

Foreword

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

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

FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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editors-in-chief