

CHAPTER 3.

Noise of Placards.

The Proximity of Protest.

The overlap between touch and hearing suggests that... hearing may actually be more earthly and materialistic than vision. At least it seems obvious that light is less solid, less grossly real, than sound – that it has ‘less being’, as Aristotle would have it, or is ‘less substantial’ (Aristotle, *Problemata XI* 904b). There is an effortless superiority about the way light travels – silently, instantaneously and in perfect straight lines... sound in contrast, is sluggish and laborious: it moves much slower drifting aimlessly and letting itself get carried away by the wind (Ree, 1999, 37/38).

In the last Chapter we have looked at the invisible and abstract political potential of networks and organization created and produced predominantly in the physical absence of one another. These communicative webs mediate language with the accompanying sound of the clatter of computer keys and mouse clicks, yet there is relatively little sound produced from the human voice box. The organizational capabilities of these networks can be seen to manifest in the collective meeting of individuals that share a certain political goal—at this moment they physically exist together side by side, in order to confront the opposition. What happens at this moment? Do they shout and hurl stones? Carry placards and banners? What does this look like? Or maybe we should ask—what does this *sound* like?

The demonstration is a politicized meeting; its oppositional context (the enemy, and the identification of a ‘we’) can be decoded courtesy of printed ephemera—text on pamphlets, posters, and deciphered from the shouts through megaphones. The political context, its aims and desires can be evaluated in relation to these signposts.

We have already evaluated informal discourse such as gossip and rumour, as well as contemporary networks of communication in terms of form, in order to propose

a politicized reading. Now we will look at the demonstration, as an example of an overtly symbolic political event and focus again upon abstract, formal, and performative elements rather than the specific words that are uttered. These moments when the megaphone crackles and a word crumples into an amplified *rasp*, or when we hear the rhythm of a whistle in the distance, or the murmur of a thousand voices from the streets ahead:

Pantheistic ideas of the unity of creation find a perfect illustration in communal singing: Morike heard his chorus of nightingales singing with ‘one voice’, and for Schlegel, the whole is but a single choir, many a song from but one mouth’. There is nothing like a whole crowd raising a concerted sound to symbolize unity of purpose, as the political, military and religious uses of sounds gives them a capacity for concord and disharmony which the world of colour could never possibly match (Ree, 1999, 33).

As we listen to the concerted sound of a multitude of voices, this ‘sense of unity’ is rarely expressed through the coherence of specific words; instead this single choir often produces an abstract distant *hum*, or a *rasping* indecipherable call. Building upon the politicized reading of the formal, abstract elements of informal discourse in Chapter Two, I want to now turn to the moment when an overtly political language is abstracted through its *own proclamation*. Rather than merely acknowledging a collective ‘sense of purpose’, following Ree, I wish to examine these politicized choirs further, in order to establish a subtle but equally poignant interpretation—specifically in terms of *proximity* and *language*.

This chapter takes a walk¹ through a politicized sonorous landscape to analyze the blurred sound of protest aimed against globalization amidst a background of active consumerism. Using a temporal, physical, and geographically shifting figure such as a

¹ While using the figure of a walk in central London, I acknowledge the earlier philosophical, lyrical, and visual observations made of another European capital city: Paris. These include the ‘intoxications’ of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1983), Walter Benjamin’s unfinished Parisian reflections in the *Arcades project* (2002), and more notably, Arthur Rimbaud’s poetry in relation to the transformation of social space during the Paris Commune. Rimbaud uses the site of political resistance as source for his work, utilizing poetic metaphor to refer to the sound of the vibrating ‘swarm’ of an agitated urban crowd. See Ross, Kirstin (1988), *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

walk, I aim to identify varying stages of proximity relating to the words that are shouted or sung by a protesting crowd, and particularly how these proximities affect the symbolic identity of these words of protest.

The Noise of Territory.

The same underground system that drowns speech with the sound of its mechanical function down below in the network of tunnels brings me out in daylight, at a tube station in central London. It is cold, and many shoppers walk between coffee shops, bus stops, train stations, and restaurants holding square, shiny bags. Think for a second of the sound here in this busy street. Think of the traffic first—buses with diesel engines, and purring cars waiting at lights—a deep, heavy background sound. And then, the sounds that are closer, like the scrape of a shoe heel on an uneven paving slab a metre in front, the single drum beat of a dropped bin being emptied, or the reversing, metronomic bleeping of a nearby van. Think of those small bits of sound even quieter and closer—when you catch someone’s conversation over their shoulder, waiting to cross the road—that rare moment when strangers stand close and still. In all this noise, resounding from a multitude of distances, there is a single whistle. And at this moment, standing with the buses, and the bins, and the shoppers with glossy square box bags—two worlds collide. Two groups of people merge sonorously—shoppers and demonstrators.



Today, our sight has dimmed; it no longer sees our future, having constructed a present made of abstraction, nonsense, and silence. Now we must judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festivals, than by its statistics (Attali, 1977, 3).

Amidst this site of consumerism and protest, it is possible to dim our sight and close one's eyes, in order to think through sound. Instead of the advertising bill-boards, traffic lights, neon shop names, newspaper front pages, and backlit window displays let us for a moment explore this fleeting juxtaposition between collective consumption and politicized dissent through *noise* rather than words.

What is this noise that always seems to exist around us, noise that, since John Cage, presents itself even in silence? This noise that cannot be switched on or off and plays itself without our consent. Jacques Attali classifies *noise* as *disordered* sound, its inevitable *organization*, by instruments and scores, as *music*. Following Attali, the *organization* of sound is directly linked to its commoditization made possible by developing industrial techniques of sound reproduction during the growth of industrialized Western societies in the past century. The commercial potential of sound also saw its separation from being *part of* everyday actions, rituals, and celebrations to becoming an artistic form with its own high cultural status and inevitable economic value. Attali's work is predominantly focused on the power values surrounding music and noise, and the relation to both economic and geographical territorial occupation.

All music, any organization of sound is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power centre to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all its forms. Therefore, any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form. Among birds a tool for marking territorial boundaries, noise is inscribed from the start with the panoply of power. Equivalent to the articulation of space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it, how to survive by drawing one's sustenance from it. And since noise is the source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination (Attali, 1977, 6).

Let us think of *noise* in terms of *territory*—As Jonathan Ree noted Morike's reference to nightingales, we too can hear these calls, in the dawn chorus out of open bedroom windows, marking the transition between dark and light during the months of spring. This song represents the mating season, and crucially following Attali, scores an

invisible, audible composition intent on marking out territorial boundaries. As with other methods of territorial notation used by animals such as the smell of urine, these bodily projections provide a vast tapestry of territorial mapping. Defined not by 5 metre high concrete walls or barbed wire, but by the impermanent and transient language of sound and smell.

Back on the busy streets of London, when the first whistle is heard from the demonstrators adjacent to consumers, two sonorous territories collide. The collective murmurings represent opposing voices with their own distinct political identities and ideological territory—of those *participating* in a globalized system and those *protesting against* it. Similar to birdsong, the protesters announce their territorial occupation amidst an established landscape or (economic) system. This is not simply a call of presence—this territorial occupation *defines* the success or failure of any protest.

Since the poll tax riots in London in 1990 the police have endeavored to change strategy to avoid the loss of territorial control of the city centre (Campbell, 2009). Since then, both at the May Day riot in 1990, and the G20 protests in the City of London in 2009, the strategy of ‘kettling’ has been imposed. This method of physical containment aims to trap and contain protestors in splintered groups, isolated from each other for many hours, to restrict the impact of a large physical mass and eventually wear down momentum. The method is similar to the tactics imposed for policing supporters at football matches. What is consistent between both contained groups, is the use of the voice to perforate the enforced physical boundaries. The songs of away fans waiting for hours in stadia, at train stations, or outside the ground and the shouts and chants of ‘kettled’ protestors, not only proclaim a collective identity but also, importantly, occupy territory inaccessible by foot. The immateriality of sound functions as an appropriate medium of action, perforating solid borders and reacting to an imposed physical segregation.

In contrast to ‘kettling’, the protest I follow, flows with the conventional snake-like slowness of a regular demonstration. *This* audible territorial conflict is marked by the ongoing nature of the sound of the city, traffic, and shoppers in the background and the temporary presence of the protesters. Rather than analyze these voices on territorial terms alone, I want to ask *how* we see, or rather *hear* these collective acts through the *noise* that they produce, rather than the specific symbolic messages that they support

and carry. So, let us not think of the glare of mass-produced illuminated words and images adorning shops, spelling out brands, discounts and sales. Or for that matter the hastily printed monochrome leaflets spilled on the floor and pressed into protesters palms promoting the next rally. Let us close our eyes to these semantic utterances and rather, face the sensory receptor that we can't close our eyes to—sound.

Noise of dissent, Noise of control.
Pots & Pans, Keys, and Muzak.

The sound of keys is a common, natural curiosity for a young child. There is a simple, physical relationship with the movement of the hand and the sound that is produced. This individual corporeal relationship between the body and sound is intensified collectively if we think of the events leading to the Velvet revolution in Wenceslas Square, in Prague in November 1989. As Alexander Dubcek was brought out of hiding, Vaclav Havel spoke to the people of Czechoslovakia. Soviet rule was broken and the crowds of thousands rattled key chains and tiny bells in the central square. This jangling of keys symbolized the opening of previously locked doors (www.nytimes.com/1989/12/12/world) and had become a common act in the wave of protests in the crumbling Soviet states of Eastern Europe. The symbolic relation between instrument and political desire, is again illustrated by the protests on the streets of Buenos Aires that took place in December 2002. As the economic collapse took place in Argentina and the government announced a state of emergency, a cross-class mass of a million people took to the streets, converging on the presidential palace and banging pots and pans (Adamovsky, 2003). The protest was known as *Cacerolazo* (saucepans) and therefore was identified by the instrument that produced the sound.

These abstracted sonorous displays are produced by a specific gestural, performative act and are conceived through the combination of a symbolic reference (pots, pans, keys) and the noisiness of the action. In these circumstances, the noise produced holds a symbolic value, as it is produced in relation to a specific political context. Simultaneously it resonates as an abstract noise. Conversely, if we return to the streets of London, the sound of chanting from afar does not indicate a specific demand (keys to locked doors) or identify the specific protest (*Cacerolazo*). This sound simply

signifies that there is a large group of individuals protesting, but it is not possible to understand *what* that particular context of protest is. So here, in London, with the sound of slogans from a distance, the words that position the specific political aims and goals are *muffled*. They no longer symbolically refer to a specific political context and in turn, the rumbling sound becomes a truly abstracted noise of protest.

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Following the direction of the whistle on foot brings more whistles and less traffic. These high-pitched sounds—expelled air from the lungs of bodies in the street begin to engulf the humming puffs of diesel exhaust pipes. And then half way down a narrow alley, I stop and listen to the indecipherable merger between the low vocal hum ahead, and the mechanical rumbling from the road behind—almost indistinguishable they form a huge heavy blanket of sound perforated by these tiny sharp whistles. Walking towards the hum in front, the sound begins to break up softly, from a blanket into a number of overlaid patches. With a sporadic rhythm the sound starts to roll like a waterfall.

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Sound is also used on the other side of the barricade in order to control and combat those who demonstrate. The megaphone is understood to be the archetypal tool to verbally direct individuals to conform to a specified system of order using directive language. But what of the controlling nature of more abstract sound when the amplified words that order ‘move’, ‘turn’, ‘believe’, ‘trust’, ‘vote’ are absent?

The use of background music or *muzak* in shopping centres—the heart of capitalist consumerism—was introduced in order to go un-noticed. It exists as the closest form of music to ‘sound’, following Attali, as its *organization* in effect renders it to the periphery of the listener’s consciousness. On the 10th February 2009, Muzak Holdings LLC filed for bankruptcy, after more than 70 years providing consumer outlets, shopping malls, grocers and lifts with music aimed to soothe and manipulate the actions of consumers. During the 1940s, the company had conducted research into the effects of music on labour production in factories revealing that subliminal volume

levels and alternation with periods of silence increased factory production.² This technique known as ‘Stimulus Progression’, is as evident in present shopping stores today as it was half a century ago. While through the mid 20th century, music was used to soothe the shopper in order to make them feel comfortable, today’s shopping malls are designed to ‘reach out’ to specific consumers, invariably marrying popular music with target groups on the High street. Here, volume is often increased rather than decreased. This increased audibility of music does not necessarily place it in the foreground as that space is colonized by consumer activities, loud music exists in the background in much the same way as Muzak and so their differentiation is lost.

Where these encounters with background sound in shopping stores appear to create an (unconscious) atmosphere in the shared presence of customer, product and salesman/woman—today music is often played in the physical absence of all. As call centres and telephonic economic exchange colonizes consumer experience, music is often played in the ‘gaps’ when the sales person is absent (not speaking), or whilst the consumer awaits a response. Here ‘comforting’ music is played in the physical absence of both the assistant and the product: ‘Today, it is unavoidable, as if, in a world devoid of meaning, a background noise were increasingly necessary to give people a sense of security’ (Attali, 1985, 3).

Sonorous ‘security’ does not solely refer to psychological relations to consumerism—sound can also be used by the State as a means to control protesters such as those who demonstrate against globalization and consumerist inequality in the capitalist market in a very physical manner.

Humans can be physically affected by certain sounds or noises: very high frequencies or very loud sounds measured can damage hearing. Very low frequencies affect other areas of the body, and have commonly been used in torture—digestive systems can be disturbed, the functioning of the heart disrupted. Many types of sound can be mentally disturbing. To think of these effects is only to begin to see how noise works, and the element that links all noise, all judgments

² For further discussion relating to sound and talk on the (Fordist / post- Fordist) shop floor see Virno, 2005 and Chapter One.

that noise is happening, is that noise is something that one is subject, submitted or subjected to (Hegarty, 2007, 4).

As well as being used as an interrogation technique such as ‘noise bombardment’ used against terrorist suspects at Guantanamo, Cuba (Back, 2007, 1) sound continues to be used as a policing tool in urban areas. Following the 2009 London Summit in the UK, the Pittsburgh Summit held in the US, only six months later presented examples of the use of sound as a public control device. On September 24th/25th 2009, the Long Range Acoustic Device was used for the first time in the USA against its own citizens. The LRAD is a crowd controlling device emitting a high frequency sound beam capable of damaging the eardrum and causing permanent damage. The LRAD has been used around the world on war ships and in Iraq. It was at hand at the Republican National Convention in New York City 2004, and used against opposition protesters in Tbilisi, Georgia by Russian forces as well as privately by the Luxury cruise ship, *Seaborne Spirit*, to defend against Somali Pirates in November 2005. The device can be used both as a physical deterrent causing pain or imbalance, or alternatively, as an incredibly precise megaphone able to reach long distances and very specific targets. Interestingly, the same device has also been used in shopping malls (www.thefreelibrary.com) to ‘aim’ specific offers to customers at particular geographic locations within the shop or supermarket³. The LRAD acts then as an advanced form of sonorous control—both as a tool to project words of consumer encouragement, or to fire sound capable of disabling those who protest against global consumerism. The Mosquito Anti-Social Device (M.A.D) emits a high frequency (16-20 kilohertz) sound only perceptible to the ears of those less than twenty-five years old. Goodman (2010, 183) explains how this ‘unsound’ can be used to selectively deter groups of teenagers from shopping centres and street corners where they are not wanted.

³ This is consistent with existing methods identified by consumer outlets as vehicles for manipulation and persuasion, such as the natural colour and form of fruit and vegetables as the first product encountered by the supermarket shopper, or the infusion of baking smells into the supermarket. The relaying of consumer specific information dependent on proximity to the product that the LRAD device transmits could present the possibility that audio advertising space could be sold to travel agents or airlines in the supermarket aisle where sun lotion is located?

We have seen how abstract sound can be used to control the public by the State and commercial enterprises. Now let us see how noise is qualitatively differentiated from noises, sound, and music.

Negative Noise?

The word *noise* comes from the Latin ‘Nausea’. This etymology immediately points to its viscerally uncomfortable nature. As music is associated with leisure, noise is associated with nuisance. Today the economic value of noise is based on its presence or absence: noise devalues property price due to factors such as traffic, flight paths, and ‘anti-social’ neighbours. This economic *clatter* then returns when a stock market crash takes hold of the language of the finance system, evident in the frenzy of activity on market floors.⁴

Paul Hegarty (2007, 3) suggests that *noise* only becomes itself when it is qualified as such—sound remains as sound until it is perceived negatively (unpleasant, loud etc), at which point it becomes *noise*. For Hegarty this (negative) judgment is important in understanding noise as it is culturally *produced* by a specific ‘hearing machine’—in this case the human ear. ‘Noise is not only a judgment on noises, it is a negative reaction, and then, usually, a negative response to a sound or set of sounds’ (Hegarty, 2007, 3). The same noise will not therefore, be considered so at different geographic or cultural locations. The sounds of car horns represent the unwanted noise of traffic. This sound also has a function—as well as a sign of frustration and annoyance, in my experience, the horns act as a warning of impending collision in the UK, mainland Europe, and North America and in other locations such as India as directional indicators. Hegarty distinguishes the negative identification of noise, by separating it from its plurality—noises. ‘Noise is not the same as noises. Noises are sounds until further qualified (e.g. as unpleasant noises, loud noises, and so on), but noise is already that qualification; it is already a judgment that noise is occurring’ (Hegarty, 2007, 3). Following these conditions we could say that the sound of car horns

⁴ Here, at the epicentre of economic crisis the desperate shouts create such noise that gestures are adopted to communicate prices and stocks, in order to buy and sell (see gesture in Chapter 4).

that are perceived as *traffic* is noise, whereas the car horns interpreted as warning or *indication of direction* are a set of noises or sounds. Yet, this negatively perceived, publicly produced noise can also function as a medium of concealment.

Background noise can act as a medium within which an illegal or violent act can go undetected. Noise can be used to cover up sound (screams) that could signify a criminal act—such as the ‘playing card murderer’ in Madrid who left different playing cards alongside the bodies of each victim. ‘He apparently timed his attack to coincide with the end of a Champions League football match between Real Madrid and Lokomotiv Moscow, when fireworks were being let off across the city to celebrate the Madrid team’s victory’ (Tremlett, 2003, 18).

Noise can be used to conceal words as well as actions. In the film *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), the process of acoustic surveillance is central. The film follows a Stasi intelligence officer who is responsible for collecting information regarding the motives and movements of suspected cultural dissidents in Berlin. In order to inhibit the success of Stasi surveillance operations, the dissidents often use background noise to drown spoken words in private apartments. There are two examples where sound is employed in this manner. Firstly, as one character arrives in an apartment to meet a fellow ‘conspirator’, a couple are arguing with raised voices and the dog is barking (noisy neighbours), drowning out the sound of their own conversation from anyone potentially listening in. Another scene later in the film uses Punk music rather than raised voices and barking as a vehicle to hide the words used to arrange a meeting place.⁵ We should note the muffling nature of sound heard intentionally (surveillance), or unintentionally (neighbours) from the other side of an interior wall. Both voice and music are ‘denatured’ (Barthes, 1989, [1967] 77) as sound passes through the brick and plaster material that mark architectural and social boundaries. Music loses its ‘organization’ (Attali, 1977, 6) and becomes ‘noise’ (Hegarty, 2007, 3).

⁵ It is interesting to note, in terms of Attali’s statement that music acts as *organized* noise attributed to a commercially viable product in the capitalist market place—that here we have punk music that is concerned with stylistic disorganization yet at the same time is highly marketable. In fact, in the East German context the transgression away from ‘organized’ or harmonious music is a central radical cultural concept. This ‘unorganized’ sound (punk) is being used to hide the words of cultural ‘conspirators’ who are trying to publish, or reach a Western audience where their cultural production also has an active economic value. For further discussion on this subject see Paul Hegarty (2007) on ‘Sound Art’, p 167-179.

Speech loses its semantic definition and becomes an indecipherable murmur. Here, the architectural materiality of private space defines the identity of social sounds.⁶

For Hegarty, noise is defined by its *external* authorship. The production of noise by ‘other people’ is integral to its identity—this sound omitted by ‘them’ is complicit with specific power relations. As well as the surveillance techniques used by the Stasi in highly politicized contexts, there are examples today of similar social values associated with the authorship of *noise*. The control of sound in residential space for example, has increasingly influenced social power relations resulting in the Anti Social Behavior Order Act (1998), where ‘neighbours who make too much noise can be fined up to £5000 or have noisy equipment removed’ (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/anti-social-behaviour). For persistent re-offenders, noisiness even presents the possibility of confinement. Hegarty suggests that noise produced by someone else *increases the volume* of noise: ‘Different sub cultural or cultural conditions or practices that are thought of as other are noisier, hence perceptions of people speaking in ‘foreign’ languages being loud’ (Hegarty, 2007, 4). This suggestion relies upon a specific understanding of one’s own linguistic and national identity in relation to he or she who is ‘foreign’. Hegarty does not specify in what social context this is most explicit, yet speaking as someone who has lived in an urban, multicultural environment from birth, the noises of foreign words are a comforting acknowledgement of a multiplicity of heritages. Again, noise or noises are subjectively determined. Rather than assert the ‘otherness’ of foreign language as a negative perception of overheard background linguistic ramblings that *increases* volume, we should instead think how these sounds in the background, can be perceived in a contrastingly positive manner.

Loudness of Noises.

The Rustle of Demonstration.

⁶ Jeffrey Goldfarb (2006), notes the influence of architecture upon surveillance and secrecy during the Soviet period, referring to the sanctuary of the kitchen: ‘Here personal and collective memories were told and retold in opposition to official history. This was the private place that was most remote from official mandates and controls, although in the worst of times, attempts were made to invade even this space, as children were called upon to denounce their parents’ (Goldfarb, 2006, 10).

...There always remains *too much meaning* for language to fulfill a delectation appropriate to its substance. But what is impossible is not inconceivable: the rustle of language forms a utopia. Which Utopia? That of a music of meaning; in its utopic state, language would be enlarged, I should even say *denatured* to the point of forming a vast auditory fabric in which the semantic apparatus would be made unreal; the phonic, metric, vocal signifier would be deployed in all its sumptuousness, without a sign ever becoming detached from it (ever *naturalizing* this pure layer of delectation), but also- and this is what is difficult without meaning being brutally dismissed, dogmatically foreclosed, in short castrated (Barthes, 1989, [1967] 77).



Back on the street and closer to the demonstration, there's suddenly more definition. Low and high pitches attach themselves to these overlaid patches of sound, and for the first time, the sound of voices is recognizable. But, there are still no words yet. The shouts are still muffled, cried out in rhythm together, and as these sounds get louder and louder they follow each other, keeping in time together or responding to an unidentifiable distant single call. Here, approaching the voices, text on banners and placards announce intentions and anger, opposition and alliance, yet still the words in these voices are hard to find. Closer still—walking towards this mass of sound, text repeats and repeats on leaflets that appear again and again, on the floor, stuck on walls, left on benches and pressed into open slits on lamp posts. These leaflets are passed between hands too; confirming 'Guilt', 'Murder', 'Lies'. Words hastily printed, spluttering onto primary coloured paper rectangles. These leaflets, with the sound of words shouted by the mouths alongside them bring to mind the outpouring of verbal expression on the streets during the French Revolution and the printed journals and pamphlets that accompanied them—titles such as 'bouche' (mouth), 'voix' (voice), and 'cri' (cry)⁷ footnoting the vocal tools of protest.



⁷ For a detailed historical account of the affect of language upon the political movement of the French Revolution see Rosenfeld 2001, 127.

Within this demonstration there is a vast constituency of allegiances. We march ‘together’ and at the same time we walk alongside each other at a distance—as inevitably our politics do not marry universally. These individual subjectivities are announced through placards, imagery, text and words, but from a distance these voices together produce a collective *hum*. This sound represents the unification of thousands of voices a live, temporal, collective act. From afar, the fragmented subjective identities are hidden and a public *occupation of territory* is announced. But this is not *only* an occupation of real physical space, in real time, in a capital city centre; this moment also activates a mass *occupation of language*.

At this stage in the march, words are hidden amidst the rustle of the sound of the demonstration. Crucially, following Barthes above, these individual words have not been lost or expelled; they still constitute the hum or rustle, but they cannot be recognized as words themselves. They are dormant threads within a vast fabric. They are not detached from the overlaid medium of the voices; they are very much part of it. This avoids the complete ‘naturalizing’ (Barthes, 1989 [1967]), 77) of this utopic fabric where meaning is erased and ‘dogmatically foreclosed’ (Barthes, *ibid*) and therefore stipulates the *concealed presence* of meaning as a constituent to his idea of the *rustle* of language.

Roland Barthes describes this moment where individual words are lost amidst a collective rumble of voices as the concealment of the ‘symbolic aggressor’. He suggests that the absence of subjective deviation presents a ‘linguistic utopia’ free from the distraction of the signifier; a language that reveals the *form* and presence of the speaker’s language, but not specific meaning. The *rustle* is the sound of the presence of language, not the specific constituents of it (decipherable words or meaning). I understand Barthes’ use of the term ‘utopic’ as a simultaneous occupation of both *form* and *content*, *langue* and *parole*—where the separations in language that we have seen through Debord and Agamben (in previous chapters) symbiotically reside together, but at the same time they conceal each other.

As with Hegarty, Barthes uses an example of the sound of overheard foreign language, where ‘the meaning was doubly impenetrable to me’ but ‘I was hearing the music, the breath, the tension, the application’ (Barthes, 1989, 78/79). Yet contrary to

Hegarty's reference, Barthes uses this figure by pointing to the individual's positive relation to his/her language, rather than of nuisance noise.

In general terms, Barthes sees the inevitable *mis-firing* of language as a perpetual game of failed catch-up. Every verbal addition that endeavours to undo what has already been said becomes another failure, and so words seem to be perpetually 'stammering'. Interestingly, he likens this to the noise of a malfunctioning machine. Again, noise is used pejoratively (malfunction) and *rustle* is used positively, to describe a machine working well—in this case the sound of 'the enormous rustle of the little balls' (Barthes, 1989 [1967], 77) in huge pachinko halls in Japan. The vast pachinko gambling halls with line after line of slot machines, represent the sound of the mass surrender to the economic desires that spectacle provides and promotes. There are no voices in the Pachinko halls, as with the vast gambling halls in Las Vegas. If voices are present at all, they are drowned by the sound of the games, leaving the ears with a 'ringing' sound that follows you when you go to your hotel room or even resonating in the eardrum on the plane home. Indeed this is a performative 'community of bodies: in the sounds of the pleasure which is "working," no voice is raised, guides, or swerves, no voice is constituted; the rustle is the very sound of plural delectation—plural but never massive (the mass, quite the contrary, has a single voice, and terribly loud)' (Barthes, 1989 [1967], 77). Barthes' examples of the *rustle* are limited to both the Pachinko halls where there are no voices and the incomprehensible overheard foreign conversations. Both these examples are already linguistically inaccessible to the hearer, as firstly, there are no words spoken (Pachinko halls), and secondly, there is no identifiable vocabulary present (unfamiliar foreign languages). Can we extend this idea of a utopic linguistic fabric, revealed through the denatured words of a plurality of voices, to the muffled calls that constitute the demonstration in London? And if so, how can we see the sound of this mass as a 'plural delectation' rather than a 'massive' loudness?⁸

Barthes describes the mass as 'loud' but the mass is only loud when you are close to it. Its 'delectation' depends on distance where the sound of voices gets diluted by the medium through which it travels. The recognition of the sound of the mass from afar reveals the true potential of the *rustle*. Barthes' evaluation is based on an external figure (the author) *listening in* (as we saw with the Stazi earlier) to socially produced

⁸ Note, following Hegarty (2007, 3), again 'volume' or 'loudness' is used pejoratively.

sounds. He is working at the periphery of these sources. I want to extend his analysis by shifting the proximity, and entering closer to the source of the rustle.

Consistent with the form of the walk that we have been following throughout this Chapter, I want to propose that the individual's relation to this demonstration should be seen as temporal—occupying varying geographical spaces, and *proximities to* the voices that produce these noises. It is thus integral to our understanding of the 'utopic' potential of the rustle of demonstration, to consider how this notion of rustle changes as our physical and corporeal relations to the emanating sound transforms. As this proximity is reduced, we become further aware of the individual corporeal intimacies that constitute the rustling mass.

Listening to *Internal* voices.

What secret is at stake when one truly listens, that is when one tries to capture or surprise the sonority rather than the message? What secret is yielded—hence also made public—when we listen to a voice, an instrument, or a sound just for itself? And the other indissociable aspect will be: What does to be listening, to be all ears, as one would say “to be in the world,” mean? What does it mean to exist according to listening, what resonates in it, what is the tome of listening or its timbre? Is even listening itself sonorous? (Nancy, 2007, 5).

The first words we hear as humans are those of our parents, but this occurs before the comprehension of language and even before birth. The first encounter we have with words is the muffled sound of speech from the womb. The words produced by the partner of the mother are produced externally to the child, whereas the words of the mother are produced at a greater corporeal proximity to the baby's sensory receptors in the womb. The resulting sounds are not only identified by the different tone of voice (father's relatively low tone for example) but are also dependent upon a corporeal mediality—how these sounds *travel through* and *reverberate with* fluids, organs, voice box, lungs and skin. In a sense, these first words we encounter could be described as an

encounter with the mediality of language, where meaning is absent and is therefore defined by its form or *corporeal rustle*.

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Up close now, walking next to those who shout with voices projected from their mouths I can hear the way the words are shouted as much, or if not more, than I can hear the words themselves. I stand near the caller and hear the rasping dryness of his throat as he shrieks, it sounds like it hurts. It's a rough sound that is almost stringy—a vocal chord. It's about to snap. Break. Hoarse and rough, throbbing larynx, inflamed tonsils, it sounds as if it could disappear into an empty projection of air at any moment, like a hissing serpent—the sound of speech when the voice box is removed. And then, after listening to the internal workings of the caller—I hear the ligaments and cartilages of proclamation, and imagine the strained colour of internal sound production from outside. At this moment I can hear his voice, and those around me, but above all I can hear these voices resonating within me, in a sort of internal rumbling of reception. I can hear these words in my ears but I can also feel the reverberations deep in my stomach.

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The sensory encounter with the politicized, urban event that we have been following presents contrasting corporeal and temporal relations. We can identify a collective bodily time-based rhythm where this 'throbbing crowd, its vibratory nexus both dis- and reorganizes body parts and individuates them into an event with its own duration' (Goodman, 2010, 111). To compare listening with seeing, sound is activated with the *arrival* of the event, whereas vision is already there before the event. Listening presents a durational encounter with the event providing a real-time, live, temporal relationship between event (in this case protest) and its sensory reception. As things we look at can be silent—like a parked car for example—their presence does not rely upon sound; they exist before and after sound is omitted or produced. The ongoing nature of vision is accompanied by the ability to block this sensory stream. The eyelids provide the ability to control the relationship with the event or object—allowing a sort of

sensory censorship to take place. Conversely, listening does not have this facility. So as well as being temporally linked to the event when it has commenced, there is also no ceasing this relation once it has started, as we cannot close our ears without external devices.

‘Moreover, the sound that penetrates through the ear propagates through the entire body something of its effects, which could not be said to occur in the same way with the visual signal. And if we note also that “one who emits a sound hears the sound he emits,” one emphasizes that animal sonorous emission is necessarily also (here again, most often) its own reception’ (Nancy, 2007, 15).

Following Nancy, we can now see that where vision requires an external tool such as a mirror to make the individual aware of his/her relation to an event, listening has a materiality that physically reverberates within the body. This internal sensory reception ignites a self-reflexivity that announces one’s own presence to oneself. This exchange or return (*renvois*) describes a site of both sonorous emission and reception (listening) occurring at the same time, and as Nancy continues, ‘it is precisely from one to the other that it “sounds”’(Nancy, 2007,16). So in effect, Nancy is describing the inter-subjective identity of the sonorous event. This presents the acknowledgement (as we will see in relation to online communication in Chapter Four) that an act of exchange is taking place, regardless of the message that is being transferred. Rather than see ‘individual’ voices being engulfed by a ‘massive loudness’, this intimate proximity to the audible source of demonstration presents a truly corporeal reverberation formulating an inter-subjective exchange within the particular medium of resistance: the voice.

We have seen how the presence of an overtly politicized act such as the demonstration, should not only be read by the numbers of participants or through the contents of its banners and the letters scrawled on its placards. Rather than *read* the politics of this mass of individuals we can also *hear* it. Through the temporal, sonorous negotiation of this event, we can attribute the collective production *and* occupation of a fabric of language, which is not confined to its symbolic identity but exists as a vast

linguistic utopia amidst the ideological consumer oppressions of the urban site of demonstration.

These politicized readings of language can be extended to the corporeal nature of other forms of communication such as gesture. In Chapter Two, I set up a general outline of the formalization of language present in web 2.0 and have referred to *the poke* (Facebook) as an example of a gesture of communication rather than an exchange of content. *The poke*, which acts as a virtual nudge, stimulating further communication, becomes the central figure of the following Chapter.