Literature, like the society as a whole, is faced with new sources of knowledge in the Crimean War. Something that emerges very strongly in the writings of the 1850s is the fantasy investment in the daily press during the Crimean War—especially The Times. This is played out in relation to fantasies about spectacle, heroism, and suffering that are sometimes directed in unexpected ways. Literature can offer a critique of these fantasies, as Isobel Armstrong argues in relation to Tennyson’s Maud, but it also keeps them in circulation. The literature is constantly in dialogue with the daily press and is conscious of a new temporal relationship between the events of war and the act of representation. Above all, the Crimean War generates new anxieties that it is the newspapers, and not literature, that have possession of the heart, the soul, and the intelligence of the nation. These anxieties persist, and intensify, in the early twentieth century, which is perhaps why Tennyson’s poem turns up in modernism as well as in war propaganda in the First World War. For Woolf and Sinclair, ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ still seems to have something to say, even as it is invoked, in fragments, as a kind of nonsense. The poem is also used to mourn for a history—the history of modern warfare—which even by 1919 is partly lost, though its legacy continued to be felt throughout the twentieth century.


CHAPTER 11

Sounds of the City: Virginia Woolf and Modern Noise

Kate Flint

Between 1880 and 1937—the calendar span of The Years—the sounds of the city changed. The human and animal cacophony of the streets gave way to a mechanical roar and hum, the product, above all, of the internal combustion engine on the ground, and—more intermittently—the drone and thrrob of the aeroplane in the sky above. The shift was between the acoustic ambience of the streets where ‘musicians doled out their frail and for the most part melancholy pipe of sound’, and the ‘deafening’ noise of London, the persistent hooting of car horns, ‘the dull background of traffic noises, of wheels turning and brakes squeaking’, that greets North on his return to London from Africa in the present day. But whilst Virginia Woolf was far from impervious to the intrusive and disturbing potential of modern noise, she was also exhilarated by it. Moreover, her sensitivity to the acoustic environment, and to the place of the listening, perceptive body within it, is an important component in her representation of the process of consciousness: one which makes her stand out from contemporary fictional observers of London life.

The nineteenth century increasingly characterized noise as nuisance. In 1821, a contributor to the New Monthly Magazine could write cheerfully on the topic, seeing the making of noise as a natural human attribute. The writer sympathetically presents the point of view that our love of noise proceeds from an instinctive aversion to our own thoughts. ‘There may be reason in this melancholy the natural ally of meditation—joy, on the contrary, is made up of noise.’ We are

2 Ibid., 908. The impress of sound on the unaccustomed ear is even more pronounced in the case of Orlando’s encounter with nineteenth-century urban life: ‘to her ears, attuned to a pen scratching, the uproar of the street sounded violently and hideously cacophonous’. Virginia Woolf, Orlando (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928), 27.
3 On 9 February 1924, Woolf contemplated the property at 52 Tavistock Square into which she and Leonard were planning to move: ‘We have been measuring the flat. Now the question arises: Is it noisy? No need to go into my broodings over that point. Fitzroy Sigre rubbed a nerve bare which will never sleep again while an omnibus is in the neighbourhood.’ The Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, with Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), ii, 291.
4 ‘Noise’, New Monthly Magazine II (1831), 260.
naturally affected by noise—the argument goes—whether music, thunder, cataracts, shouting, or bells, and 'so naturally agreeable is the sound of noise to the ear, that even its most terrific notes have a proportion of pleasing in them'. This was not, however, to prove a majority point of view as the century progressed. John Picker, in a useful article on Victorian street noises, produces some of the most noteworthy examples of those who possessed an apparent pathological sensitivity to the clamour of their environment, such as Thomas Carlyle, attempting to muffle noise by taking refuge in his soundproofed study (though 'theattle of a barrel organ and the raucous shouts of street hawkers came through walls whose double thickness distorted but by no means excluded the sound'), and Charles Babbage, who took particular exception to these same sounds—not to mention bagpipes, brass bands, and penny whistles and who was convinced that his neighbours bribed German bands to play outside his house. Within fiction, mechanical sounds could provoke revulsion against the modernity they seemed to stand for. 'Those railways!', exclaimed Lady Dunstane, in *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). 'When would there be peace in the land? Where one single nook of shelter and escape from them! And the English, blunt as their senses are to noise and hubbub, would be revelling in hisses, shrieks, puffedings and screeches, so that travelling would become an intolerable affliction.'

To be sensitive to noise was, for the later Victorians—as for Lady Dunstane—a means of demonstrating one's superiority in relation to one's fellow creatures. The psychologist James Sully, in a sustained discussion of the topic in 'Civilisation and Noise' (1878), writes in highly similar terms:

The sufferings which afflict the sensitive ear in our noisy cities are largely due to the general dulness of people with respect to disagreeable sounds. That most persons have not as yet reached a high degree of this sensibility is shown plainly enough in the fact that the rents of houses in the suburbs of London tend to be higher in the neighbourhood of railway stations. This proves that to most people the advantages of residing ten minutes later in the morning are of more account than the discomfort arising from all the shriekings and crashings which are wont to make night hideous in the vicinity of our suburban railways.

For Sully, it was a mark of human evolution—one of the 'glorious gains of civilisation', as he put it—that the 'cultivated European' could enjoy the varied delights of Western music, by contrast to the noises in which a 'savage' took pleasure, produced by rattle snake vertebrae or beating on drums made of untanned hide. He acknowledged, however, that this Spenserian view of the melodic means of gauging human development had another side to it, since although the 'savage' may lack the capacity of responding empathetically to the sounds which 'our more highly developed ear' enjoys, 'he is on the other hand secure from the many torments to which our delicate organs are exposed'. Sully himself, as he tells us in his autobiography, was acutely aware of the interference potential of sound in the modern world, and this article is full of testimony to his edgy irritation. Following Helmholtz, his guide in issues of aural perception as he was in terms of visual response, Sully quotes his mentor on the way in which noise differs from sound. Noise involves the rapid alternation of different kinds of sensations of sound, which 'are irregularly mixed up, and, as it were, jumbled about in confusion'. They thus agitate the ear, which is constituted to prefer smooth tones: irregularity, whether manifested through suddenness, or through jerky beats (especially when accompanied by high-pitched sounds), disturbs—according to Helmholtz—the fibres of this organ.

The effects of unpleasant sound were, for Sully, quite literally painful, and he was far from alone in his susceptibility. The art critic Philip Hamerton, for example, came close to envying his wife her deafness: 'I suffer from the opposite inconvenience of hearing too well. When I am unwell—and he experienced prolonged bouts of nervous debilitation—my hearing is preternaturally acute.' This hypersensitivity spilled over into his imagination, so that he could surmise what it would be like to hear as if one's ear came equipped with a microphone, magnifying the sound of his pencil scraping on the page, the footsteps of a fly sounding like the tread of a dray horse. This is strongly reminiscent of George Eliot's famous metaphorical formulation, in *Middlemarch*, of the perils of oversensitivity, which would include hearing the grass grow. In addition to the physiological phenomena that Sully termed 'sensuous pains', he was acutely aware of the power of noise to disturb and distract. Jonathan Crary has recently elaborated on fragmentation and interruption of vision as a key element in the visual aspects of modernity: the same claim can be made in relation to sound, that an awareness of its dislocating and disruptive effects was crucial to perceptual relationships in the modern environment. For Sully, discontinuous sound had the ability to destroy not just concentration, but mental health; he is agonizingly aware that not only the more 'civilized' a human being, but the more given to scholarly or meditative thought she or he might be, the more damaged she or he will sustain by noisy interruptions. Vulnerability goes hand in hand with evolutionary advance.

1. Ibid. 263.
5. George Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways* (1885; London: Constable, 1910), 59.
Part of the problem with sound, for Sully and others, lay in the very fact of its inescapability. Whilst one can, he notes, 'at will shut off completely, or nearly so, the avenues of the eye ... nature has, in the case of man, left the ear without any power of self-protective movement.' Edmund Gurney explained in 1880, 'We carry about an habitual instinct of having around us a certain amount of space in which we are alone, and any sudden violence to this instinct is very unnerving.' Particularly disorienting is sudden noise, or that which comes from a direction that one cannot determine (and which hence severs the interpretative relationship between ear and eye). These are variables that underline the perceiver's vulnerability. The assault on personal space is the more pronounced when one considers that noise quite literally invades the body. As Bruce Smith eloquently puts it: 'About hearing you have no choice; you can shut off vision by closing your eyes, but from birth to death, in waking and sleep, the coals of flesh, the tiny bones, the hair cells, the nerve fibers are always at the ready.' Whilst vision, as he goes on to explain, fixes objects out there, away from the perceiving self, the sounds that one hears reverberate inside one. John Tyndall alluded to our apprehension of noise as a physiological presence within our own bodies when, in his influential 1867 book Sound, he wrote of how 'Noise affects us as an irregular succession of shocks. We are conscious while listening to it of a jolting and jarring of the auditory nerve.'

Tyndall's description of noise as sound resulting from stimuli that cannot be resolved into periodic vibrations was to be frequently repeated into the early decades of the twentieth century, but it was increasingly felt to be inadequate. Physiological definitions remained, but social and psychological ones acquired a new prominence. F. C. Bartlett, professor of experimental psychology at Cambridge, and author of the symptomatically entitled _The Problem of Noise_ (1934), explained bluntly that 'Noise is any sound which is treated as a nuisance.' In this book, he addresses the fact that the world is increasingly full of noise, as well as of studies of the perceived problem: studies which variously address not to say continually increasing—factor in our environment, we must suppose that in time man's organism will become modified so as no longer to suffer from these sources: 'Civilisation and Noise', 711-12.

10 Ibid. 710. Ruskin was a notable disserter from this viewpoint, asking his reader to remember that 'the eye is at your mercy more than the ear. 'The eye, it cannot choose but see.' Its nerve is not so easily numbed as that of the ear, and it is often busied in tracing and watching forms when the ear is at rest': John Ruskin, Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849), The Complete Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-13), vii, 156.


15 Ibid, 52-3.
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16 Ibid, 710. Ruskin was a notable dissenter from this viewpoint, asking his reader to remember that ‘the eye is at your mercy more than the ear. “The eye, it cannot choose but see.” Its nerve is not so easily numbed as that of the ear, and it is often basied in tracing and watching forms when the ear is at rest!’ John Ruskin, Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849), The Complete Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–11), vii. 156.


21 Ibid, 52–3.
that their instruments are so grotesquely over-loud that speech items are audible and intelligible for several yards up and down the street.\textsuperscript{24}

The potential sources of unpleasant noise were almost endless: turbines, electrical motors, steam hammers, pneumatic drills, pile drivers, cement mixers, miniature rifle ranges, electrical substations, and—a recurrent source of complaint—the riveting machines used to make scaffolding secure. Hand in hand with this cacophony went an increasing amount of legislation aimed against the producers of noise (particularly in London, 'the city of din'\textsuperscript{25}), from long-standing by-laws prohibiting the excessive ringing of church bells, the use of noisy instruments to announce entertainments or obtain alms; limiting the practising of bagpipes to certain hours of the week, or forbidding the use of whistles to call cabs (a regulation originally intended to benefit the wounded of the First World War), to laws designed to deal with newer developments. Thus injunctions were issued prohibiting the night-time demolition of buildings; to curtail the outdoor use of gramophones; to ban the use of the motor-car horn in built-up areas between 11.30 p.m. and 7 a.m.; to tax solid-tyred motor-vehicles more heavily; and—in 1929 and 1930—legislation was introduced that banned the use of excessively noisy cars on public roads. The formation of the Anti-Noise League in 1934 brought together various medical, legal, scientific, engineering, and architectural authorities, and employed both exhibitions and deputations to the government to publicize their views on noise suppression. It did not go without ironic comment that the advances in mechanical and electrical science that enabled the measurement of noise—the apparatus used to measure the decibels produced by a car engine, for example—were part of the same technological phenomenon that produced this escalation in unpleasant sounds in the first place.

Unsurprisingly, this urban hubbub does not go unremarked in the fiction of the period. In Backwater \textit{(1916)}, for example, Dorothy Richardson's Miriam has problems conversing as she travels into London from the suburbs: "Through the jingling of the trams, the dop-dop of the hoofs of the tram-horses and the noise of a screeching train thundering over the bridge, Miriam made her voice heard"—but only just.\textsuperscript{26} Here noise has achieved the volume one associates with interference, but far more frequent is a sense that it is just something that is there: a dull rumble, an urban constancy. Even though characters in Evelyn Waugh's Aldous Huxley's, and Elizabeth Bowen's London may rush around in motor cars, displaying a self-conscious modernity in their fretful social restlessness, one rarely hears the sound of the engines, of brakes, of horns (although, outside fiction, the \textit{Waste Land} offers a notable exception). Rather, there is simply an occasional acknowledgement of the fact that—to quote E. M. Forster—"the thoroughfare roared gently—a tide that could never be quiet".\textsuperscript{27} One is far more aware of sound, in the fiction of the early twentieth century, when it momentarily ceases, than when it is being made. This is true, too, in early Woolf, as when Katherine and Ralph, towards the close of \textit{Night and Day}, come to an intimate understanding in the silent streets of night-time London. But after her first couple of novels—as her fiction becomes more experimental both in form and in representation of consciousness—so Woolf's attitude towards noise also seems to change. By contrast with her contemporaries' work, Woolf's fictional treatment of the sounds of the city is frequently a celebratory one. More than that, she continually makes her reader aware of the acoustic environment.

Nowhere is this celebratory stance more apparent than in \textit{Mrs Dalloway}. For Elizabeth Dalloway, taking a bus into the City of London and walking around its streets, temporarily free of Miss Kilman, and feeling simultaneously both a sense of adult independence when it comes to decision-making and a tie to a paternal heritage of public service, the urban roar is empowering: 'She liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good. The noise was tremendous; and suddenly there were trumpets (the unemployed) blaring, rattling about in the uproar; military music; as if people were marching...'.\textsuperscript{28} The narratological endorsement of this scene is not completely wholehearted. Elizabeth's exhilaration prevents her from responding to the fact that the post-war unemployed, searching for work, might have some serious grievances against society, for example: the fact that the circumstantial detail concerning the trumpet-blowers is provided for the reader gently underscores Elizabeth's position of privilege. Moreover, the narrative voice suddenly slips out of Elizabeth's consciousness to hypothesize that if someone were to open the window of a room in which a woman had just died, the music would come up to him as 'consolatory, indifferent'. This seems, on the surface, a strange dislocation of point of view, jarring against the girl's awareness of youth and possibility (although it is a dislocation that implicitly links her with her mother, into whose quivering alertness to life the fact of death recurrently intrudes). Yet it serves a wider purpose. Woolf emphasizes that 'this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out'—and it's not quite clear whether she refers just to the militaristic music, or to the whole roar of the city—"would take whatever it might be; this vox; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on".\textsuperscript{29}

City noise, for Woolf, implies continuity: even the interruptive sounds that so annoyed her contemporaries and forebears can be assimilated, like fragments of urban archaeology, into a broader continuum, whether diachronic or synchronic. This process is made particularly clear with the episode near the beginning of \textit{Mrs Dalloway} where the pistol-shot-like sound of a car backfiring causes Clarissa to jump and the deferential flower-shop saleswoman Miss Pym to apologize, and,
above all, serves to focus the attention of a random cross-section of London's population on the vehicle. Startled into auditory consciousness by the sudden report, they become as if made one by the invasive properties of traffic noise: "The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body."\(^{30}\)

The capacity of one individual to merge and blend a whole range of sounds is commented on by Louis in The Waves:

'The roar of London,' said Louis, 'is round us. Motor-cars, vans, omnibuses pass and repass continuously. All are merged into one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds—wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merry-makers—all channeled into one sound, steel-blue, circular. Then a siren hoots. At that shores slip away, chimneys flatten themselves, the ship makes for the open sea.'\(^{31}\)

In the novel's final section, Bernard's response to the sounds of the city emphasizes less the connective possibilities of sensorial alertness to the present (although, as ever with his desire to hold and merge, these are apparent too) than the inter-layering of past and present. He claims to be

drawn irresistibly to the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song that comes across courts at night; which we hear now booming round us as cars and omnibuses take people to theatres. (Listen; the cars rush past this restaurant; now and then, down the river, a siren hoots, as a steamer makes for the sea.)\(^{32}\)

The echoing of Louis's earlier phrase performs the connection in a somewhat artificial way, but the underlying desire for the linkage between ages that may be formed by noise is a much broader one. Woolf employs the concept of wordless, senseless song to suggest continuity in human emotion when, in Mrs Dalloway, she introduces the 'battered old woman' frailly warbling her ages-old lovesong outside Regent's Park tube station.\(^{33}\) As these examples indicate, Woolf's welcoming of noise of various kinds is repeatedly bound up with the desire to acknowledge human connections. Awareness of sound is unwillied; similarly, our links with others may not be welcomed, but they are as inescapable as is the cacophony of the city. One's response to noise may, therefore, in Woolf's fiction, be read as an index to a character's degree of comfort with that condition. In Jacob's Room, a novel concerned from the first page with epistolary correspondence, the anxiety to communicate that lies behind the penned message is linked with other forms of exchanging words that technological development has made possible.

And the notes accumulate. And the telephones ring. And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last card is dealt and the days are over. 'Try to penetrate,' for as we lift the cup, shake the hand, express the hope.

33 Ibid. 246.
34 Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, 133.

something whispers. Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices...?\(^{34}\)

Virginia Woolf's concern with sound and technology has started to receive a certain amount of attention, although much of this has clustered around the conspicuous political threat signalled by the ominous 'halls and reverberating megaphones' that so trouble North in the Present Day section of The Years, and the implications of the ticking of the gramophone (and the anxieties caused by worn grooves or unexpected blaring) in Between the Acts—a novel that is composed as an aural collage of interpenetrating rural, human, and mechanical sounds.\(^{35}\) In two illuminating essays, Gillian Beer has written of the links between the composition and ideas informing Woolf's later fiction and the ways in which wave-particle theory caught the imagination in the late 1920s and early 1930s.\(^{36}\) Melba Cuddy-Keane has also written interestingly on the author's relationship to sound technologies. She suggests that what she calls a 'new aural sensitivity' was coincident with the emergence of the gramophone and wireless.\(^{37}\) Although I have been arguing that the context of this sensitivity was in fact far wider, Cuddy-Keane is highly suggestive about the ways in which an expanded listening audience, actualized with the advent of broadcasting, may have enabled a conceptualization of the city as consisting of many different potential listening points. She usefully reminds us that, whilst 'mainstream developments in broadcast technologies did indeed inspire justifiable fears about state control, hegemonic dominance, and a passive public',\(^{38}\) Woolf herself was by no means uniformly pessimistic about these developments. Indeed, in her diary she records challenging Harold Nicholson's views on Empire by suggesting that new technologies might well collapse narrow concepts of nationhood. "But why not grow, change?" I said. Also, I said, recalling the aeroplanes that had flown over us, while the portable wireless played dance music on the terrace, "can't you see that

34 Ibid. 29. Compare the effect (visual and aural) of the aeroplane in this novel, and elsewhere in Woolf's writing; see Gillian Beer, 'The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), Nation and Narration (London: Routledge, 1990), 265–90.
36 Ibid. 246.
37 Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, 133.
nationality is over? All divisions are now rubbed out, or about to be.” Yet Woolf’s awareness of the potentially unifying effects of sound goes hand in hand with her registering the reverse of this process. Her inclusion of the occasional moment of sound that resists interpretation signifies a fear of the lack of communication that forms one of the central problems of social and political life in the 1930s. Thus in The Years, the strange ditty sung by the caretaker’s children at Delia’s party seems to symbolize an alarming gap: between classes, between generations, and—above all—between past and future. Rather than melody, however polyphonic, the sounds emitted by these youngsters suggest a jarring, and incomprehensible dissonance. In turn, Woolf’s responsiveness to the different possibilities of sound demonstrates how her own deployment of its nature and effects resists any neat, harmonious reading. What she does do, however, is to make the reader continuously alert to the importance of attentive listening, rather than passive acceptance of ambient noise.

Woolf is well aware that consciously registered sounds can be the starting place for associative speculation. Thus Jacob, walking back into London after the bonfire party, hears his feet on the pavement, and—somewhat pretentiously—“it seemed to him that they were making the flags ring on the road to the Acropolis.” For the more disturbed Septimus, the sparrows sing—as they had done for Woolf herself—piercingly in Greek. Moreover, one projects one’s emotions into sounds, or one’s feelings may be characterized as a kind of inner noise. When Orlando realizes that Sasha is not going toelope with him, the bells that toll in the deep, inky night of Elizabethan London “seem[m] to ring with the news of her defeat and derision.” Clarissa registers her jealous hatred of Miss Kilman as primeval sound, a “brutal monster” stirring within her, like twigs cracking and hooves being planted down “in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul.” At other times, it can be curiously hard to determine who does the listening in Woolf’s fiction. In Jacob’s Room, when Florinda and Nick meet in a café on a hot afternoon, “The door opened; in came the roar of Regent Street, the roar of traffic, impersonal, unpitying; and sunshine grained with dirt.” Although these invasive noises are indubitably nuanced by Florinda’s nervous, half-dulled, half-hysterical pregnant state, they are not overtly filtered through her aural attention: rather, they become assimilated into a composite impression of the oppressive atmosphere. As with the recording of the ‘roar’ of the shawl’s loosening fold that disturbs the ‘swaying mantle of silence’ in the empty house in To the Lighthouse, sounds, detached from those who might consciously register them, form part of Woolf’s recurrent experiments with an impersonalized narrative voice.

As we have seen, many of the complaints made against noise, whether in the later decades of the nineteenth century or in the twentieth century, inveighed against its invasive qualities, its capacity to force itself on an individual, so that she or he had no option but to be aware of it—as the sound of the aeroplane in Mrs Dalloway ‘bored ominously into the ears of the crowd.’ But hearing, as has already been noted, has frequently been figured as a different thing from listening. ‘Hearing,’ wrote Roland Barthes, ‘is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act. It is possible to describe the physical conditions of hearing (its mechanisms) by recourse to acoustics and the physiology of the ear; but listening cannot be defined only by its object or, one might say, by its goal.’ Indeed, to be overconscious of hearing—of the bodily activity, rather than the perceptual filtering and interpretation of impressions, may well be—Woolf suggests—to be vulnerable to being classified as neurotic, rather as Bartlett suggested. It certainly is symptomatic of the shell-shocked Septimus Smith’s condition that he hears a nursemaid in the park, reading the sky-writing, spell out “Kay Arr” close to his ear, “deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke.”

Barthes distinguishes three types of listening: alert, which is shared by humans and animals (a wolf listens for the possible noises of its prey, a child or lover for footsteps which might be those of the mother or the beloved); deciphering, where the ear tries to interpret certain sounds, and that which involves the development of intersubjective space. Again, he draws a parallel between human and animal: For the mammal, its territory is marked out by odors and sounds; for the human being—and this is a phenomenon often underestimated—the appropriation of space is a matter of sound: domestic space, that of the house, the apartment—the approximate equivalent of animal territory—is a space of familiar, recognized noises whose ensemble forms a kind of household symphony.

This description of the appropriation of familiar space through listening describes perfectly Clarissa Dalloway’s aural alertness to her home environment, using the ambient domestic sounds as a means of assembling her own sense of individualization:

Strange, she thought, passing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person, strange how a mistress knows the very moment, the very temper of her house! Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs; the swish of a mop; tapping; knocking; a loudness when the front door opened; a voice repeating a message in the basement; the chink of silver on a tray...
Clarissa listens here to 'the voice of the house—and all houses have voices'; an anthropomorphization that underscores yet further human filiation with one's environment.

For Barthes, it is important, if we are to practise listening at its best, that we should make 'no effort to concentrate the attention on anything in particular, but to maintain in regard to all that one hears the same measure of calm quiet attentiveness'. This is a procedure which, in its deliberate avoidance of perceptual preselection, is one that he parallels to Freud's advice to analysts in his Recommendations for Physicians on the Psychoanalytic Method of Treatment:

The analyst must bend his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the emerging unconscious of the patient, must be as the receiver of the telephone to the disc. As the receiver transmits the electric vibrations induced by the sound waves back again into sound waves, so is the physician's unconscious mind able to reconstruct the patient's unconscious which has directed his associations, from the communications derived from it.

Freud found himself drawn to the language of new communications technology to describe the process of transmission and interpretation that must take place in attentive listening: the type of listening that Mrs Dalloway practises as the sounds of the house spiral up the stairwell. And it is precisely this idea of attentive listening, or aural alertness, that blurs the distinctions between hearing and listening that some commentators on the activity of the ear would like to establish, and which demands, moreover, that we understand the listening subject as someone who is in a constant process of interchange with their environment.

Thus in the longer run, rather than look to technological language to describe the effects that Woolf is strving after, recent terminology in anthropology may prove more enabling. Steven Feld, building on the conceptualizations of 'auditory space' that have emerged since the 1950s, has proposed the term 'acoustemology, by which I mean local conditions of acoustic sensation, knowledge and imagination embodied in the culturally particular sense of place'. Such a term encompasses very usefully Woolf's understanding of the social shared aspects of an acoustic environment, whether the clock chimes that sound out across the city, or the particular combination of sound and space that produces the resonances of traffic sounds and hooting horns across the expanses of a London park, and the combination of this social knowledge with the physical and mental experiences of a given individual. For her, as for Feld,

59 Woolf, 'The London Scene', 438.
60 Barthes, 'Listening', 252.
61 Sigmund Freud, Recommendations for Physicians on the Psychoanalytic Method of Treatment (1912), quoted in Barthes, 'Listening', 252.

Sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth. This seems particularly relevant to understanding the interplay of sound and felt balance in the sense and sensuality of emplacement, of making place. For bodies are as potentially reverberant as they are reflective, and one's embodied experiences and memories of them may draw significantly on the interplay of that resoundingness and reflectiveness. A writer in Macmillan's Magazine for 1893 claimed that

The supremacy of one sense over all the others is now so completely established that the world of our waking moments is a world of sights, even as the world of our dreams is a world of visions. We are always looking, and but rarely listening; always attending to the shapes and colours before our eyes, seldom noticing the sounds which reach our ears. The visible has become the real, while the audible and the tangible appear as but casual properties of the visible.

Sight, this author suggests, is the sense of the modern: a view endorsed by Woolf, one might say, in her 1927 essay 'Street Haunting', when she imagines the individual employing 'a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye': the primary organ, in this piece, for assimilating and entering into the urban environment. Yet she admits, here, that the eye 'is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure'; rather, it keeps one tied to the surface. The imagery she employs of the body's own surface, however, figuring it as 'the shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves', suggests the potential for a more complex nacreous structure than that of the bivalve: the shape to which the folding passageways and chambers of the ear have frequently been compared. The writer of the Macmillan's article goes on to hypothesize that 'The present complete ascendency of sight prevents us from realising that there might have been, and probably was, a time in the past history of man when sounds were of far more importance relatively to sights than they are at present.'

In Woolf's work, we see this importance reasserted. The attention she pays to the acoustic world within her fiction distinguishes her from many of her contemporary commentators on urban life, who register city noise in terms of damaging invasiveness. Whilst Woolf's representation of noise does not have the onomatopoeic directness of Joyce's newspaper presses juddering away in Ulysses, its place in both individual and collective consciousness is readily acknowledged. Indeed, so prominent a place does Woolf accord listening in our perception; giving due weight to its associative and connective powers, that in addition to that 'enormous eye', she demands that we pay attention with, and to, the organ which Lucy Swithin imagines in Between the Acts: a 'gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head'. This instrument, as Mrs Swithin would have it, is capable of producing harmony even out of discordant noise—although such harmony is not always

54 Feld, 'Waterfalls of Song', 97.
55 J.B.C., 'In the Realm of Sound', Macmillan's Magazine 67 (1893), 438.
56 Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (1927), in Bollyby, Crowded Dance, 71.
57 Ibid. 71.
58 Ibid. 71.
59 J.B.C., 'In the Realm of Sound', 438.
60 Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1941), 175.
achievable by those with a less optimistic world-view. Individual subjectivity inevitably conditions how we register noise, which, for Woolf, is more internalized affect than an objectively quantifiable property of the external world. This internalization is quite literal, since the ear is the instrument, too, which has the potential to register the reverberations of this outer environment as reverberations within the body's own organs. It is thus ideally poised to reveal the connections that exist between people in the urban environment: connections that, like noise itself, may be welcomed or rebuffed, but which are, none the less, an unalterable fact of Woolf's perception of the modern world.

CHAPTER 12

‘Chloe Liked Olivia’: The Woman Scientist, Sex, and Suffrage

MAROUA JOANNOU

‘Chloe liked Olivia. They shared a laboratory.’ The well-known line from Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own (1928) evokes the frisson of attraction between women engaged in scientific work in a medical laboratory. The two women are mincing liver, apparently a cure for pernicious anaemia. But who were Chloe and Olivia? Women workers in early twentieth-century science laboratories were few and far between. And what if, instead of sharing their laboratory amicably as women scientists, Chloe and Olivia found themselves the objects of unwanted sexual interest and rivalry on the part of male scientists?

This chapter explores the representation of the woman scientist in three early twentieth-century novels: H. G. Wells’s Ann Veronica (1909) and what I take to be two feminist responses to it some fifteen years on: Edith Ayrton Zangwill’s The Call (1924) and Charlotte Haldane’s Man’s World (1926). Wells’s novel, the best remembered of the three works, established a powerful and provocative typology for the representation of the female scientist—a typology that Zangwill and Haldane both endorsed in several important respects but that they were also determined to resist. Wells took as his protagonist a gifted young woman scientist who chooses to become a militant suffragette, and who finds both her work and her consequent political commitments bringing her into conflict with the male scientist she loves. Ann Veronica thus offered to later novelists a multi-plot model for thinking about female science; one in which the narrative of scientific interest and discovery was in tension both with the narrative of heterosexual romance and with a developing narrative of feminist activism.

Ann Veronica also proved predictive in its strong reliance on the author’s own experience of women scientists. Wells modelled his heroine, Ann Veronica, on the young Amber Reeves, whom the married Wells had seduced when she was a student at Newnham College, Cambridge. But the novel reverberates, too, with an earlier illicit love affair with Amy Catherine Robbins, a New Woman for whom Wells left his first wife, Isabel, in 1894 and whom he later married. They met when

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