, a Thoreau and his communion with nature. He did not read or interpret it but felt its immanence, "the sound of circulation in nature's reins." Compare Foucault's injunction to begin clinical knowledge with attention to the living body's "primordial

noise,” the “non-silence of the organs.”

“Sound troubles representation,” declared Laurence Kramer. Its challenge lies in its potential, its lingering promise. The sound of the wave before it breaks, in Kramer’s metaphor. It is the immeasurable measure of life. The sense of life spreads outward from sound, like the cry of a newborn baby.

The Big Bang was the first, primal sound. According to NASA, the deepest sound in the universe, emitted by black holes, is a B-flat, 57 octaves below middle C.

Michel Chion has discussed the acousmatic voice, that which has been cut off from a body. “Ever since the telephone and gramophone made it possible to isolate voices from bodies, the voice naturally has reminded us of the voice of the dead.” Perhaps fittingly, Alexander Graham Bell was moved to develop the telephone by his belief that the static he could hear over the line was the voices of dead people, possibly his dead brother. Digitization of sound, encoding it, certainly takes this further, a greater distancing from any eventual origin. The present deluge and trajectory of the technosphere present various retreats of this kind, for example, the popularity of texting over voice communication—a further degree of estrangement.

In Spike Jonze’s 2013 film “Her,” Theodore falls in love with “Samantha,” an operating system’s synthetic voice on his smartphone. What is seductive is all sound in this chilling movie.

Dominic Pettman’s proposal: “Let us presume that it is not too late to listen to the voices of the earth, whether they be mineral, animal, or technological.” Unmindful of the fact that the technological is silencing the rest.

“How a sonic sensibility may inform emancipatory practices” is the theme of Brandon LaBelle’s *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (2020). To LaBelle, sound is “a

disquieting presence," always audible but rarely heard.

Both sound and silence belong to what is unmediated. Even noise can reveal that which escapes our cognitive habitat, and can point to unnoticed relationships. Jacques Attali claims that "noise functions as a force of interruption, one that announces, through its unmistakable agitations, violence that always takes its aim at the social order."

Even though sight is still the royal register, we are born in and of sound. And clearly, sound is employed in countless efforts. The U.S. space program's 1977 Voyager launched Golden Records into deep space, projecting a wide array of sounds: samples of 55 human languages, various musical compositions, and more on this sonorous territorialization of the cosmos. Is listening in the here and now a healthier pursuit?