

**THE PLEASURES OF THE EAR:
TOWARD AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LISTENING**

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Collection and research on expressive culture had its beginning in scholars' deep and often emotional and sensory attraction to folk song, narration and craft. Writing and print were the customary 19th-century media of learning and communicating knowledge, and the growing scholarly habit of screening out emotional vocabulary further impoverished our understanding of the sensory and sensual totality of experience. While students of culture have long begun to critically examine their fields' legacies, the more intimate, affective linkage between burgeoning scholars and their disciplinary subject has not been fully considered. It is this implicit attraction and its marginalization, if not disappearance from scholarly purview, that contributed to the equal marginalization of sensory experience, affect, and emotion from ethnographic work. To comprehend the marginal place of what I would like to term an "ethnography of listening" (as one example within a larger ethnography of sensory perception), this essay sketches the implications of the successive exclusion of sentimentality and sensuality from scholarship concerned with folklore, before turning to a discussion of why such marginalization is increasingly untenable and how ethnographers are beginning to recover sensuality and corporality as a vital part of understanding expressive culture.

"A deeper appreciation of sound could ... make us consider in a new light the dynamic nature of sound, an open door to the comprehension of cultural sentiment" (Paul Stoller 1984:561).

"Instead of the genuine historical, and by us improved mistones in the songs – as important as they might be – I hear in my ears the beats and sounds of the great drum which ruled the cheerful and quiet waltzes in the dancing halls ... I cannot fight off the thought that such a song has its best history within itself and is most happy when another (person) with true compassion enfolds it in his soul and shapes it as he desires. . . . If every sensual reader, stirred in his innermost by one of these songs, seeks to clear away all that disturbs him and adds all (the song) inspires and excites in him then our efforts have reached their highest goal" (Achim von Arnim [1818] 1963:265).

"So there will soon be a need – perhaps there already is a need – for something that may seem a contradiction in terms: an ethnology of solitude" (Augé 1995:120).

In the introduction to *Slave Songs of the United States*, a slender collection published in 1867, William Francis Allen relates the extraordinariness of AfricanAmerican music. He points to its affective powers and laments the insufficiency of transcription:

The best that we can do, however, with paper and types, or even with voices, will convey but a faint shadow of the original. The voices of the

colored people have a peculiar quality that nothing can imitate; and the intonation and delicate variations of even one singer cannot be reproduced on paper. And I despair of conveying any notion of the effect of a number singing together, especially in a complicated shout
(Allen, Ware and Garrison [1867]1992:iv-v).

But convey Allen and others nonetheless did, turning what they heard into texts and musical notation for others to study or perform. What was not in the notations was the “soul-turning” quality of spirituals that had stirred Allen so deeply. In this regard Allen and his cohort followed the pattern set by the German romantics who had been enthralled by the gamut of expressive culture. They, too, had set out to objectify in print the songs and tales that nourished their craving for sensual and emotional experience encapsulated in the German term *Empfindsamkeit* – a mostly untranslatable word connoting sensibility for both sentimentality and sensuality.

Volumes of song texts and tales, fragments of epic poetry, verses and riddles began to fill the shelves of bourgeois households – volumes that also represented the beginnings of the academic study of verbal arts and expressive culture more generally. The nineteenth century’s unreflected preference for writing and print as media of learning and communicating knowledge almost automatically impoverished our understanding of the sensory and sensual totality of experience. Students of culture, in this case particularly folklorists, have long begun to critically examine this legacy, recognize the nationalist fallacy, and seek ways to disentangle the complex politics involved in collection, publication, appropriation and domination carried out in the name of liberation or celebration.

What has not been fully considered is the more intimate, affective linkage between burgeoning scholars and their disciplinary subject. It is this implicit attraction and its marginalization if not disappearance from scholarly purview that has contributed to the equal marginalization of sensory experience, affect, and emotion from ethnographic work. To comprehend the marginal place of what I would like to term an “ethnography of listening” (as one example within a larger ethnography of sensory perception), I will first sketch the implications of the successive exclusion of sentimentality and sensuality from scholarship concerned with folklore, before I turn to a discussion of why such marginalization is increasingly untenable and how ethnographers are beginning to “come to their senses” (Sklar 1994). Scholars in cultural disciplines have in recent years increasingly turned to address sensuality and corporeality. But it appears, for instance, that in the process of turning the body into a site of study, grasping it as a site of cultural agency is a more manageable task than understanding the body and our senses as instruments of cultural reception. The “reflexive turn” brought into ethnography through the writing culture movement has allowed for the (re-) insertion of the researcher’s affective state, but in its focus on the authorial self shies away from seeking to understand the role of the senses and affect within as well as outside of the researcher-and-researched dynamic.

Folklore has been defined as expressive culture and artistic communication, and it is arguably this implied aesthetic dimension that endows such “chunks of culture” (Berger 1995:11) most powerfully with affective potential. But to textualize expressive culture in preparation for scientific study eliminated from consideration all the levels of perception and associated experience that had enthralled scholars in the first place. By excluding the seemingly personal as irrelevant, scholars also excluded the vital role of expressive forms’ and performances’ sensual affect within and between the social groups they worked with. Anthropologists such as Lutz and White have observed a similar gap: “The past relegation of emotions to the sidelines of culture theory is an artifact of the view that they occupy the more natural and biological provinces of human experience, and hence are seen as relatively uniform, uninteresting, and inaccessible to the methods of cultural analysis” (1986:405). There were, early on, studies of phenomena such as homesickness, where scholars recognized that feelings of nostalgia were connected to sensory impressions and memories of the sound of language and song or the scent of foods. But the very term “homesickness” shows that the

somatic aspects of the phenomenon were considered crucial, and homesickness found scholarly attention in medicine and psychiatry, but not in the study of expressive culture. The more recent inclusion of concerns with emotions' socialrelational, communicative and cultural dimensions in anthropology has focused disproportionately on non-Western, pre-industrialized, 'homogeneous' cultures, and it is only in ethnomusicology, where an engagement in lived reality of complex societies has begun to manifest itself. This paper hopes to participate in the development of a perspective on sensual experience and emotions in complex societies.

The gaps in comprehending expressive culture resulting from textualizing practices have been felt in recent years. A great deal of reflexive ethnographic work has been groping for a way to legitimately include the sensing self in scholarly work, with sound experience leading the way (M. Baumann 1990, 1993, 1997, 1999; Feld 1982; Stoller 1984, 1997). Preceding this reflexive turn, the ethnography of speaking broke through the confines of textual and etic understandings of expressive forms, clearly seeking a fuller, contextually located subject. By linking these two developments to the omission of sensual perception during the formative periods of the study of expressive culture, I hope to contribute to a reconfiguration of the subject that takes into account the entirety of the communicative and affective process. Rudolf Schenda symbolically encapsulated this in his title *Von Mund zu Ohr* ("From Mouth To Ear" 1993). I will mostly concentrate on the aural experience that is indicated in it. One reason is that the ear is targeted prominently in current aesthetic experiments, such as the rapidly growing 'world music' with all its burgeoning sub genres which deserve cultural analysis (Feld 1995) in addition to some of the equally deserved cultural critique (Feld 1988, Erlmann 1999). A German philosopher speaks of "the intervention of the ear against the tyranny of the eye" (Dietmar Kamper, cited in Baumann 1990:133), and Yi-Fu Tuan proposes:

"Sound can arouse human emotion to a more intense level than can sight alone. 'Screaming' headlines in the morning newspaper catch our attention but have no grip on our heart. Pictures of disaster may elicit more of a response. But we will be thoroughly engaged by the sound of an ambulance siren or by cries of pain, rage, or despair" (1995:72). It should be understood, however, that the kind of holism aimed for goes beyond our sense of hearing, but points rather toward the need to empirically and epistemologically address the entire sensory spectrum.

Among the early folkloristic contributions to the ethnography of speaking was Alan Dundes and Ojo Arewa's piece on proverbs and the ethnography of speaking (1964). Dundes' "Texture, Text and Context" (1964) has perhaps the most telling title to recall the growing interest among American students of expressive culture in the ethnography of speaking in the early 1960s. By differentiating texture (defined in his case as "the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes" 25) from the text, and emphasizing context as inextricably linked to folkloric production, Dundes hoped to achieve greater definitional precision for folklore genres. He articulated a folklore-specific variant of the larger goals of the ethnography of communication – a field that sought to bridge between (structurally inspired) grammars and ethnographies. As Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer formulated it: "We took it as our task to show that there is pattern, there is systematic coherence, and there is difference in the ways that speaking is organized from one society to another, and that this pattern, this coherence, this difference are to be discovered ethnographically" ([1974]1989:xi).

For the study of expressive culture, this shift proved to be very productive. On the basis of a comprehensive, ethnographic record, the differentiation between analytic versus ethnic genres could be formulated as a much-needed corrective to more than a century of analytic practices (Ben-Amos 1976). The works establishing the interrelationship of poetics and politics through careful considerations of verbal art in performance are legion (cf. Brenneis 1993).

The focus of "the new perspectives" in folklore remained, however, largely

on speaking and on performances as products of speech or enactment. Those who heard, saw, and experienced performances remained, with few exceptions, oddly marginal, accommodated in important but rarely theorized terms such as copformance. How listening differs culturally and/or individually is at least within cultural scholarship largely unexplored. The possibility inherent to the idea of a reception theory, as it was practiced within literary studies since the late 1960s, never seems to have fruitfully converged with folkloristic performance study (Jauss 1970; Fish 1970; Bendix, in press). Equally evident is the paucity of terms such as “sound,” “sound-symbolism,” or “soundscape” in standard reference works on communication. Working within a disciplinary trajectory that has always emphasized rendering the poetic visible, we have concentrated on verbal art as it emanates from the mouth and travels through the communicative channel, capturing it before it disappears into the mysterious tunnels and crevices of the ear. Roman Jakobson’s much employed “scheme of the fundamental factors” of communication and their corresponding functions takes into account addresser and addressee, and while particularly his elaboration on the poetic and metalingual function potentially lead toward what occurs within the listener, the focus remained solidly – and for his project justifiably so – on the message (1960:353-357).

There were those who did hear, such as Dennis Tedlock who wrote: “The apparent lack of literary value in many past translations is not a reflection but a distortion of the originals, caused by the dictation process, an emphasis on content, [and] a pervasive deafness to oral qualities” (1972:132). But one would have to add that a great deal of Tedlock’s own effort was unmistakably focused on improving textualization, thus bringing about literary value, and not on exploring the crosscultural dimensions of listening. Just as text-centered literary analysis fails to spell out how a reader is moved by a great work of literature, textualizing oral poetics – with all the pains taken to render the performative in print – in the interest of adding oral literatures to the canons of written arts at best skirts the issue of culturally divergent pleasures of listening or generally sensory perception.

The parceling out of scientific discovery, in turn, located the ear and the cognitive enigmas associated with our sense of hearing outside of what cultural scholarship considers part of the subject. One might remember, however, that the romantic impulse had been to collect, edit, publish and also sensitively and artfully experience (*nachempfinden*) the poetry of the folk. The first three tasks were eagerly followed, but the positivist turn soon influenced the nature of scholarship so profoundly that the component of savoring sensual experience was marginalized. Herder could still describe a Spanish song as “exuding the perfume of lilies” and summarize folksong in its totality as “meadows of flowers and sweet fruits” (1807:75). Yet standard romantic phrases attesting to the effect of verbal arts on heart and soul came to be commonly labeled and dismissed as evidence of romantic exuberance. With this dismissive stance, a window into a sensory awareness potentially quite different from our own has been closed. Successive generations increasingly removed sensory metaphor out of printed works for public consumption into the private realm of correspondence and talk. Seen in this light, the arduous tasks of categorization and analysis inherent in the scholarly practices of burgeoning nineteenth century scholarship were also instruments of puritanical denial of sensual/sensory pleasures.

Allen’s preface to *Slave Songs* stands precisely at this juncture between the rapture expressive culture holds over the listener and the rigors of documentation and analysis demanded by the scholarly habit. Affective responses did not belong to the growing canons of folklore scholarship. Dundes’ “Texture, Text, and Context,” while important in breaking the textual focus within the study of verbal arts, was intent on heightening the scholarly respectability of a discipline. Thus in a footnote Dundes chastises one Richard Chase’s “mysticism,” arguing that his exuberance stood in the way of definitional clarity. Chase had written that genuine folklore did not need the stamp of approval from a professional folklorist, because “You know by the feel, by a tingling of your scalp, by an indefinable something inside you when you hear the song sung, or the tale told, or the tune played” (Chase in Dundes 1964, ft.7).

The potential pitfalls of relying on tingling scalps and indefinable somethings notwithstanding, it is more often than not such sensual experience that draws scholars into working with expressive culture and that has been central to the way they identify and locate subject matter to work with. If listening has such an effect on the scholar, do we not have to assume that it affects the "native" audiences similarly? and should it not arouse our curiosity whether we hear what "they" are listening to?

"Nothing is more exclusively national and more individual than the pleasures of the ear." Herder made this observation in his treatise on Hebrew poetry in 1782 (Herder [1782] 1833:35). The scope envisioned in this one sentence is astounding, especially considering how Herder's interests have, in assessments of folklore's history, been simplified. Herder is often read narrowly as an engine of romantic nationalism, but he clearly grasped the differential levels of allegiance open to us as human beings, encompassing a spectrum from the most intimate and closed-off individual experience to the mass imagined in a nation. He understood the sensual element in "the voices of the folk" – performed vernacular arts *do* have the power to make the scalp tingle, the spine shiver, the pulse increase. The pleasures and displeasures of the ear feed both body and mind, and evoke a complex mixture of physiological, emotional and reasoned responses. Herder's "pleasures of the ear" require the kind of reflection that an ethnography of listening might generate, and that the ethnography of speaking has, despite best intentions, obfuscated.

The ethnography of speaking foresaw attention to the "attitudes, values, and beliefs current in the community concerning the means of speech and their use" (Bauman 1983:6; cf. Sherzer and Darnell [1972] 1986). The relationship of these patterns of speaking to other aspects of culture was also an intrinsic aspect of this project, but the focus built, among other influences, on the agency implied in Austin's *How to do things with words* (1962, centering on speech production, all the while implying intended speech perception), and the poetics of language as elaborated by the Prague Circle. We learned about the great diversity of speech rules, the aesthetic range of speech performance, and the culturally located ideologies of language. It is perhaps not surprising that it is a consideration of silence – in Richard Bauman's extraordinary study of seventeenth century Quakers – which points to (spiritual) responsiveness within a congregation, sensed mutually by minister and congregation. Yet Bauman, too, elaborates more on the ideology occasioning the silences. The experience of the Quaker Inner Light, part and parcel of the dictum of silence, is very likely another "soul-turning" moment which out of reverence and out of ethnographic helplessness has been hard to render as text (Bauman 1983:22-9).

The scholarly fixation on text and textualizing, combined with the paucity of interdisciplinary vocabulary to address the aural, have then impoverished much of the ethnographic record. Particularly strange in its almost stenographic approach was the study of belief or "superstition" – assisted, of course, by communities' own predilection to summarize as well as forecast belief experiences in proverb-like texts. Within folkloristics, the experience-based study of belief has begun to emphasize the corporeal and sensual more strongly (e.g. Hufford 1995, 1997; True 1997). Indeed, in work such as his classic *The Terror that Comes in the Night* (1982), Hufford forces us to recognize in the experience of the supernatural a form of sensory and mental reception. Paul Stoller, working with the Songhay of West Africa, learned through his native teachers' disappointment with him of his own inability to hear what they heard. "Sound is a dimension of experience in and of itself" (Stoller 1984:567), and a number of ethnomusicologists in turn have in very different ways uncovered connections between sound and music perception, emotions such as grief (Feld 1982), and other aspects of culture such as narrative and healing (Seeger 1986, Roseman 1991), or have been able to demonstrate that in some cultures, it is hearing, not seeing, that "constitutes the pivotal sensory channel" (Menezes Bastos 1999:92).

Much of this work has, however, been carried out among so-called tribal, often isolated cultures. Furthermore, some of the focus on hearing and listening that has become a bigger part of ethnomusicological inquiry, has been turned

back onto the performers themselves – how do the individual members of a Gamelan ensemble process what they hear from each other (Brinner 1999)? How does listening to each other bring about the specific sounds of barbershop harmony (Averill 1999)?

There are steps to bring us out from the rain forest to concert halls and youth culture's raves or techno parties, from seemingly whole systems of grieving and health, to the fragmented soundscapes of automobiles with quadruple speaker sets and the lonely jogger wearing headphones, from the Third World to the Fourth World of reflexive modernization. Harris Berger's ethnography of the metal, rock, and jazz scene of Cleveland, Ohio, seeks to provide a "phenomenology of musical experience," and while he, too, focuses primarily on the perceptions of the musicians themselves, he offers glimpses of what audiences might be hearing or what they might hope to hear (1999, esp. 242-5). Becker and Woehs chose European techno or rave events and seek to understand how this combined listening and dance experience grows into a mass ritual based on a sense of both listening and co-performance (1999). Michael Bull (2000) goes farthest in the opposite direction. Seemingly turning away from collectivities such as are gathered at a rave, Bull is interested in how individuals manage their own space perception and experience through their personal Walkman. Bull conducts not what Augé wistfully called "an ethnography of solitude" (1995:12) but an ethnography of what one might term "intended solitudes." Bull shows the ways in which individuals work with the available technology to shape their perception and by extension their mood. In the urban environment Bull probed, the social collective does not disappear in this personal maneuvering, but it remains present through its very denial on the part of the individual. At any moment, forces beyond the individual can intrude on the carefully managed aesthetic and experiential control, and the very fragility of this strategy thus continually reminds the individual of the powers – social and technological – that control her environment.

Bull situates his study in the tradition of critical theory to "analyze the historical nature of the senses in relation to the use of new forms of communication technologies" (2000:7). I would suggest that an ethnography of listening may begin at a still more rudimentary – or innocent – level, offering potentially an avenue to get beyond the theorizing of cultural politicization and commodification. This necessary, deconstructive move has gotten us close to disciplinary self-annihilation, and an ethnographic lens transcending (though by no means ignoring) the market and exploring the sensual could be one productive complement. The social groups we study are as reflexive in their practices as the scholars who document them. They are as aware as we are of the objectified nature of what was once called traditional culture. But they experiment with new tools and new settings to create experiences for themselves and those who will listen – experiences that are aesthetically moving and appropriate for our time. An example from the Austrian Alps might serve as illustration.

In July 1995, Trio Clarion, a group of three classical clarinetists based in Vienna, invited an interested public to partake of a 'hike within sound" (*Klangwanderung*) at the Gosaukamm in the Dachstein mountains. Offered as part of the summer season's concerts (and free to the public), only people who live in this remote part of Austria's Salzkammergut or those who spent their vacation there were likely to even know about the event. Yet there were hundreds of people who ventured and found this outdoor arena created by solid granite walls. Located at approximately 2000 meters above sea level, it could be reached from the village of Gosau by foot (a three to four hour hike) or, at least for part of the way, by an aerial cableway.

On the appointed day, people of all ages walked, ambled, and scrambled over the grassy slopes toward the designated area. Some temporary signs had been posted, but they were barely visible amidst the regular signs for different hiking routes to the surrounding peaks and to the inns and alpine huts along the route. Some people wore "good clothes" to mark the fact that this was a concert, but most wore hiking attire and sturdy shoes to cope with the uneven terrain.

Yet how to behave during this unusual listening experience? There was no code of conduct, other than the designation provided by the announcement

itself – “a hike within sound.” This signaled only a contradiction to one stereotypical way of how Westerners are accustomed to consume classical music: hiking, not sitting quietly, outdoors, not in the concert hall. The predominant response on the part of the audience was thus experimental. While Trio Clarin played an hour’s worth of Mozart, the audience clambered around from one rocky spot to another to bring – as the brochure had advocated – “continually new sounds to the ear.” Many people arrived after the concert began, there was continuous movement of what looked like tiny bodies on a gigantic expanse of mountain. There were no norms of how to listen, the bewildering mix of postures and positions of attaining aural pleasure was a beautiful illustration of how many different ways there could be of “how to listen to Mozart.” It was also an illustration of modern individuals’ reflexive effort to literally “bring themselves to their senses.” Whether sitting on a boulder, eyes closed to shut out the glorious landscape, or continually shifting place, clambering up and down a steep, grassy incline, they manifested people’s effort, even strain, to listen and “experience.” Given the altitude, there was a constant wind suffusing the sounds, spreading them and leading to unfamiliar aural crosscurrents; birds cruised by, especially the loud mountain daws; so did airplanes; rocks slithered away from under the feet of those who had stationed themselves in more precarious places; dogs held on leashes panted and barked; and people talked – less so the closer they got to the musicians. Freed of the norms of the concert hall, talk could be heard about anything from the music itself to requests for help with getting better footing to choices of where to eat lunch.

There was applause after every piece, and the musicians provided brief announcements of what they would play next. The end was as informal as the beginning; people began to disperse once the last piece was over. The musicians who happened to crowd into the same tiny two-table alpine hut cum restaurant as our family did seemed pleased with the event. Concert halls were, in their estimation, still a more valuable venue to their craft, but, stated one, “one can do something like this ever so often.” Playing outdoors, especially in scenic elevation, provided a different aural experience for them as much as it did for those who listened, but while they concentrated on each other’s playing, the audience had the opportunity to turn inside themselves. Conventions of listening lifted – everyone was preoccupied with keeping space and footing, eliminating the social control against intruding noises customary in the concert hall; everyone had the opportunity to feel the sensation of familiar sounds in unfamiliar space, though clearly each individual realized this opportunity to a different degree.

Sound experiments of this nature are not new, but at least in the Austrian approach to touristic diversification, they are mushrooming. This is the case not least because an appreciation of music, classical and otherwise, is valued enormously in Austrian culture. The experimental sounds are intended as much for native consumption as for the tourists. A first of this nature was something called *Klangwolke* (cloud of sound) of Anton Bruckner’s music, flooding the outdoors of Linz in Upper Austria in the 1980s and traditionalized since then. Other places have adopted the *Klangwolke-idea*, and clearly the described *Klangwanderung* is a further level of experimentation with sound. Vienna’s music summer regularly includes open-air screenings of classical concerts, specifically old recordings of all of the Beethoven symphonies directed by a long-deceased Leonard Bernstein. The big screen is placed in front of City Hall, with a food fair providing continuous olfactory and gustatory nourishment. But the music, projected with countless enormous speakers, floods the entire area. It can be heard from the trolley along Vienna’s Ringstrasse several stops away, and fills the night air for those taking walks or sitting by the fountains in the surrounding park.

The preponderance of musical events geared toward jostling habitual ways of listening and offering opportunities for sensual experiences of an ever new nature occur all over Europe, the United States, and very likely the entire globe. The fact that we tend to traditionalize such events, such as repeating the legendary open-air rock concert “Woodstock” of 1969, is testimony not only to the play of the market which is heavily in evidence in the Austrian touristic scene described

above. It also attests to our craving for overwhelming sensual experience which, even when repeated, provides the satisfaction of sensory memory.

How might one go about initiating an ethnography of listening? Take steps toward an ecology of the senses, their linkages to cognition, their collaboration in providing us with aesthetic pleasure? Nearly every promising point of entry requires cross-disciplinarity. The first is enculturation into sound that thus far has received more attention from education (McDevitt 1994) as well as advertising specialists (Miller and Marks 1992) than from researchers in the field of expressive culture. Children, although intent on communicating from birth, develop their communicative skills by developing and differentiating their senses, in particular listening. Language enculturation necessitates that a child learn to distinguish from a sea of sounds those considered relevant. Without sound perception, speech can be learned only imperfectly. Unlike eyes, ears cannot be closed to stop the incessant exposure to sounds that need to be sorted, and new parents are told that sometimes an infant will cry simply to drown out the onslaught of sounds surrounding her. The child's reactions to sound are then partially instinctive/physiological (loud noise tends to result in muscular reaction, certain sound selections induce calm, relaxation etc.) and partially molded by parental and environmental cues. Already in a pre-speech stage children acquire tastes – some sounds are favored over others, some are sought out and some are shied away from. Such tastes are in part enculturated, in part a result of physiological disposition. Yet much of this training occurs contextually and latently. Much more effort is expended teaching a child to speak, while vision and even more so sound perception are regarded as far more physiological and given. As children develop language and participate in verbal discourse, they begin to formulate their sensual perceptions verbally: what is heard and felt is labeled pleasurable, touching or revolting, touching, inducing fear, happiness, anger or elation.

Language thus helps children construct a referential meaning to grasp the meanings embodied in and through sound (Manuel 1995, elaborating on Zuckerkandl 1956). Listening to a ghastly tale or a hilarious song, “fear,” “pleasure,” “anger” etc., become appropriate verbal referents for what was embodied in the message as it traveled “from mouth to ear.” The question is to what extent such sensual perception is culturally molded, and to what extent the ‘pleasures of the ear’ remain idiosyncratically resistant to cultural patterning.

In his argument for a discourse-centered approach to culture, Greg Urban invokes Marcel Mauss's *Les Techniques du Corps*, subsuming them under the notion of “style” – as in styles of body painting, hair, clothing, ornamentation, postures, gestures, etc. Urban states that body techniques

may become part of the content of consciousness when they are named by means of language and discourse and so reflected upon, but which exist first and foremost in the realm of the senses. They are culture as inscribed in the physical person rather than, or in addition, to the mind. They represent a realm of physical experience that reflects a direct and immediate control by culture over the body (1991:107).

The reflexive influence of discourse on such sensually experienced self-fashioning is doubtless real. Yet when it comes to the sense of hearing, I would maintain a softened stance regarding Urban's presumption of immediate patterning by culture. The sensual processes facilitated by the ear are a great deal less subject to immediate social ordering than are other, more visible and hence more controllable sensual experiences such as touch and taste. Max Peter Baumann accepts a “culture-specific intent of the listener” but is not satisfied with that as an assessment of the complexities of what happens within the ear. He invokes the image of an eggshell mediating between sound and brain/body, arguing for a

consciousness which taps the shell of reality from both sides – through which the inside becomes the outside and the outside becomes the inside.... This consciousness incessantly listens with a ‘third ear’ which

finds between the two auricles the creativity that constructs reality in its own and special manner (Baumann 1990:123).

Pursuing this direction will of necessity lead into the kinds of territories that Gregory Bateson charted (1972), and which reverberated in a more experiential form through Victor Turner's late work. These areas join cognition, experience and culture. In anthropologist Maurice Bloch's terms, this will force us to overcome the rift that has developed between those who, in the wake of the writing culture movement see anthropology above all as a "literary enterprise [and] criticize the 'objectivist' and scientific pretensions of the field," and those who are "interested in cognition [and] who are often impatient with the lack of scientific rigor in traditional ethnographic writing" (Bloch 1998:40). Interest and understanding of cognitive science does not constitute a relapse into naive, dubious and politically devastating reductionism, but contributes to an essential aim of ethnography. As Bloch states:

If people's knowledge, in its broadest sense, is an essential object of what we study, it is necessary to reflect on its nature, its psychological organization, and to be able to explain it in such a way that we can account for one of its most fundamental yet problematic features: the incredible speed and ease with which it can be used. I would argue that all ethnographers employ, whether they are aware of it or not, general psychological theories as soon as they try to make us understand how the people they study see the world and what motivates them in their actions. These theories cannot and, therefore, should not escape from critical examination, especially from disciplines specialising in the study of knowledge in use (1998:44).

If we are to probe the contours of sensory perception and reception and seek to understand the transitions between the individual, cultural and transcultural dimensions, as I am urging here, then research methods will be needed that are capable of grasping "the most profound type of knowledge [which] is not spoken of at all" and thus inaccessible to ethnographic observation or interview (Bloch 1998:46).

There are concrete places where an ethnography of listening might set in to begin correcting some of the voids in understanding that disciplinary specialization has brought about. One might for instance consider the role of sound in custom and festival. Display events of this nature that have seen extensive research and may, in their sensory comprehensiveness, be useful bridges to the kind of genteel sound orgies I attempted to describe with Austrian examples. Earlier generations of ethnologists and folklorists (perhaps particularly in Europe) created even a special analytic category of "noise customs." Studies of such events describe the instruments involved, how they are made, the costumes worn by the players, and the supernatural creatures or phenomena that are to be driven away by the noise. Yet the noise itself and its effect on those who make and hear it remain elusive. It was generally presumed that what was 'noise' to the ear of the researcher was also noise to the practitioners.

My first fieldwork dealt with one of these "noise customs" in Switzerland – classified as such because of the use of massive cowbells in processions by New Year's revelers (Bendix 1985). I was not fully prepared for the local discourse on cowbell harmonies, in tritones and octaves. My monograph gave equal space to the exorbitant price paid for these bells and the 'pleasures to the ear' gained from them. A retired postal worker, concluding our interview, led me to the attic of his home where he had hung one such set of bells – though he himself never herded cows for a living. Putting his finger over his lips to make sure I'd stay quiet, he lightly tapped each bell and looked at me with glowing eyes as the sound reverberated through the staircase. Similarly, the staircase down into the village doctor's practice had one such set mounted, within easy reach for anyone passing underneath – and male patients without fail would tap the bells in passing, feeling an echo of the deep pleasure this tritone provides them as they went or

came from medical treatment. Fieldwork in this community did expand my own aesthetics to be affected by the wordless yodel of the area, but like so many other scholars before me, I shied away from grasping it analytically in any depth. “A certain dilettantism, or more precisely perhaps a helplessness in the face of very complex phenomena” has been attested to by various European ethnologists (Burckhardt-Seebass 1992:62).

This reluctance once again is lodged in disciplinary separation and specialization. Musicology relies on an esoteric system of notation and its disciplinary focus, analogous to literary fields, attached itself to ‘high culture,’ until a breakthrough into ethnomusicological interest became more acceptable in the latter part of the twentieth century. Interdisciplinary rapprochement until recently has thus been difficult and sporadic, as anyone not conversant in musicological terms and notation hesitates to participate in the discourse or defers to the authority of someone who is. Ironically, Herder’s best known contribution to folkloristics is the collection of songs — without musical notation — and subsequently, text and music went their increasingly separate academic paths. Yet for the realization of romantic ideology — the expression of national sentiment — the fusion of text and music in performance was (and remains) of the utmost importance.

Feld and Fox’s comprehensive assessment of the analytic dissonances and convergences of musicology and linguistics arrive at a conclusion that should indeed be the jumping board for further inquiry, paying “attention to the social immanence of music’s supreme mystery, the grooving redundancy of elegant structuring that affectively connects the singularity of form to the multiplicity of senses” (1994:43-4) — experienced, one might add, along an as yet to be properly understood spectrum from great individual variety to cultural specificity to human commonality, and lodged not only in music but to a degree in the whole gamut of aesthetically shaped culture.

My argument has been built on the interrelationship between speaking (or sounding) and listening, but the intent is to open the field of cultural inquiry to the breadth of sensual experience that fosters aesthetic comprehension. Performers and performance have been too starkly separated from audiences’ perception. The present juncture of deconstructing our disciplinary heritage and ethnographically confront globalization and the concomitant commodification of what used to be our subject may also be the right moment to seek both a recovery and an expansion of what we study.

The ethnography I am suggesting overcomes the questions “is that really expressive culture,” and “is it lodged within the class of phenomena usually studied by folklorists (or anthropologists or ethnologists),” but rather accepts that the aesthetic thrills of the present warrant attention, no matter where they are located. It employs the “kinesthetic empathy” during fieldwork that Deidre Sklar (1994) has advocated, and it brings into play the sensual register of researcher and researched alike — the boundary between the two is getting blurred in any case. Ethnically or culturally defined communities are an artifact and tool of sociopolitical interests, with expressive forms objectified and strategically employed. Behind these kinds of “shouting matches” — a term borrowed from Roger Abrahams (1981) — emerges a reality that finds individual identities interacting less with circumscribed groups than with a global cacophony of potential sensations. The ear is an enormously important place for selecting and mediating from this gigantic soundscape who we are and who we want to be — to adapt Herder to the present: “Nothing is as individualistic and as transcultural as the pleasures of the ear.”

Notes

¹ For some of the preliminary research for this paper I was very ably assisted by Edward T. McKinley. An earlier effort on this topic was presented in German as a plenary address at the congress of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* in Karlsruhe in September 1995 (Bendix 1997b). Another version was read at the 1996 California Folklore Society Meetings in Berkeley. For responses to drafts and for bibliographic assistance I am in-

debted to Roger Abrahams, John Bendix, Don Brenneis, Lee Haring, David Hufford, Kim Lau, Carol Ann Muller and Janet Theophano, as well as the editors of *Cultural Analysis*.

² Abrahams (1993) constitutes both a summary statement as well as an expansion on the historiography of "folklore" and nationalism. Handler (1988) and Herzfeld (1982) are among the most comprehensively conceptualized case studies on folklore and the politics of culture.

³ See Bauman & Briggs (1990) and Bauman (1993) for considerations of scholarly entextualization practices. Stewart has pointed to the "crimes of writing," and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work on the artifactualizing of segments of culture and their further journey into museums and other destinations tackles the complicated interface of politics and commodity culture as it has evolved over the past one hundred years (1998b).

⁴ My interest here is first of all historical, and focuses on the impact of the scholarly predisposition in shaping the subject matter of fields such as folklore studies. There are certainly efforts to correct the lacunae I am pointing to, but they occur largely in the second half of the 20th century, and find a relatively narrow following, vis-a-vis the larger scholarly production. Robert Plant Armstrong's inquiry into the affective presence of Yoruba art (1971), his insistence that in the artist's creation there is also an intentionality to bring about affect in the viewer, and his recognition that art, once created, requires a curating ambience all point toward "reception" in the broadest sense. Armstrong, much as Alan Merriam in his key introduction to the ethnomusicological enterprise in the USA (1964), work with the concept of synaesthesia which might best be glossed as the human capacity – intentional or not – to translate between different sense impressions and derive from the process a holistic experience of a phenomenon, be this an material artifact, a sound, a performance – an experience that is brought about by the working together of the senses. Merriam refers back to the work of the German musicologist Erich v. Hornbostel (1972) who worked with the term synaesthesia, as does the contemporary Swiss ethnomusicologist Max Peter Baumann, whose work will be touched on in this essay.

⁵ The major works in the realm of "bodylore" are Young (1994) and Babcock and Young (1995).

⁶ While there are numerous precursors, the writing culture movement is generally associated with Clifford and Marcus's conference volume (1986) and with the feminist response or corrective edited by Behar and Gordon (1995).

⁷ Somewhat surprisingly one discovers that the first comprehensive literature assessment on homesickness was penned by philosopher Karl Jaspers whose dissertation probed the linkages between nostalgia and crime (1909).

⁸ "Expressive culture" has always attracted interdisciplinary attention, and while it has received the most focused attention from scholars in fields called folkloristics, folklife studies, or, in Europe, *Volkskunde*, folk literature research, and European Ethnology (which naturally expands beyond expressive forms but includes them prominently in its scope), the present essay takes the liberty of ignoring disciplinary boundaries and acknowledges instead that the theoretical basis from which students of expressive culture draw are located in disciplines such as anthropology, literary studies and the philosophy of language and art, as well as specializations such as ethnolinguistics, semiotics, and in this essay's case, especially ethnomusicology. A historically more accurate account would acknowledge that all of these fields and subfields have been inspired by an intellectual interest in the vernacular (and the emotional and sensory experiences it stirred and stirs) which arguably precedes their disciplinary formation. Yet it cannot be disregarded that folklore studies have been far less successful at establishing disciplinary clout than in fostering an awareness for the subject in a given polity. This in turn very likely has contributed to the field's suspect status among disciplines dedicated to more obvious categories of 'knowledge.' Fostering awareness involves not least an appeal to the sensory and emotive faculties, which, so this essay implies, have eluded scholarly comprehension, have been censored out of proper scholarly attention, or have been relegated to the realm of a more medically inclined psychology.

⁹ Historically, Western thought has privileged the sense of sight over all others, and generally worked with a gradation of higher and lower senses, and this trust in the visual has left an indelible mark on the way in which knowledge is conceptualized. According to

Hornbostel, writing in the 1920s, sight and hearing are more specialized and are acquired later in the infants's development (1927:84) – but the state of “scientific research” to which he referenced himself at that time has changed, but it remains to be explored, how if at all the senses are hierarchically experienced culturally – historically and in the present.

¹⁰ For comprehensive articulations of the emergence of the ethnography of speaking, see Hymes (1962, 1964) and Gumperz ((1972)1986).

¹¹ Sherzer and Darnell's “Outline Guide,” for instance, incorporates audiences only in point 1. F and 2. ((1972)1986:550-51). Basgöz (1976) is often cited as a case study, but the “product” is foregrounded here, too. Duranti and Brenneis (1986) document and theorize audiences as co-performers, but the emphasis remains to a great extent on the emergent shape of the “text.” Even one of the recent, exciting collections of articles edited by Silverstein and Urban (1996) emphasizes the textual and the agency engendering discourse.

¹² A fruitful exception is Coleman (1996) and the aforementioned work by Schenda (1993).

¹³ Even the latest reference tool for anthropological linguists has entries for “deaf” but not for “hearing” or “sound” (Duranti 1999).

¹⁴ I am obviously overstating the critique here; there are a number of works that could be cited here that go a ways toward at least employing this sense of listeners' pleasure to further the analysis – Barre Toelken's article on Yellowman's “pretty language” (1976) can be mentioned as one such example, and Toelken's subsequent experience with the ethical dilemmas of voice on tape points precisely to the interface of native assumptions and experiences of sound perception, belief, and scholarly practice (1998).

¹⁵ Max Peter Baumann thus initiates an anthropology of listening with a preliminary inquiry into the biological mechanics, cognitive psychology, and philosophical ramifications of the sense of hearing (1990).

¹⁶ In this regard the definition of the romantic stance as opposed to the rational one vis-à-vis emotion presented in Lutz and White bears extension: “In the romantic view, emotion is implicitly evaluated positively as an aspect of ‘natural humanity’; it is (or can be) the site of uncorrupted, pure, or honest perception in contrast with civilization's artificial rationality” (1986:409). At least among the German romantics, emotion is not necessarily evaluated positively, but there was an immense curiosity there to both live it and understand it, which then lead to early discourses on the psyche, cf. Kaufmann (1995).

¹⁷ By including this citation I obviously do not intended to support genuine/fake dichotomies that I attempted to undermine in my study of the concept of authenticity (Bendix 1997a).

¹⁸ The year of this statement is interesting – it appeared more than two decades before Herder's *Stimmen der Völker*, the work commonly associated with Herder's involvement with song in the history of folklore studies. From the acknowledgment of the internal and “individual” in this quote from his essay on Hebrew poetry, he moves to a greater emphasis of the textual and national/cultural.

¹⁹ On silence from an interdisciplinary perspective, see also Tannen and Saville-Troike(1985).

²⁰ Stoller (1997) has carried questions of cognition and sensation especially far into senses other than sight and his work similarly to what is posited here criticizes the Eurocentrism of visual and textual privileging.

²¹ Similarly, Lutz and White observe that much of the anthropology of emotions “has been done in the Pacific, reflecting both an indigenous focus on emotional idioms and Oceanic ethnography's traditional psychodynamic focus” (1986:406).

²² I am using the term Fourth World as introduced into the anthropology of tourism by Nelson Graburn (1976). “Reflexive modernity” is discussed, in quasi-dialogic form, by Beck, Giddens, and Lash (1994), and is suggested as an alternative to postmodernity. Their concept appears particularly productive for empirically focused work.

²³ A largely interview based study of the youth culture of “techno” has also been carried out by Muri (1999), and she skirts at the very least the intersection of drug consumption

and sexuality as reported by her field consultants, though one would have to assume that the sensory preparedness is to a great extent shaped by the soundscape of Zürich's annual rave event.

²⁴ Scholarly work to no small measure contributes to this reflexivity; Hans Moser called it *Rücklauf* (flow back), and it is continuously in evidence – scholars act as consultants to politicians and reporters, appear as commentators for cultural events, write (at least outside the USA) frequently for newspapers, and their observations are in turn absorbed again in the practices they will study. Konrad Köstlin glosses this

process as the "*Verkulturwissenschaftlichung des Lebens*" – that is, the intermeshing of cultural analysis with the flow and discourse of everyday life (1997).

²⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) has insisted that "the tool is the topic" – that is, the technologies available to us as researchers have fundamentally shaped the way in which we are able to conceptualize our discipline's subject.

²⁶ Fieldwork on tourism in Austria in summer 1995 and 1996 was supported by the University of Pennsylvania Research Foundation, and in spring and summer 1998 by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

²⁷ "Experience" was the key word in Austria's 1996 tourism concept, and has been on the rise within tourism promotion over the past decade. It signals a transformation in what guests expect and what the promoters seek to offer. This clearly ties into the craving for sensory/sensual pleasure I am trying to outline here, but requires further analysis elsewhere.

²⁸ Interestingly, the Vienna event is also accompanied with gustatory possibilities, as there are temporary drinking and eating establishments set up for the duration, and the scent of all kinds of food traditions mix with beer and wine as one ambles about, flooded by music.

²⁹ A very specialized recent exception is Cook (1999). A volume such as that edited by Wolvin and Coakley (1993) coming out of speech communications seeks to operationalize listening as a communicative skill, albeit recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon; the emphasis is unmistakably on the needs of corporate America's interest in improving working efficiency.

³⁰ Human ears are differentially equipped to perceive and tolerate varying spectra and decibels of sounds. One researcher generalizes as far as follows: "Prolonged exposure to high-decibel sounds can cause . . . stress, lack of attention, mental and emotional fatigue, poor socialization, and the inability to form values" (Wallin 1986). The leap from the personal to the socio-cultural here is interesting – very likely measured with some kind of quantitative schedule of questions.

³¹ These observations are not based on the specifics of ethnography, but rather abstracted from common Western practice. I would very much welcome evidence to the contrary. Max Peter Baumann reinforces the centrality of the ear: "The ear as a sense organ for time and space is the most important of our senses. Throughout the history of time, hearing has functioned as the central and dominant sense through its overall synaesthesia. . . . It is faster than the eye" (1992:127).

³² On the workings of the inner ear, see Ashmore (2000).

³³ Cf. Turner (1985) and E. Turner (1992). The conference volume *The Anthropology of Experience* (Turner and Bruner 1986) spelled out related concerns, but with few exceptions (contributions by Renato Rosaldo, Roger Abrahams, and James Fernandez) the overall issue disappears in the intriguing aspects of specific cases.

³⁴ Apologists might claim that for Herder's contemporaries, the tunes to these songs might actually have been known, but given the cross-cultural nature of the collection, this stands on pretty wobbly legs. Rather, in the phase of textualizing vernacular practices that Herder helped to initiate, it was always the words and not the musical or gestural medium carrying them that was emphasized.

³⁵ Inta Carpenter's work on the Latvian song festivals (1996) demonstrates this particularly well; these festivals are typical of reflexive modernity in as much as the practitioners at this point in time of course invoke Herder's writings to legitimize or comment on what

they do, but the testimonials to “soul-turning” are there.

³⁶ Peter Kivy’s observation relates to Feld and Fox’s: “Music, in its structure, bears a resemblance to the ‘emotive life’; and the primary aesthetic response is a cognitive response: a recognition of the emotive content present in it” (1989:39). His argument is thus that music is not a stimulus for emotion, but that in our listening we undergo a cognitive recognition.

³⁷ Here one needs to refer to Konrad Köstlin’s “Passion for the Whole” (1997), a really intense argument for *Volkskunde*’s continuous ability and responsibility to tackle life as lived, in contrast to disciplines that purposely confine their specialization to a narrow slice of ‘the whole.’

³⁸ Politically this is highly problematic to claim – I write as a Westerner here, with all the economic privileges available to me. But the market is, I believe, propelling the planet toward this form. The choices open to me, though, are obviously not available globally.

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Reception, Writing, and Rapture: Comments on “The Pleasures of the Ear”

“The Pleasures of the Ear” is a pleasure to the eye and mind as well as challenging, nuanced, and imaginative, it links very particular insights to very general and suggestive possibilities. With her usual clarity and élan, Bendix speaks both to the intellectual traditions of our discipline and to the traditions, local and otherwise, with which our scholarly work is concerned. At the same time historical, ethnographic, and programmatic, her essay should open many ears – and sound new directions for research and reflection. In this response I want briefly to pursue several of the themes raised by Bendix: the intimate links between sound and emotion, the tensions between “rapture” and the “rigors of documentation,” and her counterposition of the acoustic and the textual as scholarly subjects.

Central to Bendix’s discussion is a strong sense of the immediacy of sound; she argues that the acoustic is “a great deal less subject to ... social ordering than are other, more visible sensual experiences,” a position shared by other scholars writing about the phenomenology of sound. This is, as she notes, a claim deserving considerable exploration. One site for such exploration lies in the process of children’s acquisition of communicative competence and the balance between “instinctive/physiological” reactions to sound and more culturally specific aspects of their experience. It is clear that infants are attuned to, and productively play with, the prosodic features of others’ speech (e.g., intonation) long before they produce recognizable words. Another site for exploration lies in the almost automatic association made between sound, musical and otherwise, and emotional experience, a phenomenon with which all of us teaching about such issues are familiar.

A second point has to do with Bendix’s brilliant examination of the self-imposed split, which scholars often make between their powerful personal responses to the acoustic and the impersonal terms within which they conceptualize and write about cultural experience as professionals. Bendix makes audible an internal conundrum, which many of us have noted in our own work and that of others; the pleasures that bring us to, and keep us, in a field often remain marginal and mute in our own writing. Bendix connects this conundrum to a third striking observation – the slow and slouchwise movement towards the pleasures of performance, auditory and otherwise, which has centrally informed the ethnography of communication but has not been fully realized within it. In suggesting that we shift our goals from ever more comprehensive “texts” to a somehow richer and more aesthetically compelling account, Bendix outlines a difficult but promising project.

She is not alone in making culture more audible, but, remarkably, folklorists and anthropologists have been somewhat slower than scholars in other disciplines to take sound seriously. Historians, e.g., Alain Corbin in his *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in 19th-Century France* (Columbia University Press 1998), and literary scholars, e.g., Bruce R. Smith in *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (University of Chicago Press 1999), have made significant contributions toward this pursuit. Bendix’s siren song is timely, necessary, and seductive for all of us wrangling with sound and culture, even those of us who don’t yet know quite what we’re hearing.

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