

**THE EARFUL BODY: TOWARDS A RHETORIC OF LISTENING
IN AND BEYOND SCENES OF WRITING INSTRUCTION**

by

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This dissertation focuses on listening, the quieter counterpart to what are usually the stars of composition instruction: writing, reading, and speaking. In particular, it examines the way students and instructors physically manifest the act of listening, using their posture, their eyes, their hands, even their choices about where to sit. I call this “gestural listening,” and it is likely to be a familiar idea to anyone who has ever faced a room of students or audience members and wished for better tools to interpret their often profound stillness and quietness.

To bring gestural listening into focus, I put three bodies of work into conversation: the recently-coalesced field of sound studies, the ever-emergent gesture studies, and the pedagogical elements of rhetoric and composition. Deeply enmeshed in processes of writing and speaking, gestural listening emerges as a tool for destabilizing the usual ways of thinking about listening as simply receptive, rather than more complexly expressive. Ultimately, I argue that listening can be leveraged as a rhetorical force, and that gestural listening should be considered one element of a broader “rhetoric of listening,” which also encompasses listening behaviors in reading, writing, and speaking. Gestural listening can, at different times, manifest both as the exertion and the subversion of power.

My primary methods of capture are ethnographic in nature—for example, the vignette: brief, descriptive passages drawn from moments in my classroom and from my observations of other classrooms. Elsewhere, I use audio and visual recordings to capture both gesture and speech for analysis while also attending to lived experience. My synesthetic methodologies, which attend to auditory, visual, and kinesthetic aspects of classroom and tutorial environments, reflect the need to be aware of these settings in multisensory ways and to develop vocabulary for their sonic and embodied dimensions. Though my inquiry begins in scenes of writing instruction, the results of my research into gestural listening are not limited to pedagogical environments. The final chapter of my dissertation, for instance, handles instances of performative listening in contemporary civil protest, such as the phenomenon of football players “taking a knee” during the national anthem.

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PREFACE

GAME OF SKILL 2.0: VELCRO, MAGNETS, CUSTOM ELECTRONICS, INTERN'S VOICE

Visitors enter a museum exhibition room, nearly bare, with white walls and a wooden floor. Attached to the walls, three long, thin strips of blue Velcro stretch high across the room like telephone wires, attaching again to the opposite wall. The Velcro grid-lines cast sparse, web-like shadows.

Visitors are given a device with a long, thin metal rod extending upwards. Their task? To walk underneath the Velcro lines, keeping the tip of the rod in contact with the line. Only then can they hear a recording play, which features the voice of the artist's intern reading a text written by the artist herself. If visitors go faster, the recording plays faster. If they falter backwards, likewise, the recording plays backwards. Only certain, controlled, tricky movements allow for the recording to be intelligible. Mostly, visitors walk with their eyes up, tenuously keeping the rod-tip in contact with the line, frequently slipping on and off, stopping, making their way with slow, tentative steps, laughing at themselves; starting and restarting. It is indeed a game of skill.

Christine Sun Kim is a Deaf artist who creates art with and about sound. This installation, in particular, defamiliarizes the act of listening: visitors are made to work hard to listen, to use their bodies in unusual ways, to suddenly learn a new physical and cognitive coordination. In

doing so, they may be brought to realize how they take for granted their own daily listening abilities, and how people shape and are shaped by sound in everyday situations.

I begin by describing this installation because this dissertation similarly defamiliarizes the everyday act of listening. It explores and problematizes listening, seeking to reconfigure listening's role in our everyday life, especially our thinking, our movements, and our teaching. Kim's installation serves as an opening invitation to question and rethink some of the common existing understandings of listening that would have it be a passive, solely receptive capacity, and by the estimation of many, less important than reading, writing, or speaking.

I hope to show, instead, that listening may at different times be effortful, expressive, resistant, creative, disciplined, taught and learned, and consequential. Above all, I would like for readers to come away with an understanding of embodied listening, or what I call here "gestural listening," as a profound rhetorical force, one that often exerts pressure on communicative situations, and one that is worthy of our further attention and research.

I would like to thank my committee, Cory Holding, Steve Carr, Neepa Majumdar, and Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, for their patience, expertise, and good counsel. Special thanks go to Paul Kameen and Nick Coles, whose courses and careful readings of my work cultivated early versions of the ideas in this dissertation. I extend my gratitude to my friends and classmates, especially my cohorts: Kyle Winkler, Moriah Kirdy, Melissa Yang, and Matthew Overstreet. Thanks also, of course, to my parents.

1.0 LOOKING FOR LISTENING: TOWARDS A RHETORIC OF LISTENING IN SCENES OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

The many varieties of quietness that can confront teachers and students gathered in a classroom are, in part, what motivate this project. As a new teacher of composition, over the last several semesters I have faced all kinds of hushes in my classrooms, and in the midst of these moments I have often wished for tools to better interpret them. Upon first standing in front of a classroom at Pitt, I realized that communicating with a group of nineteen would be very different from the one-on-one conversations that characterized the Writing Center work I had done for three years as an undergraduate. The expressive, embodied reactions that indicate understanding or confusion, for example, come regularly in one-on-one conversations but can be much more infrequent in larger groups. I quickly realized that “reading” the attitudes and reactions of a whole room would not just be a matter of scaling up. To gauge the listening of nineteen individuals, I needed to interpret a variety of other nonverbal signals: the small movements of bodies and faces, postures, eyes, hands, even choices about where to sit.

When moments of quietness arose in the classroom, I challenged myself to ask not just “why is there silence here?” but “what *kind* of silence is this?” I prefer the term “quietness” to silence, because what people call silence at any given moment usually turns out to be a collection of sounds that are simply deemed unimportant, or ignorable, in the context of that moment. A common terminological blur between listening and silence can also be misleading: not all listening manifests as silence, and not all silence indicates listening. Nevertheless, the *idea* of

listening as silence persists powerfully. Silence is often interpreted as one of three things in the classroom: listening, thinking, or waiting. But these categories underestimate the extent to which these three kinds of hushes may be intertwined, and they also underestimate the complex kinds of work that silence, and listening in its disguise, can do. This attitude on my part springs from the belief that listening is already happening, in different ways and with different levels of attention and intention, before, during, and after we gather with our students in scenes of writing instruction. With this premise, I am complicating and troubling an idea of silence that exists in pedagogical literature, which often assumes that silence implies nothingness, or even incompetence. Rather, I think of the quietness of the classroom as what George Eliot in *Middlemarch* describes as the “roar which lies on the other side of silence.”

Consistently, the quiet workings of listening are overlooked in favor of the skills commonly conceived of as the “productive” ones: speaking and writing. This alone may have been enough to pique my interest in listening. But the moment is ripe to study listening for other reasons, as well. Recently, there has been a surge of inquiry into the sonic dimensions of rhetoric and composition, and the practices and politics of sound have come to the fore with increasing urgency. The formation of sound studies, too, as an arena of scholarly activity, has challenged a traditional preoccupation with the visual to incorporate a focus on the aural. But while debates about other aspects of aurality, like voice, for example, have enriched ideas about the sonic in composition pedagogy, listening itself remains only sketchily-charted territory. My dissertation aims to map some of this territory, a speculative topography, with the important caveat that I will need to build new cartographic tools along the way.

The goal of this first chapter is to lay the theoretical foundation for a rhetoric of listening, and in particular one of its components, gestural listening. By gestural listening, I refer to

embodied manifestations of aural reception, or the way that people demonstrate to other people physically that they are listening, and the nature or extent of that listening. A rhetoric of listening, and gestural listening within its umbrella, bring together sound studies and gesture studies to make a case for the rhetorical pressure exerted by listeners. This chapter delves into the debates within those fields that come to bear on and at times give rise to the idea of a rhetoric of listening, and gestural listening more specifically. A more traditional rhetorical paradigm treats the writer or speaker in detail, and the reader or listener mostly in outline. But while listening is often written off as passive, silent, or impossible to study, I have been looking for ways to amplify its quietness.

Looking ahead, my second chapter will consider a rhetoric of listening and gestural listening in the specific context of Pitt composition classrooms and writing tutorials. In it, I'll be examining moments that have emerged in classrooms and tutorials in which I've either taught or done observations. In that chapter, I aim to enact, apply, and question this chapter's theoretical foundation-building.

1.1 THEORIZING LISTENING

A large and wide-ranging body of work about listening exists within sound studies. Initially, the path that I saw myself forging through it was guided by the focus I wanted to keep on sonic materiality, specifically, and its sense of physicality, or palpability. While sound has often been dismissed in the past as essentially "immaterial" due to its invisibility and fleetingness, many sound scholars now further an understanding of sound as physical, as vibrating waves that penetrate, resonate, and in all other respects behave like a substance. In light of that trend in the field, I thought I would cast off naturalized metaphors of "voice" in writing, for example, or

listening as an extended metaphor for an attitudinal openness and move forward with the possibilities afforded by more explicitly embodied forms of knowing. As such, I saw myself as positioned against writers like Krista Ratcliffe and Cheryl Glenn, who deal with listening in its more metaphorical senses and not its material ones. But in the course of my reading, the more metaphorical dimensions of listening have also emerged as useful and enduring. With this in mind, in continuing to think about listening, the metaphorical and the material have continued to operate intertwined. Listening seems to flow—non-dualistically, with a characteristic slipperiness—between material and metaphorical ways of making meaning. While I will still be parsing which writers work metaphorically and which materially, what may be more important is actually the particular weave of both that each writer relies upon to achieve his or her ends. The proportion of focus on metaphor and material, which each writer has to negotiate, serves to reinforce the nuance that is possible, and necessary, when theorizing about listening. If nothing else, I hope readers take away from this chapter a destabilized sense of what listening can be: not a homogeneous, predictable process, but a dynamic, subjective, and participatory one.

One way to think about listening is to posit it as the process that “translates” sonic materiality—vibrating soundwaves moving through air—into the stuff of thought. This is the way audition is often explained from a biological standpoint, with the labyrinthine ear converting soundwaves into electrical impulses interpretable by the brain. Recent scholarship complicates this translation model of listening, however, which has as its end goal a semantic meaning that’s merely *conveyed* by sound. In *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*, Steve Goodman develops vibration itself, one of sound’s fundamental “actional” qualities or characteristics, as a category for analysis. Vibration itself delves below and rises above what people would readily call “hearable” sound and allows Goodman to theorize what he calls an

“ontology of vibrational force,” of which audible sound is only a narrow slice. An ontology of vibrational force, he argues, objects to certain theoretical orientations that would make listening the “translation” of material to thought, including “the linguistic imperialism that subordinates the sonic to the semiotic registers,” and which “[forces] sonic media to merely communicate meaning, losing sight of the more fundamental expressions of their material potential as vibrational surfaces, or oscillators” (Goodman 82). Rejecting the subordination of sound’s material dimensions to its semantic ones, Goodman focuses on the meanings that can be derived from sound that precede its semantic decoding. By this he refers to the kinds of meanings that can be derived from the pumped-up, bass-heavy music spilling out of a nightclub and making its walls shake, for example, or the significance of a speaking voice’s tone and quality even before specific words can be identified; or, with particular importance to his study, from the physical violence wrought on bodies by the use of sonic weapons. In doing so, he evokes three related ideas about listening that are worth further investigation: First, the idea that the human body can be understood as porous and capable of resounding. Drawing from the work of Jean-Francois Augoyard and Henri Torgue as well as the heritage of Jacques Attali, Goodman reminds us that the body can be “rendered as a multi fx-unit, as transducer of vibration as opposed to a detached listening subject isolated from its sonic objects” (46). The second idea Goodman evokes is that the body is inherently *vulnerable* to the effects and affects transmitted by sound. Thirdly, that sound can be understood, at times, as a form of violence. Goodman’s book focuses on a variety of sonic events that highlight sound’s privileged role as a carrier of fearful affects, including different kinds of sonic weapons used both in foreign warfare and in domestic incidents of crowd control, as well as the blur between violence and certain kinds of music, illustrated in forms of interrogation and other instances of exerting military pressure without bloodshed. It’s also worth

pointing out that Goodman doesn't see the effects of vibrational force as limited to the human body—rather, vibrational ontology of sound implicates buildings, infrastructure, and non-human animals, among many other environmental factors. Goodman is just one of many who see listening as a form of vulnerability, a quality with consequences that go beyond its basic biological function of turning soundwaves into intelligible signs or symbols interpretable by humans.

Goodman's perspective raises an important concern about listening: is sonic assault on the body really a form of listening? In that it affects humans both physically and psychologically, it's hard to answer with a firm no. But listening often also has to refer to something other than forced sonic bombardment. Goodman writes: "Before the activation of causal or semantic, that is, cognitive listening, the sonic is a phenomenon of contact and displays, through an array of autonomic responses, a whole *spectrum* of affective powers" (10, italics mine). The "whole spectrum of affective powers," and the autonomic responses Goodman refers to here are not limited to the ones that render the body vulnerable—among other things, they're also the automatic responses that raise walls of selective deafness and aural self-protection on the part of hearing subjects in day to day life. For example, while walking around town with a companion, I selectively ignore the sound of other conversations being held around me in order to focus on my own. Within my own conversations, I often selectively block out "um's," "uh's," coughs, sneezes, buzzes from my cell phone, the dull roar of traffic, and even certain sentiments being expressed that I don't want to hear, or simply can't hear. From lived experience, it's clear that listening is not just, or not always, an automatic process rendering listeners open to sonic pressures.

Put another way, people are surrounded by sounds all the time, but they are not *vulnerable* to all sounds all the time. Here, the role of intentionality in listening comes into play. Krista Ratcliffe, in *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*, argues for a model of “rhetorical listening,” which she defines most broadly as an ideological “stance of openness” and as a “mode of cross-cultural conduct.” Individuals choose to adopt an attitude of rhetorical listening in an effort to be open to understanding those from whom they are separated by a cross-cultural boundary of some kind. “Rhetorical listening comprises the following moves,” she writes:

1. Promoting an understanding of self and other
 2. Proceeding within an accountability logic
 3. Locating identifications across commonalities and differences
 4. Analyzing claims as well as the cultural logics within which these claims function
- (Ratcliffe 26).

Rather than being automatic or imposed, then, this kind of listening has to be mindfully *chosen*, and enacted or applied with intention in any given situation: the efforts of self-reflection, the work of accountability, locating identity, interrogating claims and the cultural assumptions or conditions that underpin them. So listening, according to Ratcliffe, definitely does not happen automatically. In fact, she seems to exemplify one end of a spectrum that has Goodman on its other end: for Goodman, sound and audition are sites of violence, from which people might need a kind of aural “shield” at times, whereas the problem for Ratcliffe and her ilk is *getting* people to listen, to open themselves up, to tune in, implying that many people spend quite a lot of time shielding themselves and selectively ignoring certain sounds, especially certain voices. Many

other forms of intentional listening are imaginable as well, each of which would require its own analytical project. The ear of a Catholic priest bent to a confessor, for example; the ear of a musician listening for the chord progressions in a piece of music; or the ear of a therapist treating a patient. In his “Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis,” Sigmund Freud calls psychotherapists to develop an “evenly suspended attention” that withstands the temptation to be drawn to certain details of a patient’s case at the expense of others. These are only a few examples of the many that could be listed. What I hope to convey is that listening practices can be and are *cultivated* in many different arenas, and that listening should be understood as *entrained*, to one extent or another, consciously or unconsciously, by cultural and social forces and demands.

Ignoring certain voices or details at the expense of others exemplifies one of the forms of silence, enforced by a lack of rhetorical listening, that’s taken up by Cheryl Glenn in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Glenn seeks to understand silence in two main ways: first, as the silence imposed upon historically marginalized groups excluded from the production of rhetorical arts. Secondly, Glenn develops the idea of silence as a rhetorical force in and of itself, that is, a form of pressure that can exert influence on a situation. Her book exemplifies, among other things, the many potential confluences (and resonances) between listening and silence, and I want to be careful to parse those confluences when they arise. Her book demonstrates a common slippage between silence and listening: most noticeably, Glenn regularly inserts the phrase “and listening” in between em-dashes mid-sentence; it’s not exactly an afterthought—it’s too important for that—but it’s also not fully examined, never the subject of its own sentence. As a result of this slippage or conflation, though, listening emerges as sharing several of the rhetorical qualities Glenn attributes to silence. This slippage is also useful for reminding us that listening often is

underestimated as a force to the extent that it gets folded in or elided with silence, which is coded negatively in many arenas. Better that we should understand listening as taking place *within the guise of* silence, or as being badly needed in arenas that have been kept forcibly silent. If we replace “silence” with “listening” at a few points in Glenn’s text, a politics of listening starts to precipitate. She writes, for example: “Not all silence is particularly potent. However, silence is too often read as simple passivity in situations where it has actually taken on an expressive power: when it denotes alertness and sensitivity, when it signifies attentiveness or stoicism, and particularly when it allows new voices to be heard” (18). Glenn attributes a kind of “expressive power” to silence, but it’s really the listening taking place within it that better explains the intentional receptivity being described here. Glenn often points to spaces of silence as negative—the spaces of exclusion, marginalization, of being stifled. She does not take on in as much detail what spaces of silence can *afford*, or allow. As such she often overlooks listening specifically, bundling it in with silence.

Interestingly, Glenn at one point notes how listening is sometimes one of the only decent “excuses” for silence: “Silence is rewarded,” she writes, “only when signifying obedience or proper subordination: the subaltern should not speak but feign rapt listening with their silence” (Glenn 5). There’s much implied here. 1) The idea that “good” listening is silent and “rapt,” 2) that the listening role is often the one occupied by the subaltern, 3) that listening can be and is often *feigned*. Below, I will be looking at a writer (Jonathan Crary) who complicates the idea of attention, calling into question the value placed on rapt, or “total” attention, and even on the possibility of such attention. At this point it’s also important to remember that not *all* listening manifests as silence, although it often does. That listening is often the role filled by the member(s) of a conversation with less power comes in part from Glenn’s particular focus on

silence and groups that have *been silenced*. Eliding listening with silence, however, overlooks many communicational nuances. As should also be clear, silence, and listening along with it, can also be mobilized by those possessing the dominant power in any given situation. As Glenn writes elsewhere, much depends on whether a silence, which may or may not contain, reflect, or enable listening, is “our choice...or that of someone else” (13). In conversation, a person with relatively more power can rattle their conversation partner by using that prerogative to remain silent. The classroom is a situation where this negotiation of silence, listening, and power play out in complex ways. Feigning attention is one common spice in that stew.

At first, Ratcliffe and Glenn on the one hand and Goodman on the other may seem simply to demonstrate the difference between approaching listening metaphorically and materially, respectively. But in fact their theories can both play out simultaneously at many points in the middle of that spectrum, in rhetorical situations that are carved out in everyday life. As I mentioned just now, classrooms are one such rhetorical situation. Certain of Ratcliffe and Glenn’s ideas lend themselves strongly to the classroom, not least because Ratcliffe and Glenn are scholar-teachers in the field of Composition. Ratcliffe, for example, poses rhetorical listening as a form of “interpretive invention” (this is the second half of rhetorical listening, next to being a mode of cross-cultural conduct and a stance of openness, as I’ve said above). By this she means that rhetorical listening is actually where the generation of new ideas can occur. Glenn echoes this idea when she calls the silence of listening “a site of knowing, composing, [and] generation” (8). Rather than automaticity and vulnerability, then, Ratcliffe and Glenn give a vision of listening as an effortful and generative inventional strategy. In this, they owe much to Gemma Corradi Fiumara, who gives a landmark investigation of the role of listening in philosophy in her 1990 book, *The Other Side of Language*. In it, Fiumara sets the stage by

putting before the reader an expanded notion of *logos* by considering its verb-form, *legein*. *Legein*, it turns out, encompasses meanings that are surprisingly more characteristic of listening attitudes, among them “gather,” “shelter,” “keep,” and “receive” (Fiumara 1). Already, with this etymological expansion she lays bare the impoverishment of the way *logos* has operated as a term in Western philosophy, as a reduced-by-half concept of language. Fiumara argues that the West has a kind of *logos* that knows how to speak but not how to listen, or as Ratcliffe calls it, a “divided *logos*.” What results, even though philosophy often purports to value dialogue, is actually a field of competing monologues. The value of listening in this context is not necessarily to give the listener time and resources to come up with an even better counterargument (although it may do that as well), but rather to allow a way for ideas to simply (or not so simply) *exist together*. Not so much a “position” as a way, or a process, listening allows ideas to live, and go towards their potential for further conjuncture and cross-fertilization. Fiumara writes: “The ability to listen, which allows us to hold firm and remain vigilant at the borders of obscurity, might be the condition that makes it possible for us to remain open to further linguistic and theoretical fields of concern” (91). As such, listening can be understood as a form of rationality, that underlies without being in opposition to anything. What emerges is a contingent relationship between listening and thinking: thought that comes out of listening, and listening that is itself a form of thought. It may even suggest that a true rationality, without listening, is not possible. A strong case is made, here, for seeing classrooms as particularly potent sites to look for and teach listening.

Ratcliffe, as I mention above, would nevertheless have to be located more strongly in the “metaphorical listening” camp. In addition to the aspects of her work that add importantly to discourses around rhetoric, whiteness, and gender, there are moments that suffer from a

disproportionately metaphorical or attitudinal approach to listening. At times, she seems to too blatantly ignore the sonic, disregarding the material questions of why listening and language work the way they do. She argues, for example, that texts can be “listened to” just as they can be read—and that the two are not the same. I agree, but her book leaves me unsatisfied about how this can be explained. I feel especially unconvinced by moments like this one: After quoting a passage from Lillian Smith’s *Killers of the Dream*, Ratcliffe writes: “Listening rhetorically to the textual strategies, I hear contradictory sounds and rhythms in the first sentence: the mellifluous vowels in ‘tenderness and love and compassion’ juxtaposed with the harsh consonants of ‘bleak rituals of keeping Negroes in their place.’ I also discern voices of competing cultural logics: the status quo versus social activism” (39). Ratcliffe moves, here, between two kinds of listening: first, listening for prosody, or the actual sounds of the words, like “tenderness, love, and compassion,” but then moving from there into the more metaphorical form of listening, or the “trope” of listening, that is, being “open” to the cultural logics reflected in the text. It’s important to bear in mind that English-speakers’ positive associations with the sounds of the words “tenderness and love and compassion” come at least in part from positive associations they have with those qualities, not from something inherent to those sounds. The word for tenderness in German, for example, is “zärtlichkeit,” which probably sounds to most English speakers like a booted foot sliding over broken glass. So Ratcliffe slips from a more materially sonic reading, albeit a hermeneutic one, to a metaphorical one. At moments like this, Ratcliffe seems to refer strongly to sound in a material sense, but her book gives no framework for how sound’s material qualities are able to play out internally in the mind of the reader.

Others do. The phenomenon of imagining sound internally is referred to by American music educator Edwin Gordon as “audiation,” a term he coined in the 1970’s, and is considered

to be an important musicianship skill. With this term, Gordon gives a name to a phenomenon widely remarked upon, especially by writers, of being able to “hear” texts, especially but not limited to when written by people they know. Steven Connor adds an architectural dimension to the idea of audiation when he writes about silent reading that “what matters is not the channelling or vocal acting out of the text in the reader’s own voice, but the creation of an auditorium or *arena of internal articulations*. The inner space of the inward voice is a production,” he continues, “a staging, a topographic projection” (Connor 107). Importantly, Connor never insists that the rules of an internal arena correspond directly to any sonic or architectural correlative in the physical world. That would be to oversimplify the flexibility of sound, and its ability to operate in and move between a variety of modal registers, even the curious amodality of silent reading. Audiation, and Connor’s spatial concept of it, perhaps give us another example of the potential “slip” between material and metaphorical that seems to so characterize sound and listening. Unable to be reliably “proven” at this point in time, barring fMRI experiments visualizing different parts of the brain, an “arena of internal articulations” remains somewhat metaphorical in nature. Nevertheless, its physicality is compellingly evoked in experimentations with subvocalization, which refers to the tiny speech signals sent by the brain to the tongue and vocal chords during subauditory speech. Brandon LaBelle, in *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Material Imagination*, makes note of experiments being run by NASA that allow tiny sensors to pick up subvocal signals from the throat and chin and transmit those signals into commands to a computer. Silent reading, then, has measurable qualities of physicality under certain conditions, i.e., reading slowly enough for words to acquire an internal resonance. “This inner sound radically situates voice well behind the mouth, with an ambiguous mental space, flexed by a silence whose resonating energy drives

thought forward,” LaBelle writes (87). LaBelle gives a reminder, here, that audition implicates not just the ears but a matrix of bodily and mental systems. Both LaBelle and Connor complicate the idea of an inner arena of articulation by suggesting that the inner is not really inner at all: rather, that the phenomenon of internal sounding represents an oscillation that unsettles the boundary between inner and outer. The inner voice, as LaBelle writes, is “privacy and publicness together” (100).

The initial model of listening that I laid out earlier, as a process of translation from soundwave to thought, also represents one of the most readily available distinctions between hearing and listening. According to this model, hearing is understood as the physiological process of receiving sound, while listening implies some level of interpretation by the mind. This model is complicated by a constitutive vulnerability to sonic assault that humans have, illustrated by Goodman, as well as tendencies towards selective deafness into which Ratcliffe strives to intervene. Then, there is the question of attention. In situations of sonic assault like the use of long-range acoustic weapons, attention is abused just as the body is, and this abuse is part of dangerous possibilities for the weaponization of sound. But in most other situations, the play of attention comes to bear on delineating listening behaviors and practices from those we might call hearing.

Attention at first glance seems like the key to distinguishing hearing from listening: surely attention, when focused on auditory phenomena, provides the necessary leverage to turn unavoidable or automatic hearing into directed, intentional listening. But attention itself, it turns out, is not a term whose meaning can be taken for granted. In scholarship, attention emerges as a lens ground by structures of power and influence. By extension, what it means to focus on something is not a historical constant. Jonathan Crary argues in *Suspension of Perception*:

Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture that attention would never have become a topic of concern were it not for the dispersal in the early 19th century of what had long previously been understood as a coherently, fully, and predictably attentive individual. “Vision,” he writes, “in a wide range of locations, is refigured as dynamic, temporal, and composite—the demise of the punctual or anchored classical observer begins in the early nineteenth century, increasingly displaced by the unstable attentive subject,” whose “varied contours” spring from and respond to innumerable cultural and physical forces (Crary 148). Even the descriptor “attentive,” then, contains a range of attentional states and perceptions, not universally reliable or predictable, and not the same at all moments in history. Crary goes on to write that, alongside the same process of the observer’s unanchoring, “it became increasingly clear that perception was not a matter of a relatively passive *reception* of an image of an exterior world, but that the makeup and capacities of an observer contributed to the *making* of perception” (155). So in addition to being historically and culturally contingent, attention can also not be understood simply as a predictable lens that can be focused with foreseeable effects on any object, but rather as a dynamic, complex, and subjective factor in sensation and perception.

As an art historian by training, Crary’s analysis takes a set of paintings as its starting point. Due to this disciplinary orientation, Crary’s tracing of the historical nuances of attention often start with the visual. His observations may also shed light on the nature of attentive listening, as well, precisely because of a kind of “mixed modality” that starts to emerge in Crary’s work. Throughout Crary’s study, the borders of sight with the other senses are revealed to be hardly borders at all, or at least as highly permeable ones. He notes:

A British neurologist, writing in 1886, exemplifies a widespread anti-optical understanding of vision: ‘In your visual reflexes there is a regular jumble of sight, touch, hearing, the kinaesthetic sense, in fact all of the senses, with a few of the appetites, several distinct instincts, and the whole group of the higher faculties of reason, memory,

judgment, attention, etc.—such a jumble, in fact, that it is quite impossible to say where sight begins or where it ends, or, in some of the reflexes, to see what sight has to do with them at all.’ In this practical and discursive remaking of the observer as subject, vision is no longer a distinct and isolable phenomenon (Crary 337).

The idea of vision, and the senses more generally, as “no longer distinct and isolable phenomena” is an important one. In addition to debunking the long-standing myth of a stable, “regular” observer, it points to at the same time as it destabilizes the desire and historical tradition of cordoning off the senses from one another, and producing hierarchies among them.

Pinpointing the Enlightenment as a turning point signifying the ascension of sight/vision to the top of the sensory hierarchy has been a widespread way of conceptualizing the beginnings of modernity in the West. Walter Ong and his predecessor, Marshal McLuhan, are often pointed to as the cornerstones of the so-called “ocularcentric” understanding of Western modernity.

While Ong’s examination of oral-aural cultures and the way they change under the influence of print technologies is persuasive in some respects, Ong at times unfortunately relies on a modern/primitive opposition, relying on “the African” to represent societies still living in the “magical timelessness” of the ear, while the “typographic man” supposedly lives in the neutral world of the eye. But resistance to Ong and his ilk goes further to question the assertion that modernity has in fact been decidedly or uniquely visual. In response to the understanding of eye and ear furthered by Ong and McLuhan, historian Leigh Eric Schmidt outlines two major twentieth-century “motifs” around which the story of modern vision and hearing usually revolves:

(1) a hierarchy of the senses, with sight vastly ennobled and hearing sharply diminished; and (2) a marked dichotomy between eye and ear cultures that has commonly drawn on racialized constructions of Western rationality and ecstatic primitivism (21-2).

These, then, are two of the ambient assumptions that any contemporary work on sound and listening has to confront. In fact, these assumptions give rise to another body of work that romanticized the ear at the expense of vision: a counter-Enlightenment move. The problems with that kind of move should be obvious, however—replacing the dominance of one sense with the dominance of another offers yet another incomplete picture, perpetuating a faulty hierarchical structure among the senses. Better are those who seek, rather, to diversify a rigidly ocularcentric notion of modernity and/or “the West” without insisting upon an “either/or” perspective when it comes to vision and hearing.

Martin Jay, Jonathan Crary, and Leigh Eric Schmidt offer such perspectives. Martin Jay adds nuance to the idea of ocularcentrism when he writes that “the scopic regime of modernity may best be understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices” (4). To illustrate this point, Jay gives an overview of three different visual subcultures that can be found even in the peak of the dominant models of vision in the 17th and 18th-centuries. Cartesian perspectivalism, the dominant view, is closely connected with what Jay calls the “assumed equivalence between scientific observation and the natural world” (5). But subvariants within Cartesian perspectivalism existed: for example, competing with the idea of artificial perspective, where the mirror held up to the world is flat, was “synthetic perspective,” which held up a rounded mirror, demonstrated, Jay writes, in the work of Leonardo da Vinci and Paolo Uccello. Another internal contestation to the dominant sense of Cartesian perspectivalism is that the rules of perspective in their most theoretic forms were actually rarely followed exactly by practicing artists in the Renaissance. From here, Jay goes on to give two examples of scopic regimes that were not just subvariants but actually alternatives to the dominant regime of Cartesian perspectivalism. First, by contrast to the narrative impulse in

Italian Renaissance painting, a second tradition flourished in northern Europe that was more interested in “description,” or a focus on material surfaces, rather than on the angles and positionings of perspective. This was exemplified in map-making and depictions of closely observed surfaces and materials: glass, fabric, etc. Jay suggests that Vermeer may provide one example of this different visual focus, on texture rather than space. Finally, Jay’s third example of “unease” within the dominant scopic regime is what he calls the “baroque,” a term characterizing what he calls “dazzling, disorienting, ecstatic” visual experience, an experience fascinated with surplus and which rejects the drive towards coherence and legibility that describe the “classical” art styles of the Renaissance (16). The highly tactile visual excesses of Counter Reformation churches give an example of the baroque, a style that propagated even amidst the dominant visual modes of the time. What’s important to take away from this is that any notion of the dominance of vision refers not to one “kind” of vision but multiple coexisting visual regimes.

The intellectual history of our sensory equipment as humans cuts even deeper at the notion of ocularcentrism. In “Techniques of the Observer,” Jonathan Crary discusses Goethe’s early 19th-century experiments (in *Color Theory*, 1810) with the afterimage, or the faint colors produced by the eye after staring at an object for several seconds and then quickly looking at another surface. In doing so, he zeroes in on the historical moment when vision had to be understood not as a neutral mode of “immediate knowing,” epistemologically privileged to perceive the “truth” of what’s there in the world, but rather as a factor in the shaping of perception, as actively involved in perception. “It is a moment,” Crary writes, “when the visible escapes from the timeless incorporeal order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus, with the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body” (Techniques 5). Around Goethe’s time, then, new knowledge of the body’s involvement in

sensory perception, of the “shifting process of one’s own subjectivity experienced in real time...dissolved the Cartesian ideal of an observer completely focused on an object” (10). So the viewer’s sensory equipment now had to be understood as mixed with the object it beholds. In an aural equivalent to the involvement of the eye in visual perception, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy briefly mentions “acoustic oto-emissions,” which are “produced by the inner ear of the one who is listening: the oto- or self[*auto*]-produced sounds that come to mingle with received sounds, in order to receive them” (16). The ear, then, actually produces sounds that mix with perceived sounds to create audition. Acoustic oto-emissions give a powerful way of conceptualizing both hearing and listening, wherever we mark their delineation, as a process not just channeled through the body but influenced by its very structures of perception. Interestingly, my preliminary research reveals that hearing tests addressing acoustic oto-emissions are most commonly given to school-age children to identify them as possible candidates for assistive hearing devices, an intervention that’s meant to prevent them from falling behind in school.

The point of going into this detail on the destabilization of vision as a presumed “neutral” or “master sense” is to show firstly that raising up the ear “against” the eye is a kind of straw-man argument and, secondly, to demonstrate the kind of heterogeneity that will also be possible in theorizing about the ear. Furthermore, scopic regimes have to be understood as shot through with auditory, haptic, and olfactory regimes happening concurrently. One example of this attention to an alternative sensory history can be found in the work of Leigh Eric Schmidt. Like Jay and Crary, Leigh Eric Schmidt complicates sensory hierarchies in his investigation of religion and auditory illusions in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*. Schmidt’s book is driven by an effort to understand the cultural and sensorial environment in 19th-century America that could help explain the myriad personal accounts of

people who claimed to have had spiritual auditory experiences or encounters. “People heard things within multilayered devotional frameworks,” Schmidt writes, “whether the things heard were the oracular words of scripture, the inner whisperings of Christ, or the voices of angels and demons” (Schmidt 40). He continues: “They lived with the ever ringing echo of Jesus’ admonition, ‘He that hath ears to hear, let him hear’ (Matthew 11:15), as well as Paul’s affirmation, ‘Faith cometh by hearing’ (Romans 10:17)” (Schmidt 40). Schmidt’s work first traces a wave of religious hearings in the antebellum United States and then tries to understand its demise. Schmidt associates the downfall of spiritual auditory encounters with the rise of medical practices that privileged listening, and the growing association of hearing voices with insanity; that is, the pathologizing of “hearing things.” An important aspect of Walter Ong’s work is his yearning, as a Jesuit priest as well as a scholar, for a revivification of a living, resounding Word. Ong’s sense of absence, even loss, reflects the sense that practices of devotional listening have receded, and that even faithful ears are practically not “allowed” to hear the word of God in the midst of daily life anymore, and furthermore that even believers do not have the necessary sensorial training or cultivation to hear divine voices. Nevertheless, prayerful hearkening leaves behind it a powerful conception of listening. In Christian practice, Schmidt asserts that prayer is “one exemplar” of a “blurred exchange among ears, voices, and sounding bodies: the words of the speaker are conditioned by a listener and by the possibility of an answer, and full interpretation of such an encounter requires a recognition of this in-betweenness, this intersubjectivity between a listening speaker and a speaking listener” (Schmidt 34). This formulation could give us cause to consider what the frameworks are for contemporary listening, and the kind of listening that characterizes contemporary pedagogical situations.

What emerges is a sense that listening is at once more and less reliable than previous sensory regimes have allowed. The ear was understood at different points in history to be better than the eye at certain things. In the vein of Leigh Eric Schmidt, the ear was the terrain of holy and otherworldly voices of many kinds in a way that the sharp historical disciplining of the eye did not allow for. On the other hand, the ear has been derided and placed below the eye in a hierarchy of senses for many of the same reasons. But ultimately, the idea of reliability, and positioning one sense against another in a contest for it, is not the most productive line of inquiry to follow in investigating the senses. As I mention above, more recent intellectual trends have taken scholarship towards views of the sensorium as a *not rigidly differentiated* field. For instance, Steph Ceraso argues in *College English* for a multi-sensory understanding of listening, coining the term “multimodal listening,” which refers to listening that engages the whole body kinesthetically, not just the ears. “Thoughtfully engaging and composing with sound,” she writes, “requires listeners to attend to how sound works with and against other sensory modes to shape their embodied experiences” (Ceraso 103). Steve Goodman gives a view of sound that closely relates it ontologically to touch, as a physical force, and Cary, as I mention above, moves toward a “mixed modality” of sight and the other senses.

What’s important to take away from this discussion of listening and several of the main issues that characterize its scholarly treatment is that listening is 1) not a passive process, 2) not rigidly separate from the other senses, and 3) not free of social or cultural entrainment. This third point requires more discussion at this point. As part of her discussion of gender and listening, Krista Ratcliffe makes note of linguist Deborah Tannen, who claims that in U.S. culture, “speaking is gendered as masculine and valued positively in a public forum while listening is

gendered as feminine and valued negatively” (129). She goes on to point out specific ways in which men and women vocally and gesturally manifest the act of listening differently:

Tannen further argues that U.S. culture socializes men and women to listen differently: Men often listen by challenging speakers to a verbal duel to determine who knows more and who is quicker on his feet; women often listen by smiling, nodding, asking questions, and providing encouraging verbal cues (yes, uh huh, is that right?, hmmm) (142). In other words, men are socialized to play the listening game via the questions “Have I won?” and “Do you respect me” while women are socialized to play it via the questions “Have I been helpful?” and “Do you like me?” (129).

The idea of “likeability,” and the specter of sexism that accompanies it, looms large here. The act of listening emerges as one of the sites in which a person’s “likeability” factor is formed. Neither does listening escape issues of race: Tannen also goes on to argue that listening is not as necessary in U.S. culture for whites as it is for non-whites.

The gestural dimension highlighted in Tannen’s summary of gender differences in listening provides a segue into the next section of this chapter, which focuses more specifically on the gestural aspects of listening.

1.2 LOCATING GESTURAL LISTENING

In my effort to “look for listening,” a key source of information comes from reading the bodies of students, as individuals and as groups. As far back as Greek antiquity, especially in the writings of Quintilian and Cicero, gesture has been a point of concern as it pertains to the rhetorical canon of delivery. Springing from these ancient roots, gesture studies provides an important framework for identifying and analyzing the gestures of listening. Plenty of material exists that handles the relationship between gesture and speech. Gesture-study research tends to focus, by default, on the various gestures, intentional or unintentional, made by speakers as they are speaking. On the other hand, a focus on the gestures of listening, or reception, is unusual.

This pattern probably reflects the corresponding tendency, which I've noted above, to focus on speaking and writing as the "productive" skills, often to the exclusion of listening or reading. Still, exploring the existing discourse that addresses gesture and speech can provide some insight into gestures of reception.

Key to an argument for gestural listening is an upending of certain long-held attitudes towards gesture. Especially in the field of rhetoric, gestures have often been viewed as optional, as ornamentation, and as limited to delivery. Historically, the role of the body in oratory was viewed with suspicion, because it ran the risk of interfering with what was seen as the "core logic" of the argument, which was in turn seen to be contained solely in the verbal, linguistic dimension of speech-making. More contemporary investigations into gesture challenge its limited role as the ornamentation of delivery, however. In "The Rhetoric of the Open Fist," for example, Cory Holding argues for an expanded role of gesture, and especially for gesture's involvement in the rhetorical canon of invention. That is, gestures don't just decorate words—they actually help catalyze thought.

Holding's argument reflects insights into gesture and thought that find their clearest articulation in 20th-century gesture studies. In giving an overview of that literature, it's important to note that in reality, few gesture theorists write explicitly about the gestures of listening. A cursory Google search of the phrase reveals, instead, advertisements for new gesture-based music-playing devices, tips and tricks for giving effective presentations, and lists of how-to's, mostly common sense, for effective use of body language in a variety of different situations: flirting, asserting oneself, inspiring confidence in one's colleagues, etc.

How then, to make something of this lack? In what follows, I summarize what I've been able to find on listening in gesture studies thus far, and I suggest tentative ways that these

fragments may come to bear on understanding the gestural ecologies of students assembled in class. In 20th-century gesture studies, three names loom large as formative to the field: David McNeill, Adam Kendon, and Susan Goldin-Meadow. I focus on them first before moving on to a few others who round out the existing discourse on listening and gesture.

In his book, *Gesture and Thought*, David McNeill reminds readers that “a long-running controversy in the gesture-study field revolves around the issue of whether gestures are ‘for the speaker’ or ‘for the listener’—that is, whether gestures primarily perform an internal function that aids the speaker, e.g., to carry out lexical retrieval and/or to boost fluency, or an external function of communicating information to a listener” (53). Instead of choosing one side or the other, he goes on to assert that “the speaker-benefit/listener-benefit controversy rests on a false, or, at best, simplistic distinction” (McNeill 53). I echo McNeill when I argue that every gesture is at once for the speaker *and* for the listener. Crucial to this standpoint is the belief that gestures are not just ornamental or illustrative in a mime-like way, but rather fuel and contribute to the unfolding of thought and language. From this perspective, gesture and language can be seen as different “tracks,” or manifestations, of the same mental process. On a moment to moment basis, then, gestures actively participate in meaning-making. As McNeill puts it: “Gestures...are themselves thinking in one of its many forms—not only expressions of thought, but thought, i.e., cognitive being, itself...To the speaker, gesture and speech are not only ‘messages’ or communications, but are a way of cognitively existing, of cognitively being, at the moment of speaking” (99). The active role that gesture plays in thought is important here, not just as ornament, or afterthought, but rather as formative to thinking itself.

Adam Kendon deals with proxemics, or how people arrange themselves in selected spaces, in an article called “Spacing and Orientation in Co-Present Interaction.” Once again, it’s

worth noting that listening is not explicitly covered in Kendon's major book, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Nevertheless, this article explores another, related dimension of nonverbal communication: what he calls the "spatial-orientational" arrangements characteristic of different types of interactions, depending on how many people are involved, their social relation to each other, and what activity they're attending to. Briefly, Kendon touches on teacher-student interactions, describing classrooms as exemplary of "spatial arrangements typical of occasions when there is an unequal distribution of rights to initiate talk or action" (11). With this, he highlights the academic hierarchies that physically play out in so many classrooms, with a teacher at the front of the room, facing students who are grouped together. It also goes some way towards linking classroom quietness with institutional power structures. Listening, from this perspective, can easily be seen as what subordinates do, and in fact, this is often the implication—that speaking, in general, is powerful, and listening its passive counterpart. But this oversimplifies the possibilities that listening affords. While there's no mention of how students arrangement themselves in relation to *each other*, Kendon helpfully articulates how the way people organize space, bodily orientation, and positioning reflects what he calls the "attentional structure of social encounters" (15). The idea of an "attentional structure" lends itself strongly to listening behaviors without relegating it to a position subordinate to speech. Proxemics, as a category of nonverbal communication related to but distinct from gesture, may have more to offer a study of listening behaviors going forward.

Despite the promising name of Susan Goldin-Meadow's 2003 book, *Hearing Gesture*, Goldin-Meadow quickly makes explicit that her focus is on the gestures that accompany speech, and with good reason, it seems: 90% of gestures, she writes, were found to accompany speech in a study she cites done by McNeill. One of the primary aims of gesture studies in the 20th and 21st

centuries, so far, has been to assert the fundamental connectedness of gesture to speech. But in arguing strongly for the intertwined quality of gesture and speech, the movements associated with listening, or periods of not-speaking, have gone mostly ignored. Interestingly, Goldin-Meadow also finds a certain kind of gesture-speech pattern characteristic of children who are most open to learning from their teachers' instructions. These are gestural "mismatches," which means that when describing what they understand of a problem or task, children make gestures whose meanings do not overlap with the words they're using. Although the term "mismatch" carries negative connotations, a gestural mismatch simply refers to when a gesture that's made expresses a meaning that's separate and *enriching* to the speech being used at the same time. That is, a mismatch is a gesture that conveys something that the simultaneous speech is not managing to convey. It remains for us to see whether teachers could facilitate students to make more mismatched gestures, and of course whether mismatches indicating a readiness to learn could emerge out of listening, as well as out of speaking.

While Goldin-Meadow focuses on the gestures that accompany speech, she nevertheless consistently refers to the recipient of gesture, in the context of her experiments, as the "listener." In doing so, she seems to indicate that speech and gesture are both somehow "listened to" by a person's conversational partner or audience. By implying that we "listen" to gesture, Goldin-Meadow reveals a kind of modal slippage. She seems to imply that listening could itself be seen as gesture of some kind, corresponding modally to the speaker's original communicative "ensemble" of speech combined with gesture. That is, if we "listen" to gesture, listening may actually be itself a gesture. Kendon, on the other hand, refers to the audience as the "recipient," or "interlocutor." "Recipient" is a word choice that generically accounts for both aural and gestural forms of reception. "Interlocutor" does too, but implies a more active speaking role on

the part of the receiving participant. That is, an interlocutor both listens *and* speaks. At least, that's the connotation associated with the term interlocutor; although what it could mean, by extension, is that a person who is "just" listening (and not speaking) may still exert an important pressure through the sheer force of their listening presence. To demonstrate this phenomenon, I could imagine a kind of acting exercise: two participants face each other. One is instructed to speak on a topic (perhaps with a controversial component), while the other is instructed to "ask questions," or "respond" to the speaker entirely without spoken words. This would cause the non-speaking actor to "prompt" the speaker using only gesture, facial expressions, body positioning, or even the space of the stage. This could be seen as a literal acting-out of what teachers ask students to imagine when instructing them to strengthen their arguments by anticipating opposition. They are asking students to feel the pressure of a listener, or of gathered listeners: an audience.

To arrive at this point, I've have to look at a kind of "negative space" in the existing literature on gesture: what could be implied by absences, slips, or lacks. Indeed, a deeper concern emerges with the ongoing neglect of listening gestures by gesture theorists, which is hinted at by Kendon's article on proxemics as well. That concern is about the assumption that listening is less important, and in particular its popular perception as being unimportant because it "does" less, or remains as the kind of less impressive "other half" of communication. It's important to start pushing back against this culturally-engrained assumption, and to start seeing it as an extension of other familiar power structures. This attitude asks us to rethink any notion of listening that would have it be "just," or "simply," reception. Instead, we need to consider other images, as Gemma Corradi Fiumara reminds us: of listening as reaching, gathering, sheltering, holding, connecting, collecting, summoning.

A few writers who I'll touch on next take on the gesture of listening explicitly, but specifically in the context of listening to music. While this may seem like a confounding factor given that music has its own more disciplinarily-specific discourses about listening, it's still possible to glean insights from this work about gestural listening more generally. A short chapter by Prague-born philosopher Vilém Flusser called "The Gesture of Listening to Music" in his book, *Gestures*, looks for listening etched in stone sculpture. He writes:

"If we take a look at mediaeval iconography from the standpoint of gesture, then we are confronted with the gesture of listening as one of the central themes. It is Mary's gesture at the conception, the gesture of being fertilised by the word (logos). Mary "receives," that means she hears a voice. We can learn something from observing how the gesture changes with the onset of the Renaissance. In the Gothic period it is the gesture of someone who is surprised and called; in the Renaissance it is that of the resolved, hearing Mary" (21).

Flusser quickly draws a distinction between listening to music, the topic of this chapter, and listening to voices. Unlike listening to music, listening to words involves a kind of reading, or deciphering of semantic meaning. While deciphering also goes on in listening to music, hundreds of years of discussion haven't been able to agree on what the nature of that decipherment might be. What I think is valuable in Flusser's work, however, are the subtle distinctions he draws between types of listening, whether to words or to music. Gothic depictions of Mary, for example, are "surprised and called," whereas the listening of Renaissance Mary emerges as "resolved," implying quite a different quality of intention or readiness. Implicit in those distinctions is the idea that listening is not a passive or homogenous act, but rather has the potential to be creative, formative, and constitutive to communicative situations. That's to say, Flusser understands listening as a palpable force working in many different communicative situations.

Medieval iconography is not the only place where remarkable gestures of listening can be located and interpreted. In a piece called “Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic,” Paul Gilroy gives an analysis of the listening depicted in a photograph taken by Chris Steele-Perkins at a reggae concert in South London’s Brockwell Park in 1974. Gilroy examines this photograph as part of a larger inquiry into black British life, and the way an articulation of human rights intersected with movements of diasporic African music in the 1960’s and 70’s. He writes:



Fig. 1 Chris Steele-Perkins's 1974 photograph of a concert in Brockwell Park.

“The mostly youthful faces caught by the camera are both male and female. They convey a mixture of deep concentration with what looks like a profound, ineffable sadness... This photograph is also haunting because its subjects have been caught in what is wrongly understood as the inert or passive act of listening. The limitations of that view are repudiated by the common mood etched on their faces. Their concentration suggests not pleasure, but a demanding variety of work” (Gilroy 387).

Gilroy goes on to describe this as a kind of “cultural work,” undertaken by British black communities in an ongoing quest for self-understanding and healing in the wake of diaspora. His formulation of listening as *work*, as *demanding*, and as *active* illustrate and reinforce an expanded notion of the role of listening. Furthermore, this understanding of listening operates broadly, as a force not just in everyday conversations but also in a wider cultural sense. Gilroy says of the cultural work of listening captured in this photograph that it “incorporated defensive and affirmative elements: working over and working through the memories of slavery and colonialism, past sufferings and contemporary resistances so that they could provide resources for interpreting the present and imagining a better future” (388). Both unified and vulnerable, these subjects are captured by the camera in a moment of community listening that’s powerful but as yet not well understood.

Another way to interpret this photograph would be to go one step beyond listening as “working over and working through,” and to refigure it as a form of resistance. Gathering to listen to reggae, a genre of music of the African diaspora with roots in Jamaica, could in and of itself be seen as a demonstration of solidarity, an unwillingness to give up a sense of historical cultural identity even while living in Britain. Furthermore, active listening in this context becomes almost a form of absorbing, being intentionally open to processing sound through the body. From this perspective, it takes on the resonances of a kind of nonviolent protest.

This kind of physical absorption is strongly evoked in Susan Leigh Foster’s discussion of the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins, one of three case studies Foster looks at to investigate the role of the body in acts of non-violent civil protest (the other two are the ACT UP die-ins of the late 1980’s and the protests of the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, Washington). Foster asserts that the protesters engaged in the sit-ins “learned two new kinds of kinesthetic

articulateness,” active stillness and passivity. “Filled with kinetic potential while seated,” she writes, “their stillness, not a state of non-action but rather a kind of motion, consisted in monitoring and refraining from casually abundant kinetic impulses. Learning to resist coercive onslaughts by attackers and to absorb their hostile energy, their passivity in response to an attack was not a letting go of energy but rather a determined softening of exterior tension so as to absorb the shock of a blow” (Foster). Seeing “active stillness” as a form of action gives us a more positive way to understand the classroom silences that I start this chapter off by noting. “Passivity,” furthermore, becomes a kind of misnomer, or rather its negative connotations become misleading. From this perspective, passivity becomes a kind of power, one exercised under duress by those for whom more aggressive or hostile action could be dangerous. A “determined softening of exterior tension” may as well describe the physical and attitudinal (kinesthetic-affective) process of listening, especially in preparing oneself to listening to something or someone. It’s also apt to the idea of listening that this “determined softening” prepares a person to “absorb the shock of a blow.” Another aspect of the way listening makes listeners vulnerable is less physical in nature than the vulnerability described by Steve Goodman: in listening, a person opens themselves up to the possibility that they may have to hear what’s difficult or painful to hear. They may really have to change their stance on a given issue, and face the consequences of that change. This openness to change is another dimension of the vulnerability, and of course also the potential power for social change, that listening harbors.

Like Flusser and Gilroy, a good percentage of the other instances I’ve found of people thinking about and through gesture are in the field of music. Robert S. Hatten, for example, uses a theory of gesture to suggest a kind of affective alternative to music theory’s tradition of analysis. James Jordan, longtime choral faculty at Rider University’s Westminster Choir

College, has made a career out of emphasizing the relationships between breath, gesture, and singing in choral conducting, and especially in choral conducting pedagogy. His first major book, *Evoking Sound*, is directed at those either learning to conduct choir or already in positions as music educators. A choral model proves especially apt in its articulation of the links between listening, gesture, and vocal expression. This emerges strikingly in Jordan's discussion of ensemble breathing: "Not only must the conductor listen to the breath in the choir," he writes, "but choir members must listen to each other breathe so as to establish an ensemble sense...that sense of ensemble begins in the communal breath" (Jordan 76). In choral performance, the production of vocal sound and listening to that sound happen in a kind of ongoing loop, as the singers making constant adjustments to their singing based on the overall sound produced by the group and the conductor's gestural direction. Jordan goes on to instruct would-be conductors that their gesture indicating the moment to breathe (the "ictus") will impact the sound it provokes not just in its timing but in its quality. "Suddenly angular patterns and subdivided rebounds," for example, "adversely affect the flow of the air and then directly affects the intensity and color of the tone" (Jordan 115). Choral conducting, as Jordan would have it, creates a sensitive loop between gesture, vocal sound, and listening. Ensemble singing as a deliberate listening practice resonates with one of Gilroy's observations about the Steele-Perkins photograph: "The representation of that interpretative community as an audience is especially apposite given that the ability to listen in this intense, collective way seems lately to have dropped out of black popular culture" (388). It may be that choir remains as one site of intense, collective listening practices—others are imaginable.

What emerges, however, from this collection of gesture theorists is the growing sense that listening's tight association with the impressive, as opposed to the expressive, can be

challenged from several angles. Furthermore, these challenges reveal new ways of conceptualizing listening that may take shape in and/or be implemented into classroom practices. If gestures fuel thought, as McNeill has it, it seems important for teachers to find ways of allowing students to make gestural responses while listening, or to magnify the ones that they may already be enacting. Furthermore, students may be exerting influence in ways that are palpable but as yet unarticulated. Looking for listening in pedagogical spaces will more specifically be the stuff of my second chapter. That being said, I want to be clear that I see gestural listening and a rhetoric of listening as powerfully observed in the classroom without being at all limited to it. This is the first step of what could be a much bigger inquiry with potential consequences in a variety of different arenas.

1.3 BEYOND THE GESTURAL IN LISTENING

I have said that gestural listening should be seen as one among several ways to locate listening, that it emerges as one technique under the broader umbrella of a rhetoric of listening. Others are imaginable and observable. In the next few pages, I suggest a few of them, in an effort to give a sense of what a more fully realized rhetoric of listening might include.

In speech, a host of listening behaviors can be identified. I list a few here:

1. When a person in conversation asks questions in follow-up about what's been said by others.
2. When conversational partners repeat or summarize parts of what's been said to show their comprehension.
3. When people in conversation use terms that have just been proffered by their conversational partner.

4. When a conversational partner is able to finish the speaker's sentence through use of context clues.

These first four listening behaviors in speech serve to build a vocabulary unique to the participants' current situation. This specific vocabulary-building is crucial to what Andrew Dobson calls apophatic listening, in which the listener suspends his or her own preconceived categories of knowledge to allow the speaker's own categories to emerge. That is, the listener actively watches for patterns of meaning-making to emerge from the speaker before imposing their own: "The listener...processes what has been heard," Dobson writes, "making sense of it in her/his own terms, perhaps corroborating her/his understanding through asking questions for clarification—and all this before making her/his own intervention" (68).

5. When a speaker pauses, mid-sentence, as though to take in what they've just said and consider what will come next.

This kind of event in daily conversation reflects how talking and listening are reciprocal processes, and that even a speaker constantly listens to him- or herself, adjusting and readjusting to his or her own production of verbal sound, moderating it against the environment sound and the social context of the conversation. The vocal and aural apparatuses form a kind of circuit in any given speaker.

6. Listening can sometimes be found in what may seem like the opposite of listening: it's sometimes possible to observe what I'll call "non-responsive" listening as a display of power. By non-responsive listening, I refer to when a person in conversation has clearly heard and

processed what's been said, but chooses not to respond to it, instead opting to bluntly change the subject or ignore an interruption.

I see this as a demonstration of power because the non-responsive listener *hears and processes*, but considers him or herself exempt or absolved from the obligation of responding to a prompt in conversation. It also implies that the non-responsive listener's interlocutor doesn't matter too much to him or her—that whatever they said doesn't even deserve the listener's time of day. This gives an example, hearkening back to Cheryl Glenn's discussion of power and silence, of how listening can play out both sides of a power relationship: listening, when overtly, “visibly” used by a relatively powerful participant in a conversation, can carry the weight of silent judgment.

It's important to note at this point that listening in speech contexts is not necessarily about reaching reconciliation or agreement, but rather provides a focus on *process*. The goal of listening practices is usually not to end conversation but to perpetuate it.

It remains to discuss what listening in written text might look like, that is, how listening manifests on the page. What I'll be exploring here, briefly, are the ways that listening as a process can be evoked using certain textual strategies. Certain strategies, as I hope to show, lend themselves to some of the listening attitudes that I've discussed above. To do this, I give a reading of a poem by Jo Carson called “I Am Asking You to Come Back Home.” This is my choice both because it gives interesting images of listening and because it allows me to discuss the ways a listening posture can be conjured on the page via textual strategies. Here is the text of Carson's poem in its entirety:

I am asking you to come back home
before you lose the chance of seein' me alive.
You already missed your daddy.
You missed your uncle Howard.
You missed Luciel.
I kept them and I buried them.
You showed up for the funerals.
Funerals are the easy part.

You even missed that dog you left.
I dug him a hole and put him in it.
It was a Sunday morning, but dead animals
don't wait no better than dead people.

My mamma used to say she could feel herself
runnin' short of the breath of life. So can I.
And I am blessed tired of buryin' things I love.
Somebody else can do that job to me.
You'll be back here then; you come for funerals.

I'd rather you come back now and got my stories.
I've got whole lives of stories that belong to you.
I could fill you up with stories,
stories I ain't told nobody yet,
stories with your name, your blood in them.
Ain't nobody gonna hear them if you don't
and you ain't gonna hear them unless you get back home.

When I am dead, it will not matter
how hard you press your ear to the ground.

One of the primary ways a listening attitude often seems to manifest on the page is in the management of white space. White space, after all, is what “frames” written text, what allows it to “be,” or emerge, its negative space. Deliberate use of white space, then, could be seen to act as the textual equivalent of the kind of listening that Gemma Fiumara outlines in particular, listening that simply creates a space for the effort of communication, that establishes the conditions for intelligibility.

In this poem, sentences that comprise one whole line—one line per sentence—give a sense of deliberateness, of pacing. They seem to express a full thought, and then pause. The

pause emerges as important in the context of reading for listening, because as I've discussed above, pauses, gaps, and silences often form the sites of listening. In the first stanza Carson repeats the phrase "you missed" three times: "You already missed your daddy./You missed your uncle Howard./You missed Luciel." The repetition builds a sense of coherence and significance—the speaker sonically reflects and emphasizes the pattern of absence in the addressee. Each of these repeated "you missed" lines grow shorter as the list of the dead piles up, and a tone begins to take shape: patient, but justifiably asking the addressee to attend to a pattern of neglect.

Perhaps most importantly, this poem has an essential quality of conversation to it, that is, of listening for a response. Each line of the poem seems to listen *for* a response, even as the speaker ultimately yearns to be listened *to*.

The third sentence of the last stanza brings us the longest sentence in the poem: "I could fill you up with stories,/stories I ain't told nobody yet,/stories with your name, your blood in them." This sentence contains the most clauses, which in an otherwise terse poem gives a sense of flowing forward, of rushing, eagerness, or just growing momentarily more impassioned. This moment of outpouring, albeit brief, can be recognized by attending to the sentence's rhythms, how its clauses grow shorter as it goes on, seeming to pile one upon the another. Within that one sentence, the word "stories" is repeated three times, as though the speaker is thinking of the sentence even while speaking, revising and modifying it in "real time." The same goes for the phrase "with your name, your blood in them," which also gives the impression of being thought of and then amplified in a spontaneous, on-the-spot way. In this sentence in particular, the speaker of the poem seems to be enacting #5 in the list of conversational listening behaviors that I list above, pausing mid-sentence as if to listen to what they themselves have just said, and

deciding where to go next. The poem seems to listen to itself here. In this moment, the speaker's deliberate listening tone, of saying something and then pausing as if allowing for a response, pours forward into something more urgent. It's in this breaking of the previously established rhythmic pattern that a reader can get a sense of tried patience, one that throws the earlier measured-ness into relief.

That this poem seems to listen because it addresses someone could be said for many poems, which often implicitly or explicitly address someone in particular, or the reader, or both. In fact, I think it may be possible to "read for listening" in a wide variety of texts. An interesting assignment for a poetry course might be to have students write a kind of sonic analysis of a poem, giving a reading of the ways the poem itself seems to listen, and what effect that technique has on the reader, or what it may say about the speaker of the poem.

1.4 CONCLUSION

In the next chapter, I will be developing and testing some of the ideas about gestural listening and a rhetoric of listening that emerge in this chapter. My area of testing will be artifacts that I've collected from my observations of Pitt Composition classrooms and writing center tutorials, including "mini-ethnographies," photographs, and video footage. As such, it may deal in greater detail with ideas of ethnography, ensemble, and affect. Andrew Dobson writes in *Listening for Democracy* that "the courageous listener backgrounds her/his own perspective and is prepared for incommensurability, which...is a precondition for further interaction" (95). In moving to analyze my experiences in pedagogical situations, I anticipate what I hope will be courageous confrontation with incommensurability in many forms.

2.0 RESPECT AND RESISTANCE: GESTURAL LISTENING IN SCENES OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

Evan introduces himself on the first day of class, prompted by a go-around-the-circle exercise in which everyone is asked to say a few words about themselves. He then assumes a persistent silence, which, as the weeks go by, begins to feel stony.

Throughout the semester, Evan sits quite still in class, putting little on his face, taking on a statue-like stillness. Even in small groups, although I see him conferring with his classmates from across the room, I can't find an opportunity to actually hear him say anything. This goes on for weeks. I worry that I'm not reaching Evan, that my lesson plans leave much to be desired, or that the book we're using for class is a bad choice.

Then, the time comes for one-on-one conferences, which I do with each of my students in my office mid-semester. There, Evan breaks startlingly from his established quietness: speaking to me in the privacy of my office, he doesn't just have a lot to say-- he also demonstrates a profound understanding of the subject matter and an impressive growth in his perspective towards it since the beginning of the semester. It's as though a rift, which to me has been quietly expanding since the first week of class, suddenly closes.

Evan was one of the first students I tried to write about in conjunction with the idea of gestural listening. I was twenty-three, in front of a classroom of freshmen and sophomores for the first time. Evan's stillness and persistent quietness stood out to me perhaps more starkly because of my involvement that semester in Pitt's CEAT (Committee for the Evaluation and

Advancement of Teaching) practicum and, simultaneously, its Seminar in Pedagogy course, both arenas that enact and encourage a model of the classroom that is student-centered and participatory, almost as a point of pride. A key aspect of that participation, furthermore, so naturalized as to be taken for granted, is vocal participation—that is, speaking in class. As such, I was concerned about Evan’s learning, and concerned about my own performance as an instructor, as well. I felt I was not “succeeding” with Rob.

The first few times I wrote about Evan, in seminar and conference papers, I didn’t even include the fact of his race. Even in this chapter, I haven’t done so until now. Evan, as it happens, was the only black male student in his class. Why this omission on my part, and why does it matter?

A part of me was reluctant to admit that race had anything to do with listening, perhaps in the naïve hope, in early phases of this project, that listening somehow transcended issues of race. Since then, the way processes and behaviors of listening emerge as culturally-specific and, crucially, *entrained*, makes the involvement of race in gestural listening nearly unavoidable. But even had I been open to bringing race into the equation, I didn’t yet have a framework for understanding why I had interpreted Evan’s listening behaviors so differently from those of his peers. After all, other students in the class were quiet. Some of them went long periods of time without speaking. But I didn’t feel them to be stony, sullen, angry, or impassive, all qualities that I attributed to Evan at one point or another in the first half of the semester. When other students were persistently quiet, I didn’t feel a strange apprehension about calling on them directly.

I will return to Evan later in this chapter. For now, my observations of him and my responses to his performance of listening serve to show how gestural listening in classrooms requires careful interpretation, even as it defies definitive readings. Race, however, is not the

only category that comes to bear on performances of listening: gestural listening must also contend with dimensions of gender, disability, and class, among others. To begin that work of contending, I will be dwelling on moments from my own experiences observing and teaching composition, investigating what happens when theoretical frameworks that I explore in my first chapter collide or collude with these instances. Some of these moments come from the classes of other instructors, and some come from my own classroom.¹ Each zooms in on an aspect of listening behavior, a manifestation of listening that could be understood as gestural. While I have in the past called these vignettes “mini-ethnographies,” I now count ethnography as one of several methods that can be used to approach gestural listening, each with their own difficulties of capture and interpretation. My hope, moreover, is that these vignettes will provoke questions, and show the importance of acknowledging uncertainty even in the midst of constructing a framework of theory and practice.

2.1 CAPTURE AND CODE

When I have given presentations about this project at different forums, I have been asked by audience members to summarize a few listening behaviors that teachers might look for in their own classrooms. There arises a sense that I “have the answers” about what gestural listening really looks like, which I should really now share, now that I’m “done theorizing.” These kinds of questions reflect the strong desire that exists, when talking about gesture, to create a one-to-one correspondence between a gesture and its meaning, a gestural “key” by which *this*

¹ For the purposes of this chapter, I was able to observe five composition classes, in addition to drawing on experiences teaching my own sections of Seminar in Composition for four semesters and Writing for the Public for two. All names have been changed to protect students' privacy.

movement or posture means *that*. But gesture, as slippery a mode as sound, resists easy codification. Never free of meaning, it is also not tied as tightly to a particular semantic meaning as words often are. Furthermore, while it is possible to become more highly sensitized to the play of gesture in day-to-day life, no such definitive gestural “key” exists.

This is not for lack of trying, though, throughout the tradition of gesture studies. As far back as John Bulwer’s *Chirologia* and *Chironomia*, published in 1644, which strove to catalogue the hand gestures underscoring certain rhetorical appeals in public speaking, those studying gesture have gone to great lengths to create codices of movement. More recently, 20th century gesture scholars have exploited many modes of capture in their attempt to code gesture. In particular, the members of the “Chicago School” of gesture take pride in complex and exacting means of transcribing gesture onto the page.

In *Hearing Gesture*, Susan Goldin-Meadow exemplifies this attitude when she writes: “Overall, the key to any study of gesture is its coding system—isolating gesture from the stream of motor behavior, describing its form, and assigning it meaning (and, of course, going through the steps to ensure that meaning codes are reliable and valid)” (11). In fact, in the early days of this project, I too began assembling a catalogue of listening gestures that I hoped would give me a sort of gestural vocabulary with which to look for listening. A few of them are as follows:

1. catches: “catching” a meaning, or “receiving a message of some kind. Nodding stood out to me as the most common catch.
2. looping: catching and “elaborating,” or indicating reception with a response of some kind. A nod with a smile (or a grimace?), for example.
3. reflecting: “mirroring” the expression of the speaker.
4. holding: when a listener holds a gesture to indicate the sustained quality of their attention.

Holds can come in “parts,” or sequences of one hold after another that may serve as a kind of punctuation to what’s being said and/or understood.

5. taking-the-floor: Sometimes there are audible signals of a person trying to “take the floor,” like an audible intake of breath that overlaps with the last bit of whatever the previous speaker was saying. It can happen alongside, entwined with or even independent of speech. In this example, the breath acts as a kind gesture that reflects processes of listening by the intention, following listening, to speak.

What explains this pervasive desire to isolate and transcribe gesture, to capture and code? Tying gesture to language, both contemporarily and in antiquity, emerges as one major reason. Ancient rhetorical studies consider gesture essentially ornamental to speech, an outgrowth or afterthought. This attitude makes it seem possible to catalogue which gestures go with which language, or which appeals. The Chicago School’s desire to transcribe and code comes from its academic roots in linguistics. What they share is a focus on speech, or the active, positive production of semantic meaning. In exploring some of the many uses of silence in “Silence: A Politics,” Kennan Ferguson encapsulates this focus in noting how communication is often “presumed to reside within, or be constituted by, language; words might be demarcated by the lacuna between them, but the words remain the elementary objects of analysis” (115). Linguistics, ascribing to this orientation, takes as its basic unit of analysis the word, and the gesture studies that derive from linguistics often see themselves as taking as its object of study the kinesthetic “parallel” of the word: the gesture. Relatively few writers take on the stillness in between movements, or dwell on the idea of stillness *as* movement, or rather as a “kinesthetic choice” that can be made by a person.

It's important to note here that only certain categories of gesture are understood by gesture theorists to "contain" or convey semantic meaning, most notably those gestures called "emblematic" as defined in particular by Adam Kendon. These are the gestures that can essentially "stand in" for a word or phrase. Although this is only one category of gesture, an attitude that ties gesture to language nevertheless lends itself to the sense that gestures might be able to be isolated and transcribed with something like the semantic precision of words. Much of textual studies takes as an assumption its ability to take the word, or even the letter or phoneme, perhaps, as its smallest unit of analysis. The desire to identify a similarly small unit of analysis can also be seen to drive gestural inquiry. But that effort to encode, Aristotelian in its drive to subdivide and name, often falls short of the richness of people's movements in day-to-day situations. The question that emerges is what it might mean to study something that can't easily be reduced to manageable units of analysis.

A different perspective, like that furthered by Gunther Kress, in *Multimodality: A Social-Semiotic Approach to Communication*, sees speech and gesture as two different modal resources for communication, each with their own limitations and affordances, and with different capacities for transcription. Kress's theory of multimodality is one that sees language as one semiotic resource among many, rather than as a full, "complete" mode of communication unto itself. In any given situation, communicators usually draw on multiple available semiotic resources, shifting between them and among them based on the values and conventions of a given community, what it is they need to express, and which mode seems most apt to fulfill that communicative need. Kress calls this a combination of communicative modes a "modal ensemble." Gestural listening, considered as a modal ensemble, incorporates gesture, gaze, speech, and spatiality. While it's true that 20th and 21st-century gesture theorists see

communication as inherently multimodal as well, incorporating dimensions of speech and gesture, Kress's multimodality differs from that of the gesture theorists, in that it doesn't necessarily *prioritize* or *centralize* speaking as the main site of concern, as most gesture theorists do. Kress understands communication more broadly: even seeming "lacks" of communication are in themselves communicative.

An inability to satisfy the desire that exists to codify and thus be able to reliably "decode" the gestures we encounter in our classrooms pushes gesture-based inquiry in a different direction. The idea of gestural listening as a modal ensemble moves a study of it further away from *transcription* and more towards *description*, that is, qualitative written observation of gestural phenomena. It asks observers to examine the social and cultural forces that come to bear on situations in the classroom, to consider gestural listening on the one hand on a case-by-case basis, and, simultaneously, with larger, systemic categories in mind such as race, gender, class, and authority.

2.2 AUTHORITY IN THE CLASSROOM

An instructor poses a question. The classroom remains quiet, and students seem to hold themselves still, some looking into the middle of the circled tables. After a pause, the instructor calls on a student by name to answer, although no hands were raised. There is a snap to attention from many students in the class, quick swivels, eyes raised and directed towards the called-upon student.

The "snap to attention" that I describe here is a respectful one, through which students show their attention to their speaking classmate. It's also a ripple, however, that registers

something else: the dimension of low-level anxiety that seems to spread suddenly in the group of students. It says-- look alive. Anyone could be next. When the instructor in this class, confronted by quietness in response to her question, calls out a student by name, she reminds the class that although she may be a friendly and sympathetic figure, she nevertheless has the authority to prompt her students to speak if their silence stretches on for too long without a volunteer.

Being made to speak, after all, makes a student vulnerable in the classroom. In speaking, lack of preparation, lack of insight, and lack of understanding may all be quickly revealed, and students are often understandably reluctant to take this risk, especially when they are less familiar with the disciplinary norms for discourse in a given subject. This differs quite a bit from widespread understandings of speech as one of the strongest markers of identity, presence, and personhood. Or, I should say, it coexists with those understandings of voice. Voice dually manifests as an assertion of self and as something that renders its owner vulnerable. From this perspective, silence can be seen as a self-protective measure on the part of the students in a class.

Taking up this interpretation of classroom quietness that's sympathetic to students, Mary Reda does an extended inquiry into classrooms quietness more generally in her book, *Between Speaking and Silence*. Reda takes as her focus those who she calls "quiet students"—a kind of persistently quiet student familiar to nearly every person who's ever been either a student or a teacher. In her book, Reda reflects on a graduate seminar in which she herself, for a variety of reasons, had been a quiet student. She notes how vocal, often aggressively so, her classmates had been in that particular seminar—and how she chose not to throw herself into the melee. Her final paper was returned to her with the following note from her professor written at the bottom: "For your paper, I give you an A. But because of your *refusal* to speak in class, I am forced to lower your grade" (Reda 60). Her quietness, she realizes, had a strong impact.

In recounting this experience, Reda brings to the fore the forms of participation that are often taken for granted by both students and teachers. Breaking with those forms, whether its effects are intentional or unintentional, can be seen as not only uncooperative but even threatening to the social order of the classroom. Reda writes: “My relative quietness in this large class broke an unspoken rule, apparently projecting an active, hostile resistance I had not actually felt” (60). Furthermore, “my silence was more powerful than I had thought,” she continues, even “powerful enough to make my teacher act against his will” (60). Power, it seems, works in both directions here: first, there is the professor’s power to break a student’s silence or punish a student for their silence. On the other side, however, there is the student’s power to use silence in ways that exert pressure. In this case, Reda’s use of silence as a graduate student to create pressure is mostly unintentional, but it nevertheless provokes a strong response in her professor—he is actually forced to do something “against his will!” Reda goes on to reflect on the affective response she has to her professor’s response in this situation. “Since that class,” she writes, “I have never felt entirely safe in a classroom or professional space where someone has the power to command my speech” (60). The “snap to attention” that I mention in the vignette above may reflect, on a small scale, the sense that students are not “entirely safe” in their classroom, where an instructor can command their speech, and does.

My aim in pointing out this phenomenon, I should mention at this point, is not to eliminate the kinds of teaching strategies the instructor in the class I observed practices, nor to strip them of value. My aim is rather to look closely at the kinds of power dynamics out of which they manifest, and at the effects those dynamics have on gestural manifestations of listening.

In the examples I’ve been looking at so far, Reda’s experience as a grad student and the students’ who “snap to attention,” the issue arises again of how to parse listening, specifically,

from silence more generally. Listening, as I discuss in my first chapter, often takes on some of the meanings attached to silence because listening manifests so often in silence. In this case, the pressure that listening exerts gets some of its power from its close relationship to silence. The model of listening that emerges here is that of the silent listener exerting judgment. In this way, the listener holds onto power. The motivation to hold on to some kind of power arises more strongly when the situation is one in which the listener “ranks” lower than others in the room—in this case lower than the instructor. Using listening, with its valance of silent judgment, as a way to hold onto power is one way that listeners can try to subvert an established power structure.

What of the moments right before the snap—in which a question has been asked and “students seem to hold themselves still?” One of Reda’s main efforts, stemming from her experiences and her research, is to rethink quietness itself. She observes that students who choose not to speak are often “described through a rhetoric of failure: these students are seen by what they do not do rather than by what they *choose* to do” (Reda 7). Lack of vocal participation, then, is often read as a form of failure. At the same time, teachers often interpret silence as a sign of their *own* failure—failure to engage the class, to ask the right questions, or make the right lesson plans. This was the case in my class with Evan—I felt I was not “succeeding” with him. Either way, quietness consistently gets configured as a form of failure. In response to this, Reda encourages teachers to try to see past their own sense of failure, at times, because a preoccupation with perceived failure can prevent them from realizing that “students see their silences through a different lens than we do,” and that they often “use a different vocabulary to talk about classroom dynamics” (2). Early this semester, one of my students (among the most quiet in the class, by Reda’s standard) wrote the following as part of a brief assignment on our class’s Tumblr:

“I’ve recently started journaling. My entries consist of ramblings that go on for pages, random poems, and daily reflections. During the day I’m constantly writing down thoughts about the things I observe and experience. Though I’m quiet, and probably get misinterpreted as uninterested, I’m actually so intrigued that I become overwhelmed by constant observations about myself and others. Writing down what I see in other people allows me to untangle thoughts about everything I take in.”

In this post, Casey gives an example of a different lens, the kind Reda refers to above, through which she sees her conduct in class—rather than the quietness of being “uninterested,” she explains that hers is the quietness of absorbing the “constant observations” she makes throughout the day. She sees herself as processing things later, through writing in her journal, a practice that “allows” her to “untangle” what she’s taken in that day. Of course, it’s possible that she was trying to “explain” her comportment to me in an effort to prevent me from lowering her grade. She could with equal plausibility be explaining her behavior to her classmates, who also read the Tumblr. Either way, what’s notable is how she remarks that her quietness is probably “misinterpreted as uninterested:” she knows full well that this is a risk she runs by being quiet. The quietness-as-deficit mentality is as common among students as it is among teachers.

Casey’s reflections on herself as an observer are a useful reminder that even stillness can be understood as a gestural choice on the part of listeners. It would seem that in environments where actively vocal participation is strongly valued, in order not to be accused of hostility or resistance, a student might be motivated to exaggerate the visibility of his or her listening behaviors, to make sure everyone around, and especially the instructor, know that theirs is the quietness of listening, not the silence of apathy or nothingness. Gestural listening, then, can be coerced, not with violence per se, but with the threat that power holds over those lower in a hierarchy. Reda writes: “As teachers we may not have our students put their heads down on their desks for misbehaving, but we certainly exert control to censor language, topics, or responses

considered ‘inappropriate.’ In these ways, behaving appropriately...affords students *citizenship* in that classroom” (25, italics mine). Citizenship is a pointed word choice here, not least because it implies that certain rights and protections come with mastery of certain proprietary behaviors. The students who snap to attention may be seeking a kind of protection by physically acting out their listening.

Also interesting, however, is Reda’s mention of a certain physical means of control, or manifestation of a teacher’s authority. Of course, having students “put their heads down on their desks” is a technique most common in primary school classrooms or even preschool, and would be considered demeaning and inappropriate in a college classroom. Nevertheless, Reda evokes the ability that teachers of younger students (that is, school-aged children) have to make students assume submissive body positions. Oftentimes those techniques are used to regain control of an unruly classroom, to calm an overwhelming energy-level, and, built in to both of those aims, to *make students listen* to what the teacher has to say. In this case, students are compelled by authority to adopt the body positions of quiet, subservient listening.

Although speaking makes students vulnerable, staying quiet does too, at times, as demonstrated in Reda’s professor essentially punishing her silence by lowering her overall grade in the course. Reda notes that teacher-initiated silence is often the kind that is considered productive and positive, while student-initiated silence remains the kind of silence that is more often deemed negative, read as failure or resistance. This pattern reiterates the power differential that exists between students and their instructors, but other factors also come into play. Definite, if not often articulated, preferences exist around the ratio of silence to speech that are culturally and contextually specific. Deborah Tannen explores this phenomenon in a piece called “Silence: Anything but,” in which she compares the preferred silence-to-speech ratio to two groups of

people sharing a Thanksgiving meal. Three of the participants in the dinner identify as Jewish with family based in New York City, while the other three are Californians and not Jewish. Based on an audio recording and subsequent transcription of the conversation at dinner, Tannen argues that different groups have preferred pause-lengths between the end of what one speaker says and the beginning of a respondent's reply. Furthermore, these differing preferences for pause-lengths also result in differing tolerance towards and perception of interruption, or overlap, between conversation participants. Perceptions of pause-length and overlap affect whether silence is seen, Tannen writes, as a "chance for personal exploration vs. failure of language" (100).

That distinction—between silence as a moment of personal exploration versus a failure of language— and especially perceptions of that distinction, vary with context beyond ethnic identity. Anne Graffam Walker makes a study of pauses in speech in "The Effect of Witness Hesitancy on Lawyers' Impressions." In it, she notes that, from a cognitive standpoint, "planning [to speak] requires pausing" (Walker 56). In the context of the courtroom, pausing to plan a response comes with consequences with regards to perceived guilt or innocence, and witnesses are often advised beforehand to these ends, encouraged to enact patterns of speech and silence that come across as trustworthy, the patterns associated with "telling the truth." In the classroom, however, the implications of Walker's observation change. The idea that planning requires time would seem to indicate that a pause between speakers is in fact a listening behavior, because it gives the sense that planning was not being done while a speaker was speaking. That is, if a respondent requires time to formulate their response, that may imply that listening was happening prior to that pause-before-speaking. This would be another way to interpret the students who "hold themselves still" after a question is asked in the vignette above.

Looking at listening reiterates some of the ways that education in the university environment takes place within a certain power structure, a structure that plays out each day in the classroom. No matter how student-centered a class is constructed to be, and no matter how strong the ownership an instructor encourages students to take over their experience in the classroom, an unavoidable power differential still exists between students and their instructors. Listening, furthermore, is a behavior that responds to and reflects this power structure, especially because of listening's close relationship to silence and quietness. But if listening masquerades as quietness or silence, and those sonic states are understood both by students and teachers to be negative, uncomfortable, or even signs of failure, teachers and students risk trading a space of quiet contemplation for a mere reduction of discomfort. The key here would seem to be finding a way to make silence more acceptable at times, for students and instructors to agree upon a clause in their unofficial contract to the effect that some kinds of silences are acceptable at times, and not just teacher-initiated ones.

Reda's methods include interviews with quiet students that were conducted after the semester was over. Chapters and sections often start with quotes from these interviews. According to Reda, this method allows students' own opinions and perspectives to be heard, especially with regards to how they understand themselves in the classroom. In assigning the blog post that occasioned Casey's thoughts about herself as an observer, it strikes me that I may have stumbled upon a way to gain insight into students' behaviors even before the semester has ended. One of the problems with a study of listening is that many of the ways to "check" if listening has happened occur after the fact: evidence of listening emerges most concretely when a person articulates something they couldn't have articulated if they hadn't listened to what came before. Part of what the idea of gestural listening offers is a way to look for listening *while*

listening is happening, not after. In a similar vein, asking students to reflect on themselves as observers towards the beginning of the semester offered a way to find out that listening was happening not after the semester was over, but during. Inquiries into gesture, in particular, contend with the problem of simultaneity: the difficulty of interpreting complex sets of signals that occur fleetingly raises different issues than looking at the product of a student's writing process after the fact, for instance.

Understanding physical stillness as a choice made by students can redefine the way a teacher interprets their students' behavior on a moment-to-moment basis, and in particular reconfigures the idea of stillness and quietness as failure or lack. This becomes especially important when considering dimensions of difference in the classroom—such as gender.

2.3 ELEMENTS OF GENDER IN GESTURAL LISTENING

Mollie: a first-semester freshman in my Seminar in Composition class. In the midst of discussion, a period of silence ensues. After thinking for a while, Mollie lifts her head suddenly in a sharp, sparrow-like movement, making eye contact with me at the front of the room. These sharp movements out of rest are characteristic, and throughout the semester I've noticed that they sometimes mean she has something to say, but other times when I call on her after I see those movements, she's still not ready to say anything.

Questions of citizenship, as Reda mentions, and the kind of comportment that allows people to claim citizenship in classrooms occasioned in my exploration of gestural listening a turn to women's studies, a field that contends with the forced absence of women from rhetorical traditions. In a collection called *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*, co-edited by Krista

Ratcliffe and Cheryl Glenn, several authors seek to reread rhetorical traditions from the perspective of women's participation, at times trying to reclaim aspects of that tradition. The interplay of respect and resistance in students' gestural choices take on greater depth in historical context, especially the history of women's participation in rhetorical arts and public life. Above, Mollie's kinesthetic profile is unique for being at once active and restrained: her thinking and listening seems to be visible in her occasional, darting movements, but, like Casey above, she also strongly exercises stillness. In fact, her movements emerge as all the more noticeable because of the way they take place against a backdrop of relative stillness.

Taking Lisa Suter's perspective on the American Delsartist movement into account, it may be particularly important for women, even today, to negotiate a particular balance between stillness and movement, as well as speech and silence. In "Living Pictures, Living Memory: Women's Rhetorical Silence within the American Delsarte Movement," Suter examines the rhetoricity of silence and the body in regards to the American Delsartist movement. Among other forms, the Delsarteans revived genres such as statue-posing and *tableaux-mouvants* (or "moving pictures"). Suter writes: "At the end of the century, as women continued to fight for the franchise, women's education, labor reform, and temperance (among other causes), it became common to refer to female activists speaking their minds in public as 'freedom shriekers' (Johnson 64), 'shrieking sisters,' or 'screaming viragos'" (Jorgensen Earp 96) (105). "In this climate," she continues, "the voice that male rhetors could take for granted was for women a dangerous means of expression: a rhetorical medium likely to backfire. Small wonder, then, in this historical context, that many American Delsartists began to study the rhetoricity of silence" (Suter 105). This historical perspective on women's choices around silence and vocalizing can help illuminate certain choices that students make in the classroom even now. In an effort to gain

an audience, according to Suter, women often inadvertently alienated potential listeners by speaking out what was considered “too boldly.” The voice was something to be held in reserve, in order not to dull its effect when used. An attitude like this is unlikely to simply disappear, however: to some extent, the notion of vocal women as “freedom shriekers” persists. A felt sense of these constrictions on speech is an attitude that may come to bear on Mollie’s comportment.

Also worth noting is that Delsarte art forms were self-consciously modes of performance, which were rehearsed and took place onstage. Being in a classroom, on the other hand, is less often considered a real mode of performance in the same sense of theater or music, except in pedagogical situations that purport to assess a student’s “performance in class,” a term which often refers not just to participation in the classroom but also more generally the student’s writing or exam results. In a sense, making classroom interactions more intentionally or mindfully a performance in the Delsartean sense would actually cause gestural listening techniques to crystallize and become more apparent for what they *are* and what they *do*. Students and teachers alike, with a more performance-oriented approach, could think more specifically about what’s happening physically and what effects those choices have. As is, performances of listening as a part of classroom participation remain obscured—they are part intentional, part automatic, and entrained in ways that have often gone unexamined except for in arenas like the work of Perry Gilmore or Suellen Duffey (to come).

The idea of performance in gestural listening has many facets. Nancy Myers, also examining silence and listening in the context of women’s rhetorical agency, takes a perspective on listening and silence that frames them both as tools for negotiating a complex and often unfriendly social climate as well as “acts of learning.” She writes that “purposeful silence (based on a woman’s deliberate restraint and choice) and perceptive listening (based on a woman’s

processes of reasoning and reflecting,) are ongoing acts of learning. Contingent and negotiated, purposeful silence and perceptive listening ensure the possibility of cooperation and influence when a woman chooses to speak or write” (Myers 59). According to Myers, purposeful silence and perceptive listening allow for the “social perception of conformity and submission while offering women the opportunity to make deliberate choices about when to be silent and when to speak” (59). Myers’s writing here is of interest for the way that it seems to slide between seeing silence and listening as forces facilitating learning on the one hand, and as forces for social leverage on the other. That is, between resources for learning (“ongoing acts of learning”) and for a kind of social performance on the other (“[ensuring] the possibility of cooperation and influence”). Of course, learning and a physical “performance” of learning may not truly be isolable from each other. Something has changed when Mollie tilts her head quickly up—the motion is unmistakable for “something has occurred to me.” Mollie’s restful thinking looks like a form of listening: and when she “hears” something, in the vein of Gemma Corradi Fiumara, she seems to have “listened” a thought into existence.

Eva: a first-semester freshman in my Seminar in Composition class. Interested in Theater, Neuroscience, and Russian literature. While she often arrives late, Eva is fully present once in the room: funny, good-natured, charismatic. Amidst rows of sometimes-reticent faces, she makes eye contact with me boldly, moving forward in her desk seat when the conversation especially interests her. At times, she seems about ready to leap up from her chair. It’s as though her voice is in the room even before she speaks, actively responding to my questions with her face and her posture. Thoughtfulness, confusion, resistance, agreement, excitement, all are visible in her, available. She often seems to have begun her comment before I’ve even called on her to start speaking.

Eva comes across as a very “willing” student, in large part due to her extremely visible, or physically manifest, involvement in class. Her type of listening enacts the idea of listening as a condition or prerequisite for communication, and in this case, learning. Eva is the near opposite of Mollie’s self-containment. She primes the room, preparing it for her participation in the conversation. I have described her, above, as feeling visibly “in the conversation” even before she voices a specific comment. In drawing this positive attention to herself, she makes it easy to speak whenever she’s ready. Other students who are more still and who voice comments less frequently sometimes have a harder time “breaking in” to an established pattern of conversation that relies on a few of their more vocal classmates. At the same time, the impulse to attribute “willingness” to Eva’s comportment deserves closer scrutiny. Calling a student “willing” implies that there might be something inherent to the processes of education that would might make a student *unwilling* to begin with. One danger stemming from that stance is of ignoring, writing off, or negatively perceiving students whose comportment comes across as unwilling. Another consists in generalizing out from a student’s comportment to their overall “attitude.” This strikes me as especially important with regards to primary and secondary school environments: students choose to attend college, but attending elementary, middle, and high school is compulsory in the United States up to age sixteen in some states, seventeen and eighteen in others.

It’s important to mention that it’s not only women who use strategies like these to leverage rhetorical force. Reda writes, about a quiet male student who made a rare and impactful comment mid-semester: “I suspect that part of the power of Jon’s question came from his relative silence. His question had more power and weight because he so rarely spoke, thus we knew it mattered a great deal. We listened,” she concludes (Reda 68). This student leverages his usual quietness, in order to ensure close listening when he finally chooses to speak. In this, he

demonstrates what Nancy Myers describes as the techniques women have used in climates unfriendly to their contributions: choosing the quietness of listening until the opportune moment arrives. For Jon, listening begets listening.

2.4 RE-SEEING SULKING: POSSIBILITIES FOR RACE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF GESTURAL LISTENING

At this point, I want to return to Evan, who gave me my start in writing about gestural listening. In the previous section, I touched on the idea of willingness and attitude, especially in regards to younger, school-aged children. The listening practices that manifest in college classrooms have their roots in earlier life, and in the years of school that many students undergo before arriving at college. As such, it's important to look at studies of younger classrooms.

Few writers delve quite as deeply into comportment than Perry Gilmore in his three-year study of a predominantly low-income, black urban community and elementary school, "Silence and Sulking: Emotional Displays in the Classroom." In it, Gilmore looks primarily at children in grades 4-6, but his observations nevertheless shed light on what children learn about the performance of listening in their classrooms. "Many of the most crucial social interactions in school settings are highly charged with emotion and regularly interpreted with regard to 'attitude,'" Gilmore writes (140). "Attitude," however, takes on particular dimensions of meaning. "In talking to many of the staff, and in the initial phases of general observation in this school and community, it became apparent that 'attitude' was delicately woven into a broader context of what might be labelled 'propriety,'" or "proper standards of what is socially acceptable in conduct or speech" (140-1). Gilmore observes that in talking with faculty and staff, students with "good attitudes" were also the ones who were deemed, much more generally,

“good kids.” The problems with this association between attitude and a student’s overall character become clear when Gilmore goes on to write: “Yet when the behaviors subsumed under the label ‘attitude’ were examined, the data indicate that they consist largely of a set of paralinguistic and kinesic communicative adornments which are associated with a particular ethnic style of socioeconomic class, rather than a set of character traits reflective of the nature of individuals” (141). With this, Gilmore shows that there is danger in collapsing “kinesic communicative adornments...associated with a particular ethnic style of socioeconomic class” with a much more generalized statement about “attitude.”

These connections between comportment and the perceived value of individuals, furthermore, do not seem to be limited just to primary school education. In a study called “Psychological Correlates of Silence and Sound in Conversational Interaction,” Cynthia L. Crown and Stanley Feldstein examine responses to patterns of interruption in conversations between white and black college students, both male and female. They write:

That noninterruptive speech of the white men and interruptive speech of the white women were viewed as positive seems somewhat counterintuitive. It may be that the white women who engaged in such interruptive speech were thought to be assertive rather than impolite, and that the assertiveness of white females may be a quality of which college students approve. For white men, however, noninterruptive simultaneous speech may be viewed as supportive and as expressing interest and, therefore, worthy of approbation. That the blacks, whether male or female, only tended to be viewed positively by other blacks and whites when the former refrained from interruptions of any kind is open to several imaginable interpretations (Crown and Feldstein 46).

“Several imaginable interpretations” acts here as a kind of euphemism. One of the “imaginable interpretations” would be that different standards for the attentive behavior of black and white people are, consciously or unconsciously, still held. This study seems to indicate that a desire to avoid negative racial bias may affect the way black and white students perform listening. These gestural subtleties appear to be very naturalized—many readers might argue that something so

subtle is impossible to study and impossible to respond to. Guillemette Bolens writes in *The Style of Gestures* that “a person’s kinesic style manifests itself at this specific level of a corporeal organization of meaning. Kinesic style is an omnipresent perceptible parameter,” she writes, “which is, however, rarely the focus of attention” (22). Bringing this parameter to the center of attention is the step that will allow researchers to know more about racial bias and the performance of listening.

Gilmore goes on to give an extended description of what he calls sulking, a description that exemplifies the kind of subtle observation Bolens calls for, and which characterizes his mode of gestural capture:

Girls will frequently pose with their chins up, closing their eyelids for elongated periods and casting downward sideways glances, and often markedly turning their heads sideways as well as upwards. Girls will also rest their chins on their hand with an elbow support on their desks. Striking or getting into the pose is usually with an abrupt movement that will sometimes be marked with a sound like the elbow striking the desk or a verbal marker like ‘humpf.’...It is necessary to draw attention to the silence, and with the girls it seems to be primarily with a flourish of getting into the pose.

Boys usually display somewhat differently. Their ‘stylized sulking’ is usually characterized by head downward, arms crossed at the chest, legs spread wide and usually desk pushed away. Often they will mark the silence by knocking over a chair or pushing loudly on their desk, assuring that others hear and see the performance. Another noticeable characteristic of the boys’ performance is that they sit down, deeply slumped in their chairs. This is a clear violation of the constant reminder in classrooms to ‘sit up’ and ‘sit up tall.’...The silence displays go against all the body idiom rules of the classroom (149).

The kind of sulking that Gilmore illustrates here can be understood a particular performance of listening. Sulking students are listening “resistantly.” Another way to view this would be to see sulking students as purposely *not* listening, making a performance of how they’re *not* open to what’s happening. At the same time, this raises the question of whether the opposite of listening is actually talking, or simply inattention. Sulking students, on the other hand, seem to be paying close attention. They’re engaged enough, after all, to maintain a physical performance based on a

perceived slight. For the purposes of this chapter, it becomes important to ask what versions of sulking might look like at the college level. It's all too easy for a student to have one bad experience and decide to "shut down" for the rest of the day. College students may even have more tenacity and a longer memory for perceived injustice—a sulk may even stretch on the length of an entire semester.

Gilmore goes on to note that "a black teacher was more likely to discipline a dramatic sulking display, sending the child to the office, calling the parent, or in some way immediately chastising the student" (157). To a white teacher, on the other hand, stylized sulking was seen as a cultural variation of expression. "Sulking," Gilmore writes, "in the highly stylized way it is performed by many of the students, was viewed by both black and white teachers as part of a stereotypic communicative style of blacks. Much the way Jewish or Italian gestural style might be characterized, so too this behavior might easily be interpreted as a black gestural performance" (157). The performance of listening, according to Gilmore's study, appears to be influenced by a student's race and socioeconomic status. This realization helps Gilmore arrive at a crucial question: "Is there a trade of blackness," he asks, "for success in the study site?" (160). This remains an urgent question, very real to me during the semester that I puzzled over Evan's still quietness in my class.

A moment of pause is required here: just as the term "willing" raises questions, so does the very idea of sulking. Gilmore, in his article, does not interrogate his use of the term "sulking," or the implications of mobilizing that term in his examination of behaviors that, he notes, may be characteristic of some black communities of a particular socioeconomic class. The word "sulking" carries, after all, strongly negative connotations. Even the sulker knows full well that being accused of this comportment is undesirable, potentially shameful. Others, usually

adults, seem to retain the right to “call out” or accuse a child of sulking. Doubtless, sulking can often be a juvenile or misguided form of passive resistance. Nevertheless, sulking, in the context of Gilmore’s study of fourth-to-sixth grade students, is an exercise of power on the part of the student, who may not have many means of recourse, or the maturity to exercise some of the “better ones.” Sulking can be a powerful tool available to a student who feels wronged, ignored, or misunderstood. Seen as such, calling out or embarrassing a child for a performance of sulking compounds the authority that triggered the sulking behavior to begin with with the authority to actually accuse the child of sulking. Insult is added to injury. The teacher offends the student, and then rejects the child’s performance of resistance. So it becomes important to ask: who gets to tell whom that they’re sulking?

Some instances of gestural listening must be read through multiple lenses: race, gender, and even a listener’s regional identity. In “Student Silences in the Deep South: Hearing Unfamiliar Dialects,” Suellen Duffey recounts a remarkable example of gestural listening, beginning with a vignette similar to the ones I have written for this chapter, and similar to the ones Perry Gilmore relies on in his research as well.

“Her Body Made Me Listen”

A Scene

Her body is the color of latte. Mine is white. Hers faces the desk at which we sit, and one of her arms stretches across the desktop and supports her head, adorned with intricately braided designs. She appropriates the space for herself.

She makes no eye contact with me. She makes no perceptible movement but rests, still. I do not think her asleep, as she may seem.

I sit beside her, my chair angled toward her, my body half-facing her and half facing her essay on the desk between us.

I speak. She listens. (296)

Unlike my reluctance to make explicit the color of Evan’s skin in this chapter’s first vignette, this is the first detail Duffey offers: “Her body is the color of latte.” And she continues:

“Mine is white.” I might add to my own writing, then, a few more aspects of my identity: that I am female, Jewish, for all intents and purposes considered white, and several inches above the average height for women in the United States. Only after these details about skin color does Duffey move on to the spatial (or “proxemic”) orientation of herself and her student, and their body positions, with Ashley resting her head on her arm and Duffey ostensibly sitting upright in a chair. Notably, Duffey does not mention her own body position very specifically, only that she half faces Ashley and half faces the essay on the desk. Only body positions that are considered unusual for the given situation, it seems, merit explicit mention.

Beginning by making explicit Ashley’s skin color and her own, Duffey seems to make the vignette immediately *about* race. I was concerned to mention Evan’s race immediately for exactly that reason—the question is whether an explicit mention of race obscures or distracts from other things to be learned about listening, or whether race is inextricable from listening behaviors, and as such almost needs to be mentioned in order for the observational write-up not to seem almost deceptive or misleading. Interestingly, Duffey refuses to make simple attributions about where Ashley’s unique listening behavior might have derived from—the church, for example, or Ashley’s home life. Duffey considers these explanations or attributions as easy at best, and mere offshoots of Southern stereotypes at worst. At the same time, though, she makes of note of a broader regional orientation towards propriety and correct behavior in Georgia. Place emerges as important to Duffey, and while she avoids any simplistic explanation of why Ashley’s performance of gestural listening might have been unique to the deep south, she suggests that places shape their listeners, even referring to the need to learn the “dialect of [Ashley’s] silence,” as though her form of gestural listening were a regionally unique form of a language (298). “Even though Ashley gave me none of the usual signals that she was attentive,”

she writes, “I had learned to recognize her ways of listening—and of showing that she was listening—were different from those of students I was accustomed to” (297). Duffey goes on to interpret Ashley’s gestural performance this way: “Since Ashley’s silence and body at rest are ways I behave in communicative situations in which I am very close to the person I’m in dialogue with—someone I love, a family member, a trusted colleague—I had to look beyond my own experience to listen to what Ashley’s silence was telling me” (297).

While Duffey does not name gesture specifically, she is in essence looking at Ashley’s listening. She refers to “listening” to Ashley’s listening here, but while this appropriately underscores the idea of listening as mutual and reciprocal, in fact Duffey really *looks* at Ashley to understand her listening behaviors. This instance also underscores the ways that gestural listening can be unique to individuals, and can even border on subversive at times. Duffey refers to the way Ashley “appropriates” the space of the desk and Duffey’s office, but not in the violent sense that the word appropriation is often used. Rather, it’s an appropriation that gives way to an insight about Ashley’s mode of listening. Another professor might have exhorted Ashley to “sit down and sit up,” like a teacher in Gilmore’s study, or even simply grown worried about whether Ashley was sick or tired or deeply discouraged, disrupting their ultimately productive conferences with needless, concerned questions. Interestingly, Ashley’s body position in Duffey’s vignette is similar to Reda’s evocation of how teachers of elementary school students sometimes command students to put their heads on their desks. The same position, in these different contexts, requires a different interpretation of the students’ intentions and inner state.

Gilmore’s writings about his classrooms observations demonstrate a certain method for capturing incidents in the classroom that become the sites of analysis. His written voice in the classroom observations tends to be relatively detached. Suellen Duffey uses a similar descriptive

technique, but with several important differences in her approach, her style, and her selection of detail. First: Duffey describes Ashley's skin as "the color of latte." This at first seems like a well-observed specificity, a detail that even seems to belie a tender attitude towards the student, as does the inclusion of Ashley's being "adorned" with "intricately braided" hair. Upon further examination, though, the student's skin color is a specific shade and opacity of brown, while Duffey's own body is "just" white, with no further elaboration. White is just white, it would seem. Also of interest are Duffey's descriptions of Ashley's listening more specifically. In the second paragraph of the "scene," Duffey relies on negative descriptors to convey what Ashley is doing: she "makes no eye contact," "makes no perceptible movement," but "rests." Resting, then, is the only positive explanation for what she *does* do in that string of tries. Duffey then writes: "I do not think her asleep," acknowledging an understandable guess on the part of the reader as to what she might be doing. But again, that is she not sleeping doesn't position Ashley as *doing* anything, as making a gestural choice. The last line: "I speak. She listens," perhaps reflects a desire to make these seem like equal activities, but it nevertheless has the effect of making Ashley seem passive. Reversing the order of the two gives rise to different possibilities. What Duffey perhaps does better or more comprehensively than Gilmore is including the body and actions of the instructor in the scene. Gilmore's scenes read with a kind of ethnographic distance, but he treats the teacher in less detail. While he is far from pretending that teachers don't have their own "emotional displays" (they do), his focus is overwhelmingly on the reactions of the students. It's conceivable, however, that teachers have their own ways of sulking, which should not go ignored. This issue is folded into the issue of power that allows one individual to name another's sulking, as I discuss above.

Writing about listening in a way that reflects or enacts the models of listening that I've explored in my first two chapters seems to require writers to stretch for a new way of depicting listening altogether. To do this, writers will have to ask: how can a sentence be constructed to position listening as reaching, summoning, or holding? How can listening be figured as on par or perhaps even more influential than speech, at times? How can conventional attitudes about speech on the part of the reader, with which they will approach almost any piece of writing, be unsettled? When Duffey writes "I speak. She listens," she chooses the most unadorned syntax available to her in depicting those two acts. But even that syntactic sparseness is not quite enough to truly depict Ashley's listening as a powerful force in its own right. Duffey instead mostly relies on *telling* the reader that it is. In my vignettes, I have striven for sentences that depict listening in the active, or positive sense: Evan "assumes a persistent silence," while with Eva, it is "as though her voice is in the room even before she speaks." Students "seem to hold themselves still." I'll need to continue to find ways of doing this going forward.

A discussion of race in regards to gestural listening, of course, should not be limited to black and white. Mary Reda makes mention of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* on more than one occasion, as a book that handles, among other things, the silences of young Chinese girls like the book's protagonist. In *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, Cheryl Glenn draws on interviews conducted with members of the Zuni Pueblo tribe. She writes: "Todd Epaloose spoke for his people: 'The only time we'd purposefully use [silence] would be out of respect and courtesy. As far as conversations go, we tend to listen more first and tend to be silent until we totally understand that the person talking to you is done'" (Glenn 119). Later, she summarizes: "Interestingly, Epaloose equated keeping silent with respectful listening" (Glenn 132). Gary Planck's work, also quoted in Glenn's book, notes that "Navajos are taught from the

youngest age never to draw attention to ourselves. So Navajo children do not raise their hands in class. At a school like Dartmouth, the lack of participation was seen as a sign not of humility but lack of interest and a disengaged attitude” (Plank 30) (Glenn 141). Based even on these few snippets, there exists ample room for cross-cultural studies of listening behaviors to be conducted.

2.5 ESL STUDENTS AND AMBIVALENCE

One arena where this kind of inquiry has begun is in regards to ESL students. Students for whom speaking English as a second language is cause for anxiety leverage listening with even higher stakes, perhaps, than native speakers.

Hantong: freshman, a Chinese international student. Sits in class with a kind of kinetic energy. He doesn't participate much verbally, in part possibly because of concern about his English abilities, but is nevertheless extremely active, jiggling his feet and rocking his legs back and forth underneath the desk. This is especially noticeable when he's wearing materials that produce a swishing noise. The swishing becomes most apparent when, at certain moments, it suddenly stops.

Here, Hantong uses a gestural modality, often unintentionally, to indicate his interior state, whether listening or thinking. In this example, he evokes the idea of a humming machine, whose constant roar reflects productivity and proper function. When his foot is jiggling, in this example, he seems to be listening, taking in. When it stops, suddenly, it seems to indicate that he has shifted from mostly listening to mostly thinking, processing information and formulating a response. Listening while someone is speaking and the pause that follows are not, furthermore,

hard-and-fast or sharply delineated phases. The pause of formulating a response, as I have argued elsewhere, can in itself also be understood as a form of listening—listening, gathering, collecting, summoning our own words into sayableness.

A dual question arises, about how ESL students listen, and how to listen *to* them. In “Revaluing Silence and Listening in Second-Language English Users,” Jay Jordan writes: “What is necessary is patience—hearing not for immediate consumption or translation or evaluation but for ambivalence” (284). Here, Jordan writes at once about the quietness of ESL students themselves and the listening required of their teachers. In both senses, Jordan’s piece responds directly to Ratcliffe’s idea of rhetorical listening: Jordan tries to map Ratcliffe’s framework onto second-language users of English. What he means by ambivalence, then, may refer to the “troubled identifications” or “cross-cultural communication” that Ratcliffe develops rhetorical listening to address. “Especially in the case of second-language users,” Jordan writes, “both production (traditionally conceived) and silences can give rise to misunderstandings, snap judgments, and consternation on the part of native-speak peers and instructors” (Jordan 284). By asking readers to “listen for ambivalence,” Jordan avoids the construction that Ratcliffe uses: which is “listening to a student’s listening,” a construction that presumes the researcher “already knows,” more or less, what listening is, or that listening can indeed be called one separable, readily identifiable process.

Nevertheless, another problem that emerges is that Jordan still conflates how instructors should listen *to* ESL students, and how ESL students themselves listen. Jordan may at first seem to be talking about listening *through* difficulties with English to “get” a student’s point, or to avoid imposing preconceived categories on what students are trying to say. These are both admirable aims. But, led by the examples he chooses in this article, Jordan’s focus at times shifts

without warning to interpreting the functions of the ESL students' quietness, as well as the functions of their listening. Citing a study of Turkish graduate students in the United States done by Sibil Tatar, Jordan writes: "Some participants informed Tatar that they employed silence in order to listen to the comments of their native-English-speaking peers, whether to attend to linguistic considerations of how they phrased questions" on the one hand, "or whether to 'protest against the perceived low quality of [peers'] contributions'" on the other (290) (Jordan 297). The second half of this sentence is of interest here, because it implicates listening in a display not of resistance, exactly, but of "protest," not so far from the civil protests I touch on in my first chapter or the sulking I analyze in the last section. So in spite of folding student's and instructors' listening together, and at times slipping somewhat vaguely between them, what's nevertheless useful about Jordan's figuring of listening as ambivalence is the way it suggests that moments of listening can be characterized by their potential, or the "unsettledness" that lends itself to instruction, and to arriving at new ideas.

2.6 LISTENING THROUGH DISABILITY AND NEURODIVERSITY

So far I've touched on gender, race, place, class, and language proficiency in the case of ESL students. Although the layout of this chapter has taken on each of these categories separately, that separateness should really be seen as a contrivance of organizing a paper. In day-to-day situations, each of these categories could be seen as a lens through which to look for listening—but furthermore, any given situation would realistically require multiple of these lenses, one stacked in front of the next, overlapping unevenly and idiosyncratically. This is simply to say that the intersectional aspect of identity comes to bear on interpreting gestural listening. Mollie,

for example, is a female student, but also of Asian descent.

Adding to these many possible “layered lenses,” Shannon Walters and Brenda Jo Brueggeman provide starting points for thinking about the role of neurodiversity and disability in physical manifestations of listening. In *Rhetorical Touch: Disability, Identification, Haptics*, Shannon Walters looks for elements of rhetoric that can be leveraged by disabled and neurodiverse rhetors. Her focus, in a sea of scholars studying vision and hearing, is touch. People living with disabilities, Walter argues, are often individuals for whom the usual ways of harnessing logos, pathos, and ethos, for example, are not available, or are compromised by the fact of their disability and the way narratives of disability are mostly funneled into one of three categories: the inspirational “overcoming obstacles” narrative, the pity narrative, or a narrative of disgust and its resulting isolation for the disabled individual. Touch emerges as a uniquely useful modality for these individuals as they find ways to use rhetoric that serve their needs. As Walters puts it, looking at touch rhetorically allows for “persuasion beyond explicit verbal and linguistic means” (42). One of the most striking examples of rhetorical concepts being retooled in light of disability is Walters’s discussion of Hellen Keller, and in particular Keller’s relationship with her teacher, Anne Sullivan. When Keller began to produce written compositions, especially an early story called “The Frost King,” questions were raised by the reading public about whether the work could really be considered Keller’s—if she could really be understood as its sole author. According to Walters, in instances like this, Keller’s ethos is being called into question, tied up especially with a long-standing and widespread belief that “real” authors, which Walters figures more generally as rhetors, are singular persons who create their works of art essentially “on their own.” After all, Keller’s means of communication relied heavily upon spelling words into the palm of her teacher’s hand, an unusually tactile and collaborative mode of communication. All

Keller's words went quite literally *through* Sullivan like a conduit. "Both conceptually and substantially," Walters writes, "Keller and Sullivan share an ethos and are identified with each other" (48). Here, Walters evokes Kenneth Burke's rhetorical concepts of identification and consubstantiality. She continues: "Keller's ethos especially transgresses the accepted understanding of the rhetor as the individual autonomous person, located in a singular, hard-edged body" (Walters 48). Keller and her writings unsettle the idea of a rhetor as a clearly identifiable individual with a clearly delineated body.

As I argue by way of Steve Goodman's *Sonic Warfare* in my first chapter, listening is a mode of sensory input that is closely related to touch: sound, under certain conditions, can act as a palpable force on the body. Keller's mode of listening actually forgoes the sonic register entirely—what people would most readily call "sound," that is—and relies totally on the tactile register. Just as Deaf people commonly say, "I listen with my eyes," so Keller might say she listens with her hands, extending them to be spelled into by those who know the signs, or using them to touch the faces of people speaking to her, a technique she developed to literally lip-read with her hands. Listening's close relationship with touch causes the arguments Walters makes about tactility to carry over into listening, too, especially in the sense that a common "listening trope" is that listening allows for an understanding which seems to go beyond words, beyond the semantic or "verbal" and into the affective, the more fundamentally vocal. Drawing on views espoused by the pre-Socratic scholar Empedocles, Walters writes: "In contemporary rhetoric, Empedocles's sense of connectedness among all bodies, beings, and words resonates with revisions of rhetorical situations that focus on enactments, affects, ecologies, structures of feeling, and the physical registers of rhetoric" (46). Ultimately, Walter's discussion of Keller's means of listening, and of her successful struggle to establish ethos, give us a yet further

diversified way to look for listening.

Walters configures neurodiverse individuals as a kind of category within disability with its own challenges in manipulating the tools of rhetoric. One case in point are individuals on the spectrum of autism disorders. For people with autism, the usual ways of establishing connections with other people via non-verbal signals can cause distraction and even discomfort. People with autism are often uncomfortable with eye contact, for example. In an article for the Indiana University's Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Rozella Stuart asks if eye contact should be insisted upon by parents and especially teachers working with autistic children. Educators, after all, are often taught to gather and recapture students' attention when starting instruction and when attention seems to have diffused. "To accomplish this task," Rozella writes, "teachers often first attempt to get attention by cuing 'Look at me:'"

They also often assume that they have individuals' attention when they "get eye contact" and that those who do not conform cannot be paying attention. Thus, when individuals who have autism seem to avoid looking into the eyes of teachers and others with whom they interact, the strategy that comes most naturally and is often pursued quite intently is the verbal cue "Look at me." If an individual who has an autism spectrum disorder fails to respond within what is viewed as a reasonable length of time, the cue may be repeated more forcefully. If the person still fails to look as directed, misinterpretations of why the person isn't "complying" may fuel futile power struggles that only frustrate everyone concerned and further thwart the abilities of individuals with autism to respond (Stuart).

Insisting on gestural manifestations of listening that are the "normal" or expected ones, then, can actually backfire completely for students with autism. Eye contact often serves as a gestural assurance that attention is being paid, and that listening is occurring. The implications of Rozella's observations, though, is that listening doesn't always look like what we expect listening to look like in neurodiverse individuals. Furthermore, insisting on any gestural performance of listening may actually be a disservice to some students. Rozella goes on to note that some students with autism struggle to simultaneously process information coming in through

different sensory channels. This leads to situations where a student may appear to be looking out the window all during class, but can then demonstrate, upon being asked, exact knowledge of what's been said.

This may seem to bring about a death knell to an inquiry into gestural listening. If listening can look so diverse depending on the individuals in question, why look for listening at all? But investigating how listening manifests for neurodiverse individuals changes the angle on that inquiry in a useful way. It reminds people, but teachers in particular, that we have, already, certain expectations for what paying attention looks like, and even for what respect and resistance look like. Those preconceptions can affect our perceptions of students as people, as well as our perceptions of their abilities and potentials. Nothing crystallizes expected norms for listening behaviors than their subversion by those negotiating atypical forms of cognitive perception.

Another perspective is introduced by Brenda Jo Brueggeman, who writes about her experiences both as a student and as a teacher who is severely hard of hearing. For deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, it would seem that looking literally *is* what it means to listen, especially for those who depend on lip-reading or communication via sign language. Unlike the autistic students that Rozella writes about, a deaf or hard-of-hearing person not looking at a speaker is truly unlikely to be listening, or even aware that speech is happening. That even deaf individuals can be said to “listen” opens up the idea of listening to include things beyond the reception and decoding of soundwaves by the brain, a point I explore in my first chapter. But Brueggeman also makes observations what it means for her as a hard-of-hearing woman to “appear” correctly, especially when it comes to listening. In *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness*, she writes: “I tend to control conversations...It is safer this way: if I don't shut up, if I

keep talking, then voila, I don't have to listen" (Brueggeman 93). Here, Brueggeman positions listening as a different form of vulnerability than the one Goodman exemplifies in *Sonic Warfare*, one that often exposes Brueggeman's disability and makes her subject to a set of associations and reactions that people often have towards deaf and/or hard-of-hearing individuals. "And if I don't have to listen," she continues, "I don't have to struggle, don't have to ask for repeats, don't have to assume any of the various appearances that I and other deaf/hard-of-hearing people often appear as—stupid, aloof, disapproving, suspicious" (Brueggeman 93). Brueggeman confronts and negotiates daily the expectations that exist for what listening should look like, how it should gesturally manifest. "If I keep talking," Brueggeman asserts finally, "I pass" (93). With the idea of "passing," Brueggeman may put readers in mind of what Mary Reda calls citizenship: the belonging, and the set of rights and privileges granted to those who can produce the correct forms of comportment in any given situation. What we think listening looks like takes on serious consequences for students, especially those negotiating disability.

Brueggeman is equally conscious about the "look" of her listening as a teacher. About teaching, she writes: "I avoid, at all costs, leading large group discussions in which students might speak from the back of the room" (Brueggeman 99). Instead, she writes, "I put them in small groups for discussion and then I walk around, lean over their shoulders, sit down with a small group for a short time" (Brueggeman 99). In this way, Brueggeman not only readjusts classroom practices for the kind of hearing she can and can't do, she also performs listening physically in a different way, walking around, leaning over students' shoulders, and sitting down with individual groups. "Then," she continues, "I bring one group to the front of the class to help me lead the whole class through discussion, branching from what they were talking about in their smaller groups. In this way, the students take charge of receiving the questions and become

interpreters for me and each other” (Brueggeman 99). What’s interesting to note here is how Brueggeman finds a way to have her students actually *do* most of the listening, and in doing so, they also coordinate or facilitate the class discussion. What emerges here is a model of listening in which a group of students serves as a kind of aural conduit for their instructor, and becoming, as she writes, “interpreters.” Maybe a better image for this kind of situation would be to see the discussion-leading group as an adaptor, with one end plugging into Brueggeman and the other end bearing multiple ports that can connect to their roomful of classmates.

Like Brueggeman in the passage above, Shannon Walters moves towards an understanding of rhetoric driven by touch that unsettles the idea of a singular rhetor with a single, “hard-edged” body. She takes up ideas of identification and Burke’s “consubstantiality” as the frontiers of rhetoric that can include rhetors possessing a range of physical and cognitive abilities. In my observations of gestural listening and the pressure it allows listeners to exert on situations, I too have noticed scenarios where listening seems to exceed the commonly recognized boundaries of singular personhood.

2.7 ENSEMBLE LISTENING

Shannon, Jessica, and Anna: a three-person team within my class of eighteen. Jessica enters the classroom and chooses a seat directly across from me in the circled desks. A few minutes later, Anna enters and puts a paper cup of coffee in front of Jessica, sitting down in the seat by her side. Then Sara comes in, often though not always sitting next to the other two. Shannon, tall like an athlete, sits back and stretches long legs into the center of the circle. At the start of discussion, Jessica’s hand is reliably first in the air. Anna, less assured in the subject matter,

seems to gain confidence from Jessica, and together they dominate conversation, seeming to speak to each other as much as to me or the rest of the class.

For a while, this three-person team perplexed me: they dominated the class, clogged the airways, and seemed to jockey with me for a kind of social power. I felt I was witnessing the kind of “alpha girl” pack I’d spent all of middle and high school avoiding, and whose influence I also skirted by attending a women’s college in whose culture they were discouraged. Later in the semester, I would find that two of these women were roommates, and two of them sorority sisters—significant, preexisting social bonds. At first, I didn’t think to consider any part of their behavior as listening behavior; I just saw it as being at once fearful and condescending towards the work of the class, undermining to me and unthoughtful towards the other students in class. I struggled to be patient.

One day, though, I got a brief moment of insight. That day, I posed a question to the class that included the word “ethical,” used in a way that was unfamiliar, or perhaps just unexpected, to some of the students. Just after, in the intermittent silence, I saw Shannon turn to Jessica with a furrowed forehead, and ask her, in a barely audible whisper: “ethical?” I realized suddenly that some of the whispered conferences between these three young women, irritating as they were, might actually be a form of processing what was happening in class. These three women almost seemed to “listen together,” simultaneously checking their understanding of what was said against each other’s understandings. In this interpretation, they could be seen to listen as a kind of network. In my first chapter, I make note of ensemble listening practices in the context of choral singing. Shannon, Anna, and Jessica also remind me, in retrospect, of the way a trio would sometimes be chosen, out of the whole choir, to sing one verse of a song, a smaller

ensemble within the whole. The idea of ensemble listening may be easy to spot in the context of choir, but is still present in other types of ensembles, like those that arise in classrooms.

In looking at gestural listening, instances arise where listening exceeds a “two-way street” between two individuals, or the class as a homogeneous group facing the teacher, but presents as a more complex, multi-dimensional responsive structure. Outside the realm of choral singing (I touch on James Jordan’s *Evoking Sound* in my first chapter), there are a few other places to turn to start thinking about listening as an ensemble act.

Gesture and sound in particular are modalities that seem to provoke contagion, or spread, perhaps because of their affective impact, or impact that registers before the intellect “catches up.” In *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, Anahid Kassabian pursues this idea when she develops the term “ubiquitous musics,” referring to the kind of music listened to in our lives without the primary, focused attention often associated with (although not limited to) classical concert settings. This kind of diffuse, yet affectively powerful listening which leads Kassabian to point out what she calls “distributed subjectivity.” Distributed subjectivity challenges a widespread understanding of individual subjectivity, envisioning instead *non-individual* subjectivity, a kind of “field” of perception that threads through and between individuals, and which may also encompass non-human or non-individual elements like environments or institutions. The triad formed between Shannon, Jessica, and Anna, and the way they sometimes seemed to “listen together,” could be seen as a manifestation of Kassabian’s distributed subjectivity. Jessica and Anna, in particular, seemed to see themselves as interchangeable—that is, a comment or question directed to one of them was fair game for the other, too. Forming a “team” of three within a class, as these women did, had the effect of diffusing the responsibility, between the three of them, of anything that was said by one. They

also seemed to take responsibility for each other's emotional states: if Jessica received a perceived slight in class, Anna would frequently rejoin with a comment that implicitly defended Jessica's original point. It was as though they "felt together."

Of course, Kassabian's ideas are really meant to be applied to much bigger groups of people: entire ethnic groups, for example, or the entire population of a shopping mall, for instance, at any given time listening (albeit peripherally) to the music pumped in as a kind of environmental moderator. But even manifesting on a very small scale, the trio of women "feeling together" in my class reflects one of Kassabian's main ideas: that across this wide field of distributed subjectivity, affective responses can be produced in listeners that may lead to full-fledged emotions, or may remain unarticulated, unnamed currents beneath the surface. In other words, the effects of listening can manifest across groups, not just in individuals.

Kassabian proposes that listening, and especially the diffuse listening that characterizes the consumption of ubiquitous music, can give rise to affects among groups. Another scholar who investigates possibilities for the generation and movement of affects is Teresa Brennan in *The Transmission of Affect*. Brennan argues that the ability to "soak up" the mood of a room, or to "take on" someone else's depression, for example, is an idea that was at one time taken for granted. As the idea of a self-contained, autonomous subject coalesced, however, so did a different attitude about the psychical boundaries between individuals: an attitude of pathology. Now, as Brennan would argue, pathology dominates the approach to most kinds of blurred agency or valence between the members of a group, whether it's the crowd at a soccer game or people gathered for a protest. Nevertheless, Brennan calls for readers to hold off on the impulse to pathologize in order to look more closely at the mechanisms for group transmission. While Brennan doesn't explicitly write about listening, she does point to sound, and especially rhythm,

as a powerful mechanism for the transmission of affect. Rhythm, she writes, has a “unifying, regulating role in affective exchanges between two or more people. The rhythmic aspects of behavior at a gathering are critical in both establishing and enhancing a sense of collective purpose and a common understanding” (Brennan 70). It’s notable here that Brennan specifically refers to rhythm, a dimension of sound that, in particular, unites the sonic with the tactile. A future study will need to ask what the “rhythmic aspects of behavior” are that can unify, regulate, establish, and enhance the “sense of collective purpose and common understanding” in classrooms. Teachers probably have a sense of this kind of rhythm from memories of days in class when conversation was going especially well.

2.8 THE EMOTIONAL DISPLAYS OF TEACHERS

It was the week before spring break. My students had been instructed to conduct and record three interviews which they would be recombining into an audio assignment over the coming weeks. I started class, or tried to, with a few general questions to my students about how their interviews had gone and what it had been like to run them. Had they found themselves going off their scripts? Had anything surprised them about the process? But replies were not forthcoming—in fact, a silence unfolded, stretching out, unbroken by the usual students who often take it upon themselves to step in, step up.

It seemed a simple thing: I was inviting the class to engage in conversation about what was, for many, an unusual assignment they’d just done. My invitation, quite clearly, was not being accepted. In an effort to raise the energy in the classroom, I initiated a brisk call and response.

“All right,” I said, raising one hand. “How many people interviewed classmates?”

Several students raised their hands in response.

“How many interviewed professionals in the community?”

Several others put their hands up.

“How many people have their interviews done for today?”

Almost all hands are in the air now.

“Okay,” I said, growing suddenly stern, “then you should have something to say about this.” I made a gesture towards them with both hands as if to say, “It’s your turn, now—come on.”

It’s usually unnecessary to indicate to students that their silence has gone on too long, that it has verged on the unacceptable. Rather, students and teachers, through years of shared experience in classrooms, already have a remarkably sharp and well-calibrated sense of how long a silence is too long. The tipping point can be almost palpable, from a period of “acceptable” silence into a length of time that feels risky, tense, and fraught. Usually what needs to be done is to diffuse or disarm the existing expectations about how long silences should last to allow students more and longer periods of comfortable thinking time, and/or a wider range of possible reactions to being prompted by an instructor, e.g., asking a question in return.

But in this moment, on this day, another, more familiar signification of silence won out among the other possibilities, and I lashed out in a brief spark of frustration and anxiety. Those emotions, as I reflected on them later, came from feeling exposed, of feeling like I was being left to “twist in the wind.” Further, beyond a momentary sense of discomfort on my part, those emotions came from a sense of my responsibility to impart education, to make sure that

education was “happening.” I need to earn my stipend, and they need to get their money’s worth, to put it baldly.

Jason, probably among several other students, seemed to see my quick turn towards admonishment coming. In the front row, before I even finished my chastising words, he seemed to be leaning forward, one hand up, even beginning to vocalize in his throat slightly-- a sound that was almost pained-- before I recognized him to speak. All this in the space of a second. He answered my basic questions with a suitably basic response: a few people were available on his hall to interview. They were around, and willing to give fifteen minutes of their time. It was an answer that did two things: it reflected 1) what might have been a baffling simplicity in the questions I had been asking (useful feedback I wish I hadn’t needed to fight for), and 2) it threw boards across a divide that had grown in the space of a minute, or even less, and allowed us to cross to more solid ground where class moved along more collaboratively. Other students joined in: hands were raised, responses offered, and soon we had managed a quick recovery. The new energy lasted for the rest of class, through a discussion of the interviews and a reading for that day.

Jason: Participates regularly in a relatively quiet class, often carrying the class forward through more challenging moments. It’s not hard to recognize: a student, a year or so older than many of his classmates, taking it upon himself to fill in during moments of uncertainty, risk, or exposure. A team-player, Jason also gives the sense that if he didn’t have to, he probably would not contribute verbally as much to class. He says only as much as he has to, and his posture and movements reflect a slight reticence, or maybe a guardedness. He doesn’t want to appear to be working too hard or too openly; doesn’t want to be too expressive or “give too much away” with his body language. That being said, he sits in the first row, directly in front of me, and has since

the first day of class. He makes a point of participating every day, as per my recommendation on the course syllabus.

That day, it was as though Jason had been able to see a few seconds ahead, to anticipate where the silence, followed by the call-and-response hand-raising might be leading. And when my emotional response precipitated, he rushed to diffuse the tension as quickly as possible. In a sense, Jason rushed in to manage what *my* emotional reaction had been to the class's reticence. In classrooms with younger students, some observers make note of instances when the children try to take care of their teacher. This might be more readily observable in classes with children, but it's not unheard of with older students, either. Readers may remember a time when normally quiet students became unusually talkative on the day that an outside observer was present to evaluate the instructor's teaching.

Above, I write that I initiate the call-and-response sequence to raise the energy in the room. But instead of going what now seems like the obvious route, in the direction of more productive questions or thought, in a brief moment of frustration I compelled my students into the uncertain, even embarrassing position of having one raised hand stranded in the air while I threw a barb at them for their apparent unwillingness to engage in the usual processes of class. It's embarrassing to be left signaling while a teacher proves a point. I remain suspicious of what seems to me like an instant, almost unconscious impulse, on my part, to reprimand my students for their quietness, even to exact a small revenge for my feelings of exposure, of being ignored. The length of an acceptable interval of silence in the classroom is deeply ingrained. I caved to its pressure even having studied and thought about quietness in the classroom for over a year. I was genuinely concerned about this rupture, however brief, in my usual teacherly ethos. It felt like a breach of rapport and a breach of whatever hard-won trust I had earned thus far in the semester.

For the most part, I don't think my relationship with this group of students has suffered unduly as a result of what happened that day. There has been only one other moment in which I've felt the repercussions of that original event: a reading began with an epigraph from *The Great Gatsby*, and I began a discussion in which I hoped to parse out what it had meant for the writer to start the piece that way. At one point, I said, "How many people here read *The Great Gatsby* in high school?" Although virtually all of them had (which I found out later on), only one or two students put their hands up, and only shyly. I realized in a flash that they were reluctant to raise their hands in this simple poll because they might have been afraid of being singled out or possibly even embarrassed again in whatever follow-up question was to follow. I quickly reassured them that I wasn't trying to "call them out" on their knowledge of the novel, but rather just trying to establish the sense that *The Great Gatsby* was an iconic, widely-read text. I changed my approach and said instead: "I would bet that almost everyone in here read *The Great Gatsby* in high school." Nods.

A consumer mentality says: I've paid for this, and now I'm here to *receive* my education. This formulation lends itself to the image of students sitting in lecture halls and quietly receiving, or being filled, via the ears and eyes, with a substance called education. The real situation, at least in discussion-based humanities courses, is that students are paying to be able to participate in the *process* of education. To my mind, the way we think about listening directly affects this issue: if listening is passive reception, then sitting and receiving emerge as the main behaviors of education. If listening is seen as complex and participatory, on the other hand, the active, agentic role students need to play in their classes becomes more apparent, and more participatory behaviors would follow.

2.9 CONCLUSION

Steven Connor, in “Edison’s Teeth,” writes: “the body of a culture is...a mixed body” (172). Shannon, Jessica, and Anna show, if on a small scale, that gestural listening in a classroom can be inflected by the gathered quality of its participants, exceeding usual boundaries of the single, autonomous self. Scholars like Brennan and Kassabian make a start on developing a vocabulary for sonic-tactile ensemble phenomena like these, but Connor reaches for an even more speculative set of terms: “It is not an orchestra,” he continues, “but the shimmering body of a multitude; it has the kind of mobile, diffuse intactness possessed by a swarm, or shoal, or horde, or cloud” (172). These may be images that lead to productive theorizations of the movement, transmission, and responsiveness of gestural listening. This chapter touches on several dimensions of and possible directions for gestural listening. Having developed a theoretical framework for gestural listening in classrooms, however, the stage is now set for deeper investigations into particular settings where this aspect of a rhetoric of listening may manifest.

For the time being, I would leave readers with the following points, which emerge for me as the most important conceptual takeaways from this chapter. These can also be seen as the conceptual “conditions” that would be needed for gestural listening to become a more significant, actionable tool in classroom situations (although exportable to many other environments):

1. It’s important for both teachers and student to become sensitive to dimensions of stillness and silence that they are unaccustomed to seeing as communicative choices, or even as in any way intentional, learned, or culturally entrained.

So, manifestations of gestural listening can take the form of specific gestures, but should also include stillness as a gestural choice with an equally profound “grammatical” function. As I’ve written in my first chapter, the definition of what counts as a gesture needs to be broader than just isolated, ornamental “hand movements,” for example. Participants in classroom situations should also adopt a similar way of relating to silence: seeing it not just as one monolithic “thing” signifying failure or absence, but rather as a flexible, complex signifier.

2. Following Guillemette Bolens, Suellen Duffey, and Perry Gilmore, identifying the “kinesic style” of both students and teachers would be a worthwhile exercise.

Exercises in pairs could be imagined, during training sessions for teachers, or perhaps in pairs for students in a classroom. Once aspects of someone’s kinesic style are named, that teacher or student could start to think through how to use that to certain ends in the classrooms, or could intentionally strategize about how to change aspects of their kinesic style in order to help cultivate the kind of environment they want.

3. Gestural listening can, at different times, manifest both as the exertion and the subversion of power. It responds to aspects of identity and difference that need to be interpreted on a case-by-case basis but also with systemic categories in mind.
4. I would like my readers to see listening, and gestural listening as its subcategory, as something that helps *create conditions*, whether it’s for debate, for conversation, or for intelligibility, even more fundamentally, in any number of situations.

This is strongly evoked by Andrew Dobson’s formulation of apophatic listening, which is, in essence, the effort to suspend one’s own categories in order to let another’s emerge before

intervening with proposed solutions or counterarguments. Further, with regards to gesturality more specifically, I see this as an attitudinal shift that can manifest both physically and mentally.

3.0 INTERCHAPTER

If there was anything that drove home to me the importance of co-presence in the classroom, it was the herniated L4-5 disc that compelled me to teach virtually for a total of ten weeks in the spring of my third year of graduate school.

Initially, my students and I used Skype video calls to keep our class going. We were able to carry on with readings, discussion, and assignments, but there were certain drawbacks, to be sure. In the virtual version of my classroom that I saw on my computer's desktop, the audio component was limited to the sound picked up by one handheld microphone that students passed around to each other anytime they wanted to answer a question or make a comment. The richness of physical co-presence seemed totally lost, and in the beginning I felt this loss acutely. From an armchair in a corner of my apartment, I spoke to a classroom that felt two-dimensional, its intricate palpability of sound and physical presence immensely reduced. At one point while this was our setup, I asked the class to do some small-group work. Placing the microphone on one of the benches in the middle of the room, students formed groups and started their conversations. On the screen, I could vividly see their groupings, their gestures, their lively reactions to each other, but I could hear nothing but the traffic outside my window and a few brave birds chirping. I could almost hear the collegial hum in the classroom, but in fact I was only seeing this gesturally-rich scene. Saddened, I thought the circuits of gestural listening were gone.

After a few weeks, my class moved to a room specially equipped for video conferencing that used a different software called BlueJeans. A mic was no longer necessary, and specially-

designed cameras could zoom in on whoever spoke. One day in March, while I was in the midst of explaining something, the camera froze. My right hand was suspended high, a few inches away from my forehead, horizontal and flat. This is close to a gesture I make lower on the air when explaining something, under normal circumstances. But to account for the frame of the webcam I'd raised it and exaggerated it, turning it into a weird salute. The freezing BlueJeans camera had momentarily captured one of the adjustments I'd made, without knowing it, to maintain the gestural dimension of my communication even through the virtual boundary of the video-conferencing software. When the camera finally unfroze, I saw my students smiling and heard their friendly laughter. The circuits, it turned out, might still be intact.

4.0 GESTURAL LISTENING AND THE WRITING CENTER'S VIRTUAL BOUNDARIES

Teaching remotely forced me to reflect on how pedagogy adapts to the screen—moreover, how pedagogy is shaped by the rhetorics inherent to software and user interfaces. Without relying on clichés about listening, like those laid out by Jonathan Sterne in his “audio-visual litany,” this chapter positions listening—especially gestural listening—as a force that coheres disjuncture. That is, listening tends to “fill in” for the sensory gaps that come about in screen-mediated learning environments. It may seem counterintuitive to claim listening as a cohering force in the context of teaching via video-conferencing software. However, listening’s expressivity emerges as especially important because of the way video-chatting technologies deeply compromise gestural listening behaviors, e.g. eye contact.

To argue for the importance of expressive listening across digital boundaries, I will be focusing on tutorials conducted via video-conferencing software in university Writing Centers. I draw from interviews conducted with the directors and tutors of Writing Centers offering a remote, video-tutoring option and from observations of video tutorials at Pitt that I organized for the purposes of this chapter. As in the previous chapter, I present ethnographic vignettes that both convey instances of gestural listening and occasion methodological reflection.

In this chapter, I’ll first focus on the construction of a frame in typical video tutoring set-ups before exploring how the face achieves primacy as a result of that apparatus. Moving then to a close reading of the screen as a materiality, I conclude with an exploration of eye contact as an

important gestural listening behavior uniquely vulnerable to the disjunctures of online video tutoring apparatuses.

But why Writing Centers? This move, from the group setting of the classroom to the one-on-one dynamics of tutorials, and further, to their screen-mediated variant, may seem like a confounding choice. But there are several reasons why video Writing Center tutorials are my focus here. First, most Writing Centers practice a version of peer tutoring. Although it's rarely articulated as such, for all the reasons that listening often gets sidelined, the most widely-practiced forms of peer tutoring in the United States rely on a pedagogy built around dialogical listening, making it a productive site to examine gestural listening. Second, peer tutoring conducted via video conferencing software centralizes the faces of its participants. The face, and eye contact in particular, emerge as privileged sites for gestural listening, and require closer examination, which focusing on Writing Center tutorials conducted online allows me to do. The face and the eyes, even as they are centralized, also become particularly vulnerable to the sensory disjunctures brought about by video tutoring.

For these reasons, Writing Center tutorials conducted via video-conferencing software provide a rich area in which to continue my investigation of gestural listening and a rhetoric of listening more broadly. As such, this chapter delves into Writing Center scholarship, couched in my broader inquiry that springs from gesture, sound, and pedagogy. Furthermore, I hope to show that aspects of gestural listening lie at the heart of Writing Center practices, and can help inform pedagogical and technological questions that arise with the growing practice of video tutoring. I begin with one of the most constitutive material aspects of video tutoring: the frame.

4.1 QUESTIONING THE FRAME

“Just yell out if you want me to stop!” the tutee says. The student commences reading her piece of writing aloud, interspersing her reading with verbal self-corrections and questions for the tutor as she goes along. At one point, the tutor breaks in to say: “You read ‘which look’ there; you have ‘who look’ in here [on the page].” The tutee makes the correction, and continues reading.

At first glance, the vignette above depicts a triumph of video tutoring. The classic Writing Center practice of having a tutee read their work aloud proceeds remarkably unhindered by the technological interferences, like echoes or delays, that sometimes plague video conferencing software. During the session, the tutor remarks on sentences that feel too long, the tutee catches and changes words that sound repetitive, and together, they improve the precision and flow of the student’s writing. Indeed, in many ways Writing Center work is well-supported by video conferencing software, and many centers throughout the United States have begun to offer video tutorials. In offering this option, however, Writing Center practitioners need to evaluate the interfaces that enable it, using the same care with which they interrogate aspects of conventional, in-person tutorials. After all, personal computers and their software are not neutral conduits for Writing Center pedagogies. Consider the following moment of capture from another one of my observations of a video tutorial:

While speaking, the tutor gestures gently with one hand, which hovers just above the laptop’s trackpad. Glancing at the computer screen, I note that her hand remains too far beneath the frame of the camera to be caught by it. I can see the tutor’s gesturing, but her tutee can’t.

Later, beneath the desk, the tutor bounces one leg as though full of barely contained energy, another embodied signal the tutee will not be able to see.

As I note in this observation, the most commonly used video-conferencing software in writing tutoring, including Skype, BlueJeans, and GoToMeeting, all rely on the construction of a frame. In a co-present classroom, it might be possible to argue that a lectern, the chalkboard, or the proxemic arrangement of students and instructor in the room might create something like a frame as well, but the logistical and felt experience of that co-present classroom suggest a kinesic flexibility not allowed by the small, rectangular frame of a computer's camera. In *Ambient Commons*, Malcolm McCullough writes: "One core belief in media studies is that when a frame fixes a perspective, it also fixes a cultural position," and that "to question the frame is to expose those conventions" (McCullough 155). Following McCullough, Writing Center practitioners need to ask what cultural position the frame that enables video tutorials fixes, and how it shapes pedagogical practices.

To begin analyzing the conventions of video tutoring, I turn to *Reading Writing Interfaces*, in which Lori Emerson examines and historicizes the idea of an interface.² Emerson traces the progression within the personal computer industry from the command-line interfaces of the early 1980's to the window-based interfaces introduced by Apple in the mid-1980's, and in doing so, she identifies a certain strain of rhetoric that has powerfully guided the development of both hardware and software. Two of the central ideas in this rhetoric are *invisibility* and *user-friendliness*, both of which have implications for video tutoring. Deeply associated with Apple

² An interface, it is important to note, can refer both to human-to- hardware interfaces (like keyboards, screens, and mice), and human-to-software interfaces (namely, the graphical user interface [GUI]). Both matter in Writing Center settings.

products, although not limited to them, Emerson's "invisibility" refers to the way that devices like personal computers have come to seem "hermetically sealed," that is, almost completely unable to be opened or tinkered with by typical consumers (Emerson 31). Emerson argues that contemporary computing devices are defined by their "no-longer noticed closed architecture," their sealed quality hardly ever questioned by most users, and, in fact, actually admired as a part of the products' sleek, elegant aesthetic. The idea of invisibility also carries over from smooth hardware into seamless software. According to Emerson, software interfaces, too, have followed the trend towards invisibility, which, she writes, "now also implies inaccessibility" (6). The document-formatting conventions of Microsoft Word, for example, have become so deeply normalized that breaking out of its given options is a challenge at times, even discouraged. "We need not know how it works," she writes, "or how it works on us rather than us on it" (Emerson 6). Emerson's stance is clear, here: that the appeal of invisibility is also dangerous in its masking of personal computers' inner workings, leaving most users profoundly unaware of how these technologies, so central to the working lives of so many people, actually function. The idea of user-friendliness works alongside invisibility, and refers to the way that designers of personal computing devices strive to make both hardware and software as easy to use as possible, their operation coming to feel deeply natural, almost inevitable. According to Emerson, however, qualities of invisibility and user-friendliness actually hide ideology about what the public's role as users of hardware and software should be: referring to the smooth, intuitive operation of personal computing interfaces, she notes that "we no longer have access to [the] digital tools for making" (3). "Instead," she writes, what we have are "*predetermined choices*" (Emerson 3, italics mine).

Video-conferencing software offers what Emerson would describe as a predetermined set

of choices. Even when options for customization exist, those customizations often appear in the form of a predetermined list of settings or preferences. Sometimes, this lack of choice even impinges upon closely-held Writing Center practices. For instance, one common Writing Center practice is for tutor and tutee to sit next to one another, as opposed to across from each other, a proxemic arrangement which reflects the non-agonistic, non-hierarchical power dynamic that Writing Centers strive to construct. But the graphical user interface of most video conferencing programs effectively asks tutors and tutees to sit face to face; that is, the face-to-face quality is a powerful existing convention for how these programs are used. While it's possible to angle a camera differently, the "default" camera position is a direct, centered shot at the user's face. Further, as of the writing of this chapter, many tutors and tutees are using laptops, which typically embed a camera into the top, center of the screen. With this setup, the angle and height of the camera are givens due to their position in the hardware of the computer. In this case, the conventions of the software and hardware actually subordinate a long-standing pedagogical technique valued in many Writing Centers. Even this minor example illustrates an idea key to Emerson's argument, which is that an interface, whether embedded in hardware or software "does not simply lead from one space to another" but rather inflects how meaning is made, and even what kind of communication is possible (132).

The way the face-to-face layout of video conferencing software overrides the Writing Center preference for sitting side by side emphasizes how users are asked, essentially, to *submit* to the set of communicative choices that current hardware and software interfaces allow. It would be easy, at this point, to take on Emerson's skepticism and remark on how much is lost when instruction occurs online via video. As I point out in the vignettes above, certain communicative actions, and important elements of gestural listening, end up "lost" outside the

parameters of the frame, which is one of the most fundamentally constitutive elements of online video instruction. But perhaps better than submission is simply the idea of constraint. Shifting away from an attitude of loss, we might simply say that the limitations of the interfaces shaping video tutoring ask participants to adjust their behaviors accordingly, and may even give rise to new gestural practices. In addition to whatever losses may be associated with the construction of a frame, the frame brings about a concentration or heightening of other sensorial elements. Either way, the construction of a frame in the graphical user interface of video-conferencing software results in certain, concrete physical adjustments on the part of users. For example, one experienced online tutor noted: “I tend to talk with my hands a lot, so I sit back from the screen” (Steve, 13:25). Here, the tutor adjusts in order for the better part of his gestural communication to remain intact. Another tutor responded differently, and said that she gestured less during her online tutorial, because she could see that her gestures weren’t inside the frame and that as such, the tutee couldn’t see them. Based on my argument in chapter two, it’s important to make note of elements in pedagogical situations that affect gesturality, given the role of gesture in language and learning.

Also worth mentioning at this point is the use of another technology that often goes hand in hand with video tutoring software: headphones. Headphones are often necessary to minimize echoes or other auditory interference during online video appointments, and are sometimes indicated as required in pre-appointment instructions. Headphones, though, exemplify a technology that strongly circumscribes the movement and positioning of the body during their use. Due to their cords, they require the user to sit within a certain distance of the computer. Although wireless headphones are of course on the rise, many Writing center tutors and tutees are literally leashed to the workstation by the use of older, corded headphones.

What comes from this questioning of the frame, so far, is the realization that personal computers used for video tutoring cause the bodies of users to be *still* and *separate*: still in the sense of held still, or contained, within the confines of the video camera, and separate in the sense of being placed and spaced apart from the bodies of others. To take this generalization a step further, personal computing devices, designed for use by humans, in turn shape the physical behaviors of their users. That is, a certain physical regime arises from the use of computers as objects. In her study of screen-reliant installation art, *Screens*, Kate Mondloch notes how, when interacting with video installations involving cameras that cause viewers to see themselves, “viewers [often] implement self-policing boundaries to keep themselves visible on the screen” (34). Although a range of interactive behaviors might be possible, Mondloch notices that viewers tend to adjust to keep themselves centered in the frame.

Listening, like all other communicative elements, adapts to the construction of a frame. To compensate for the limitations of the frame, participants in video tutoring rely more heavily on the aspects of gestural listening that do survive the digital in-between of the screen, and they also rely more heavily on verbal cues that reflect attention and responsiveness. One important way that this plays out stems, once again, from the construction of a frame, and gives rise to a prioritizing of the face.

4.2 THE PRIMACY OF THE FACE

The cameras flicker on, and tutor and tutee center their head and shoulders in the frame. After brief greetings, the tutor says, “So tell me about the assignment you’re working on today.”

“One second!” the tutee responds. “I was trying it without the headphones, but it’s not as good. ...Okay, so this project is...I did an internship, and I have to sort of write a reflective

paper... ” Without further ado, the appointment is underway.

The frame that video-conferencing software produces leads to a focus on the faces of the participants. The face, after all, tends to be centered in the frame, and the frame itself captures only a small rectangle containing the face and what surrounds it. This aspect of selection, as “normal” as it may feel to those habituated to video conferencing software, nevertheless has implications for Writing Center practices and scholarship.

As in the vignette above, introductory aspects of face-to-face appointments tend to get shortened. Rob Patterson, the director of the Writing Center at Washington University at St. Louis, MO, notes that video tutoring, as opposed to asynchronous online tutoring, helps in “making the reader very real” (4:27), but he then goes on to remark upon the differences in the first few minutes of a tutorial between in-person and virtual set-ups. Online, he says: “we don’t have the back-and-forth of a greeting that feels natural” (7:20). Another interviewee, Dr. Jim Purdy of Duquesne University’s Writing Center, agreed, noting that online sessions seem to just “hit the track running” and skip some of the early conversation that helps set up a Writing Center-style relationship between the tutor and tutee. This aspect of the interface, then, most obviously affects aspects of rapport-building.

The quality of simply appearing in the frame of the camera, however, may have more far-reaching effects as well, due to information that can be attained by a person’s physical, in-person presence. Consider the choreography of a co-present setting: a student enters the Writing Center and often checks in at a front desk. They may sit, possibly in a waiting area, until their appointment time, when their tutor comes over, greets them, and leads them to a table to begin their tutorial. They arrange themselves at the table. These steps, as mundane as they may seem, get elided or eliminated by the interface of video conferencing, where tutor and tutee just

“appear” with their faces in the frame.

As obvious as these aspects of co-presence may here, from the perspective of gesture studies, their informative power should not be underestimated. Harry Denny explores aspects of this kind of “informative in-personness” when he takes up the idea of face in *Facing the Writing Center: Towards an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring*. Denny deals with the idea of face by walking a line between its physical and metaphorical meanings. At times, a student’s physical appearance, their physical face, brings about a threat to their metaphorical face, or a sense of respect or belonging in the eyes of others in a given community. Denny recounts a time when a white international student from Russia sat down to have an appointment with Allia, a Black woman and graduate student tutor at St. John’s University. The tutee, Denny writes, “has inflected a current events paper with what the tutor perceives as racist rhetoric. When she pushes the student to think about her argumentation, the student says she thought her tutor was going to be one of the white tutors and questions her tutor’s qualifications” (32). Allia responds by explaining her qualifications to the tutee and continuing with the appointment. Allia’s literal face, in this instance, becomes part of a conflict in the tutorial, one that brings about a challenge to the tutor’s credibility and forces her to defend it. This dimension of face is likely to be maintained in video tutorial settings.

Other times, Denny’s “face” is more strongly the metaphorical kind, although not without a dimension of the physical. Denny writes the following passage about a student named David who comes to the Writing Center for an appointment. David comes from a working-class Latino community in New York City, and Denny describes him as highly self-conscious about his own ability to fit, especially in his use of language, into St. John’s middle class environment. David at one point has a tutorial with a “thoroughly middle-class white woman who had transferred to

[Denny's] school from an elite liberal arts college" (Denny 76). Observing them, Denny writes the following:

She performed the very all-American college affect that David sought to mirror. Watching them from my office was a curious ethnographic experience: From afar Eliza and David looked like an ad for Abercrombie and Fitch, Eliza more casual and effortless than David, whose performance of the college boy persona felt forced, too self-conscious at times. It was in this sense that he represented a failure to negotiate the complex rules of class: that to assimilate or cover requires a profound internalization and performance; and that success is almost always fleeting (76).

Denny's observations bring forward an idea within gesture studies: that bodies and faces can, at times, be a kind of liability—they can “give us away,” as David is given away here in his appointment with Eliza. Despite looking from afar “like an Abercrombie and Fitch ad,” an image that encapsulates a certain idealized vision of the American “college-kid” identity, upon closer examination, David's performance is too “forced” and “self-conscious.” Being together in the room is what allows the appointment to even approximate the appearance of the idealized advertisement, and it also allows that unrealistic illusion to come up short. The reader sees this through Denny's eyes, with Denny performing a kind of spectatorship in which he views the appointment between Eliza and David from a distance. His ability to draw the conclusions that he does about the two of them, and their respective sense of “belonging” in the academy, comes directly from being able to see them, their whole bodies, their postures, comportment, and self-arrangement in the space. In this passage, he gives a reading of a tableau, a tableau that would be fractured and stretched by the apparatus of video tutoring, which, as I argue above, stills and separates the bodies of participants in a way that disallows this kind of reading. What's notable here is that Denny's view is not restricted to the faces of the participants. Without the restraint of the frame, he is able to “read” many more aspects of their embodiment. In person, a different range of communicative choices can be drawn upon by participants in Writing Center tutorials.

It's easy to see why the face, as one of the most concentrated sites of emotion and communication in the body, would be prioritized by designers of video-conferencing software. But simply being able to see the face of another person does not necessarily guarantee clarity of meaning or expression. One of the most significant scholarly efforts to study the complexities of facial expression comes from psychologist Paul Ekman. In his book with Wallace C. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face*, Ekman and Friesen outline the minute physical manifestations of six different common emotions, including surprise. Here, he describes when the overt features of surprised facial expressions become a kind "performance" that actually comes to signify something else: "Although the surprise brow is usually joined by wide-open eyes and dropped jaw," Ekman and Friesen write, "it sometimes appears in an otherwise neutral face. When this happens, the facial expression no longer signifies an emotion; it has different meanings, some of which are related to surprise" (39). They go on to describe this facial phenomenon, not real surprise but "related" to it, as a common one leveraged by listeners:

When the brow is held in place for a few seconds or more, this is an *emblem* which means doubt or questioning. Frequently it is shown by a person who is listening to what someone is saying; it registers without words a question or doubt about what is being said. The questioning or doubting may be serious or not; often this emblem will express mock doubt, the listener's incredulity or amazement about what she has just heard. If joined by a head movement, sideways or backwards, it is an exclamation. If the surprise brow is joined by a disgust mouth, then the meaning of the emblem changes slightly to skeptical disbelief, or if the head rotates back and forth, incredulous exclamation (Ekman and Friesen 39).

Two major points come out of this passage. First, this kind of performative facial expression represents one way that listeners commonly continue to exert communicative power in conversational situations even when not speaking. Notably, what Ekman and Friesen refer to here are not spontaneous, involuntary facial expressions, but rather strategic performances of them. According to Ekman, people often control their facial expressions because of "cultural

display rules” (139). Cultural display rules are a useful way of thinking about how students and teachers use facial expressions in classroom environments, and especially the phenomenon of misleading facial expressions. Students and instructors can be said to operate within cultural rules of display in their classroom comportment.

Secondly, this excerpt reminds readers that simply being able to see the face of another person does not guarantee any kind of simple clarity or authenticity in a communicative encounter. While I devote significant space to analyzing aspects of screenic interference and affordance in this chapter, it’s important to remember that the human face itself is said by some gesture theorists to be itself a kind of screen. At first, this realization may seem to undercut the value of being able to see the face without the veil of a screen in between participants. But Ekman’s research on detecting lies demonstrates the multi-layered complexity of the face, and why it may still be important to be able to see it. “Usually when a person is said to lie with his face or words, he lies to meet some need of the moment,” he writes (Ekman 139). But the controlling of facial expressions “can involve false messages or the omission of messages” as well (Ekman 139). “The word lying,” he continues, “may be itself misleading about what occurs. It suggests that the only important message is the true feeling that underlies the false message. But the false message is important as well, if you know it is false. Rather than calling the process lying, we might better call it message control” (139). What Ekman calls “message control” is one reason why centralizing the face in video conferencing software removes important communicative information. As can be seen in the excerpt from Denny, above, the bodies of participants allow for different communicative choices and the gathering of more embodied information.

What emerges, further, is the sense that the visual regime of personal computing and, by extension, of video-conferencing platforms, is complex, but that the gestural and audio regimes do not match that complexity. Moreover, this has implications for writing pedagogy. Often, for example, tutor and tutee will move through a piece of writing with the help of deictic gestures, pointing, grasping, framing, etc. But, as I have shown, the visual conventions of video tutoring give primacy to the face: the hands can make an appearance in the frame, but not in relation to the text. To some extent, the lack of the gestural can be made up for on programs like WCOOnline, which allows tutor and tutee to interact with the written text on the screen, but the communicative flexibility of the hands is nevertheless reduced to the functions allowed by the screen—highlighting and typing, for example. The privileging of the face in most video conferencing software used for writing instruction reveals a lack of creativity in the way those softwares are designed. Why not, for example, develop a type of software or camera orientation that privileges the hands? The hands, in many respects, are one of the primary bodily locations for writing. Giving primacy to the face makes the idea of dialogue and audience the main facet of writing tutoring. Giving primacy to the hands, in contrast, would centralize slightly different aspects of writing: perhaps aspects of craft and construction, like how much space on the page is given to a paper's different ideas, or the importance of ordering and arrangement on the page. Better yet, why not be able to move between the face and the hands, or be able to see both at once? Greater flexibility and creativity in the design of video tutoring software will be necessary, but new interface choices should come from Writing Center pedagogies and priorities.

The frame of the camera does not just centralize the face: it also serves to help create a sense of place. Jackie Grutsch McKinney gives a sense of why this is important by explaining what she calls the “grand narrative” of writing center work. She writes: “Many involved in

writing center work have internalized what I have called the writing center grand narrative and when confronted with new ideas, our instinct is to see how the new idea fits into our existing internalized, collective narrative” (17). “Failing this,” she continues, “we might reject ideas that we cannot place within our existing story of our work:”

“For many, the move to online tutoring in the 1990s was a new idea that was hard to place. The writing center story told of students and tutors meeting together, face-to-face in cozy spaces over physical texts. The loss of the physical place, human bodies and voices, and physical texts have made some question how well online tutoring even fits with the writing center model (e.g., see Carpenter 2008). Some writing center practitioners were able to resolve themselves to online tutoring only when it looked more familiar—when it was able to capture human bodies and voices through audio-textual-visual tutoring (see Yergeau et al. 2008). In constructivist terms, they could map audio-visual-textual tutoring more easily onto traditional face-to-face tutoring and thereby audio-visual-textual tutoring began to make sense as part of the already established narrative (McKinney 17).

A sense of place is especially important to McKinney’s argument about what fits into the writing center grand narrative. Writing center practitioners seem especially attached to the idea of cozy spaces, perhaps spaces that resemble the studies or living rooms of some students’ homes. But as soon as the grand narrative of writing center work is articulated, many of its aspects emerge as problematic. As McKinney points out, the cozy spaces of writing centers may resemble the homes of some students more than others, and likewise for the writing center’s codes of hospitality. In short, what many feel by default are charming face-to-face meetings in cozy spaces are actually approximating a certain vision of middle-class American life. The excerpt from Harry Denny’s book above gives an example of the way that some students may in fact be alienated by the default physical spaces of writing centers.

A further point that emerges from McKinney’s work is that, as she writes, “Writing center practitioners were able to resolve themselves to online tutoring only when it looked more familiar” (17). Part of what this means is that online tutoring became acceptable as it became

possible to look *through* rather than *at* its technological apparatus. As hardware and software apparatuses for video tutoring became more seamless, moving more towards the invisibility and user-friendliness that Emerson emphasizes, online tutoring came to be integrated into shared visions of what the writing center does. I want to resist the momentum to only look *through*, in line with Emerson's skeptical attitude toward invisibility and user-friendliness, and to dwell further on the ambivalent materiality of the screen.

4.3 THE MATERIALITY OF THE SCREEN: FROM FRAME AND WINDOW TO BARRIER AND MIRROR

The willingness of writing center practitioners to look *through* rather than *at* the screen that enables online tutoring requires a kind of close material reading of the screen itself. Anne Friedberg does this in her book, *The Virtual Window*, in which she traces an exhaustive history, both material and intellectual, of windows, as architectural features and as objects with rich metaphorical function. As an art historian, her starting point is a famous quotation from the Renaissance painter Alberti which likens the frame of the painting to a window that frames the subject being painted. Alberti writes: "Let me tell you what I do when I am painting. First of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, *which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen*" (Friedberg 249).

According to Friedberg, this quotation set the stage for the development of genres of painting, which would in turn go on to shape future media as well, especially screen media. Personal computers fell in line with the same set of metaphors as of their prevalent interfaces developed in the 1980s. Friedberg writes: "The computer screen is both a 'page' and a 'window,' at once opaque and transparent" (19). Furthermore, and of particular interest to this study, "it

commands a new posture for the practice of writing and reading—one that requires looking into the page as if it were the frame of a window” (19). She continues: “The computer screen adds a new depth to the perpendicular surface. Its overlay of ‘windows’—open to different applications for word-processing, Web browsing, emailing, downloading—transforms the screen surface into a page with a deep virtual reach to archives and databases, indexed and accessible with barely the stroke of a finger” (19). For Friedberg, the coexistence of depth and flatness characterizes screen media ongoingly.

The desktop metaphor of a stack of papers, in overlapping array, implies a view from above. The window metaphor implies looking into or out of an aperture, a ‘perspective’ position facing an upright perpendicular surface. Stacking windows on top of each other, piling documents in layers, meant that the user could maximize the limited ‘real estate’ of the relatively small screen. The space mapped onto the computer screen was both deep and flat. It implied a new haptics in the position of its user: in front of and above. 227

Each user in a video writing tutorial, then, may look upon the other as though slightly from on high. These haptics are clearly quite different from the haptics of being in a space together, more clearly dramatized by the excerpt from Harry Denny in *Facing the Writing Center*, above. The “real estate” of the screen brings about questions of what can be seen at the same time, for instance the student as well as the document they’re working on, but also questions relating to visibility and opacity through and on the screen itself. For instance, the stacking windows which allow for the piling of documents means that one user can quickly switch to a different window on the desktop and completely cover the face of the other participant.

By definition, then, screens raise a barrier, even as they convey the illusion of depth, or opening onto another space. This plays out in particular ways in the context of video tutoring. At centers where Skype and GoogleDocs are used simultaneously during online tutorials, or even if a shared document is simply on the screen alongside the Skype window, it’s possible for the

tutor or tutee to be looking at something else entirely on their screen rather than at the other person in the Skype frame. Steve Pijut noted to me that although this may not be intended, he can always hear when a tutee is typing (11:28). In response, he told me that he too makes sure to let the tutee know if he's typing during an appointment, and why. Brad Hughes, of the Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, picks up on the theme of the opacity of the computer screen. He remarks that there's a need to pay attention to "managing expectations about who's writing during the session in that shared GoogleDoc; whether the expectation...is even higher electronically than it is in person that a tutor is going to write things on the document...so being explicit about those roles" (7:50). In a case like this, listening may manifest in doing something to the shared document. It emerges as important to be extra explicit about who will be doing what, and when.

After all, silence is a complex signifier, and can be unsettling in the context of a video tutoring session. Dr. Hughes goes on to say that: "Then there are times when the writer seems to go missing or be quiet—we don't know if connection—you know what it's like with Skype sometimes...it just cuts out or you can't hear something for a while or you're not sure—did the writer step out of the room? Did they go get something to eat, are they watching a movie? Who knows how people are multitasking—I hear this from TAs on our staff...there are some things they have to get used to." (9:15). These observations show most clearly how the screen acts literally like a screen, that is, like a barrier.

In addition to the construction of a frame, using many video-conferencing software, participants are made to *see themselves* in unusual ways. Over Skype, both parties can see a small image of themselves, moving and talking, in the corner of the screen. In the screenshots in the preceding interchapter, taken from my computer during one of my Skyped classes, my

classrooms can be seen on the screen, as well as what I could see of myself in the right-hand corners. Video conferencing platforms routinely include a function where participants can see themselves—in fact, it has become an expectation for this type of software. At times, the self-facing camera actually acts as the confirmation that the other caller can see you. That is, if you can't see yourself, your contact can't see you either.

In a follow-up conversation with the tutor in the vignettes above, she noted how distracting it was to be seeing herself on camera during the tutorial. “It does make you more self-conscious,” she said, noting that during the tutorial she had seen and fixed an out-of-place lock of hair in the self-facing camera. She also observed that the setup creates the problem of not knowing where to look—at the tutee, at the text, at herself? The tutor went on to say that it was a lot to look at for someone easily distracted like herself, and it made her wonder whether it might not be better to go back to just using telephones for distance conferencing. Or maybe it would be nice to see the student, she mused, but not herself?

Last fall, I interviewed an experienced video writing tutor from the Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, who said: “Sometimes when I switch back over to skype [after not being in that window for a while] I'll realize that I've been...kind of hunched down to the point that I'm almost out of the frame...of vision” (5:08). She often responds by sitting up straighter. After pauses during which she's not looking at herself, one of the tutors I interviewed said: “I semi-regularly kind of forget how my face is coming across” (5:20). Similarly to sitting up straighter upon seeing herself slouched in the camera frame, the tutor put this forward as a problem, as though she should be aware at all times of whether or how her face is communicating. The self-facing Skype camera seemed to chasten her with the constant reminder of what her face was doing when she was paying the least attention.

The self-facing camera could be said to heighten participants' awareness of how they might be communicating with their faces in any given moment. Essentially, these situations unique to the video conferencing apparatus ask tutors, teachers, tutees, and students to become more aware than they might usually be of how their bodies are or are not manifesting the act of listening. The anecdotes that I sketch in the last paragraphs start to suggest how. For example, when the first tutor is hunched down almost out of the frame, she would be likely to say, if asked, that that posture probably wouldn't make the tutee feel that she was engaged in attentive listening.

The way participants in video tutoring sessions compensate for the barrier of the screen goes to show, as I've argued in the previous chapter, that there exist listening behaviors that have developed into expected conventions in communicative situations. Furthermore, participants tend to compensate for the diminishment of those behaviors in two ways: first, by relying on verbal cues that reflect listening. Second, they adjust listening's gestural elements, keeping themselves within the frame of the camera and being sure to sit up straight, for example. This is a reminder that, as I argue in my first two chapters, that listening is an entrained behavior. Aspects of gestural listening are so entrained, in fact, that certain elements of gestural listening prevail in spite of their detriment to mental processes. A major example of this is a physical behavior deeply tied to performances of listening: eye contact.

4.4 SCREENIC LISTENING AND EYE CONTACT

Within the face, the eyes merit more attention as particularly concentrated communicative tools, for which video-conferencing software creates a special set of issues. Among the interviews that I conducted with experienced online video tutors, one says: "I always struggle with where to

look” (Pijut). Whether looking at the tutee’s face on the screen or at the computer’s camera, he told me, “something’s a little off” (2:40). Skype and its ilk, as they stand now, actually hinder the form of body language that might be the most commonly used to reflect attentive listening—eye contact. A person can choose to look at the eyes of the other person on the screen, *or* at the computer’s camera. Looking at the camera brings about the visual illusion, for one participant, that eyes are meeting, but in fact one person is looking not at the image of the other person but at the camera at the top of the computer frame. In other words, there’s no way to make real eye contact.

Eye contact is a gestural listening behavior that is as important as it is misunderstood. Harboring both cultural and physiological components, eye contact is closely tied to cognition, intimacy, and power. Studies have shown that Infants prefer faces that engage them in direct gaze, and that early experiences of eye contact may form the basis for future social skills (Senju et al.). But a fundamental misnomer lies at the heart of the term “eye contact:” what we tend to think of as eye contact, it turns out, is actually not really contact at all. The phrase “eye contact” lends itself to the sense that the eyes of two people meet and lock in a kind of beam stretching between them. This is a misleading image: in reality, a sustained gaze is actually comprised of multiple, fleeting eye movements that encompass not just the eyes but also the nose, cheeks, and mouth, other areas of the face that inform about identity and emotion (Ekstein and Peterson). Photographs that track study participants’ gaze when looking at a face show concentrated clusters not on the eyes, but rather on and around the nose (Ekstein and Peterson). These rapid movements are what allow the visual system to put together information about the identity of a viewed person and what they may be thinking or feeling. Further, eye contact is socially preferred in many cultures, but as it turns out, this may be more socially preferred than

cognitively optimal. Japanese studies have found that maintaining eye contact impedes participants' ability to do perform a cognitive task, such as naming the color of a word (Kajimura and Nomura). Eye contact, it seems, takes up large amounts of mental bandwidth, and may not actually foster the best cognitive environment for certain types of tasks.

In spite of this knowledge, however, the concept of eye contact in popular imagination is so strong that it remains important pedagogically, and it emerges as a key aspect in the success and failure of video tutoring. As a result of the way that eye contact is compromised, other gestural listening conduits need to be leveraged more heavily, as well as more verbalizing to help alleviate the disjunctures of the video apparatus. Elisa notes that “one way that I demonstrate that I’m listening is that I’m highlighting things or making marginal comments...[and] I’ll forwarn them that I’ll do that ...so that they know I’m with them and engaged, that something is happening” (9:30). Dr. Purdy echoes Elisa, saying: “the removal of visual cues asks the consultant to be intentional about signaling their place in the conversation, and maybe kind of guiding things in a more explicit kind of way to make it clear that they’re still listening, that they’re following along, that they’re understanding, but since there’s not the normal nodding of the head or smiling...those sorts of moments can be more intentional, if the consultants are thinking about doing that. I think initially sometimes they forget” (4:24). Tutors and directors may want to consider what Dr. Hughes calls “intentionality,” here, being sure to respond to the need to replace the usual visual and auditory cues with verbal or textual ones. When the dialogic aspects of listening don’t get communicated, negative consequences can result: ranging from confusion to alienation to resentment. There may also be a need to tolerate silences whose significations are unclear.

Because, as Purdy admits, the affective dimension is harder to read online. “Even with the video,” he says, “it’s a little harder sometimes to read facial expressions and visual cues” (21:24). Elisa talks briefly about how this plays out, how she pays attention to: “how I’m listening to [the tutee] and how I’m letting them kind of guide the conversation...making sure to take note of moments when they look like they want to say something or they start to say something right as I do when I cut them off and make sure to go to back that” (7:30). She goes on: “so their face is also really important to me in the session...if they look confused, or disconnected, or like they want to say something” (8:10). In an article called “Contact with My Teacher’s Eyes,” Yin Yin investigates some of the affective dimensions of eye contact in pedagogical situations, attending to both students’ and teachers’ experiences. Using a similar vignette method as I used in this dissertation, Yin Yin identifies pressure, belonging, and intellectual excitement all as possible results of making eye contact with one’s instructor during class. In one vignette, the author brings forth in particular the sense of pressure that can arise from eye contact between student and teacher:

There lies the ambiguity of unspoken eye language, the vagueness in silence. However, perhaps it is unnecessary to fathom the original meaning in his teacher’s look. It is not as important to trace back the teacher’s purpose as to see what has happened to Andy: he “hears” the teacher’s demand for concentration. He becomes so nervous and vigilant. His body is no more under the veil of pre-reflectivity; his nervousness gathers extra attention to hasten his hand to take note word for word (72).³

³ The author, Yin Yin, is a graduate student at the time of this article’s publication, but one who is herself the speaker of English as a second language. As a result, her syntax and the way she conveys the students’ responsiveness comes across as unusual. She departs from the usual ways of rendering listening, and in doing so, actually arrives at new ways to convey it. Yin Yin’s rendering of Andy’s listening behavior resonates with a point that I bring forward in my second chapter about the need to find new ways to describe listening behaviors in writing. For example, in the phrase “his nervousness gathers extra attention to hasten his hand to take note word for word.” First, it’s unusual to make nervousness the subject of the phrase in this way. We don’t often think of nervousness itself gathering attention. The clauses in that final part of the sentence also seem to pile up: “to hasten his hand,” “to take note,” “word for word.”

Here, the author prioritizes the student's response to eye contact with the instructor, which is to become nervous and vigilant after making eye contact. The author writes that "his body is no longer under the veil pre-reflectivity." Rather, it is pushed out from that veil, and stands exposed. Eye contact can be such a powerful a choice that Yin Yin writes: "the value of knowing student's experience of having eye contact with us lies in getting to know both the power and limit in the eye contact. We should not only know when to make eye contact with a student. We have to know when to not give it" (78). According to Yin Yin and my interviewees, eye contact functions as a kind of two-way street: it can serve as a means of reception, but also as means to provoke speech and build expectation. A distinctive aspect of eye contact is its exclusiveness—it can only be formed between exactly two people at a time, after all, and this sudden forming a dyad within a group may account for the sense it creates of closeness, or pressure.

At first blush, it may seem counterintuitive to focus on eye contact, so central to vision, in a study about listening. But the importance of eye contact to listening behavior goes to show how listening, vision, and touch, in particular, are best understood as a kind of *field* of sensory perception, rather than rigidly differentiated parts. Above, Yin Yin uses the word "hear" to convey the student's response to his eye contact with the teacher: Andy "'hears' the teacher's demand for concentration.'" In the context of the original text, this comes across as something as something of a mixed metaphor, in the sense that the student "hears" eye contact. To emphasize the oddness of that mixed metaphor, she puts the word in quotations marks. Although her article doesn't deal with listening specifically, the exploratory and ambivalent wording used to describe a quality of responsiveness resonates with the way I formulate listening in this dissertation, weaving auditory, visual, and tactile elements together.

4.5 PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

For Writing Center tutors to identify their own embodied habits, choices, or kinesic ways of being emerges as a worthwhile exercise. While filming tutorials might seem like a natural choice, I suggest a different approach. An activity that I have conducted in Writing Center workshops involves having two tutors enact ten minutes or so of a mock tutorial. While they do so, two other tutors silently observe, taking notes on certain aspects of gestural listening that they are given secretly in advance on an index card (eye contact, posture and body positioning, how participants use their hands, etc.). After the mock tutorial, the observers reveal what they have been looking for and share their findings with the group. Then, tutors switch roles and the new observers take notes on a different set of listening behaviors, followed once again by discussion.

Building from this, it will be important to become aware of cultural preferences around eye contact and other kinesic choices, as well as the ways these habits and choices may respond to aspects of identity like race and gender. Power dynamics often manifest in acts of listening, so tutors in ongoing training sessions might be encouraged to consider: in any given situation, who gets to be listened to and who gets to listen? Are certain individuals or groups more often forced into listening roles? On the other hand, when do the more powerful players in a communicative situation leverage that power to become a kind of listening “judge?”

Lastly, Writing Center directors might want to consider how they can help those facilitating online video tutorials sensitize to aspects of interface, and the ways that layered, culturally- and historically-situated tutoring interfaces come to bear on Writing Center pedagogies. Directors may imagine different ways of going about this, asking tutors to reflect on elements of interface and embodiment.

4.6 LISTENING ACROSS VIRTUAL BOUNDARIES

What notion of listening prevails here, at the end of this deep dive into the nuances of video tutoring? A conception of listening that is expressive, participatory, entrained, and suasive. Video tutoring highlights the expressivity of listening in the way that it fragments and compromises the sensorium. In the face of this fragmentation, listening's expressive qualities take on even more importance, serving to overcome and help cohere the fragmentation brought about by the technologies of video tutoring. Furthermore, cultivating the expressive aspects of gestural listening helps video tutoring succeed.

5.0 THE SCHOOLING OF WRITING AND GESTURAL LISTENING

Nicolas Philibert's 2002 film, *Être et Avoir*, follows a year at a small elementary school in the French countryside. There, a small class of students, ranging in age from four to eleven, are led by a gentle, bespectacled teacher named Georges Lopez. In one early scene, the school's young pupils arrive to the classroom in the morning and stand behind their small chairs, waiting with anticipation for Monsieur Lopez's word. Lopez has clearly instituted this daily moment of pause and patience at the start of things; he looks to make sure his young charges all adhere to this part of their class routine. At his cue, they pull out their chairs as one, and sit, marking the start of another day of school.

Être et Avoir often feels like a documentary in its style, focusing as it does not on actors, but on Lopez, his local students, and their families. The film's "slice of life" approach foregrounds the small, daily efforts at discipline and direction that comprise elementary schooling for the minds and bodies of children. Lopez's insistence on having the children wait behind their chairs, for example, represents a gentle but profound instance of how schooling can be understood as a corporeal education in addition to an intellectual one. I use moments from this film as invitations to explore, in this chapter, how school shapes and even produces the bodies of students, and especially their language activities. While not ethnographic in nature, I include moments from the film at the beginning of sections to provide live, idiosyncratic examples of ideas that the chapter handles, serving both to illustrate and complicate those ideas.

Here, I hope to show that both handwriting and gestural listening are physical practices taught by school. I argue that their instruction differs in important ways due to their respective

abilities—or lack thereof, in the case of listening—to leave a *trace*. In addition to the relative durability of writing’s inscription, which causes it to be prioritized over nuanced listening instruction, I want to suggest that handwriting instruction actually epitomizes the kind of global physical control required by school. In examining gestural listening and handwriting in tandem, as co-constitutive, I aim to unsettle how these two skills have fared under a persistent, limiting binary that separates the language activities into categories of active and passive. Ultimately, in examining examples of “non-normative” gestural listening in my own classroom, I suggest that what results from strict active/passive divisions are “preferred” listening performances, or preferred versions of how listening should manifest in the body, which marginalize those who don’t, can’t, or won’t perform them. I then speculate that the affordances of listening more generally—that is, what listening can actually *do*—may be limited by the constrained gestural listening behaviors that are widely considered acceptable.

5.1 CHALLENGING THE ACTIVE/PASSIVE BINARY IN EARLY LITERACY

Axel, a boy of four or five, is seated at a low table, reading aloud. Lopez sits beside and slightly behind him. The boy reads the first few words of a passage before looking suddenly off to another part of the room, as though something has caught his interest. He looks for a few seconds, his fingers gently moving against each other, before being prompted gently by Lopez: “Where’s our book?” he asks. Axel smiles sheepishly. “Here,” he replies, pointing down with two fingers to tap the open workbook. “So look here,” Lopez says.

Axel sounds out the words he doesn’t recognize. Lopez supplies a word from time to time, but only after Axel has tried the first syllable, testing the word aloud with his ear. As he reads,

Axel touches the text, the small fingers of both hands alternately tracing the lines of text and holding the page in place.

For young children in particular, listening is an important tool to help develop literacy skills, creating as it does a kind of conduit for the cyclical, recursive processes of speaking, reading, and writing. Above, Axel leverages his listening abilities, which have been tested in almost every waking moment through daily conversation with family members and friends. Those abilities help Axel match combinations of letters with meaningful sounds that he recognizes from speech. He reads, speaks, and listens at once, all these processes feeding into each other. In later scenes, the children speak softly while practicing their handwriting. An older student, nine or ten, works to write down the words of a dictation. He mouths, during a pause, the words of a sentence read aloud by Lopez, using his mouth and his ear to help him arrive at correct spelling and grammar. Marie Clay, a New Zealand psychologist and researcher, articulates the elements of listening that are built into acts of early writing: “Writing forces learners to search their speech for the acoustic units that count in printed language so that they can represent them in writing” (Clay 146). “A child trying to write an unknown word,” she continues, “or literate adults trying to write down names they have never seen in writing *find ways of analyzing the flow of sounds in words* (146, italics mine). When children or adults “find ways” to “analyze the flow of sounds,” listening takes on a crucial function in facilitating the movement from speech to writing and reading. This skill is called “phonological awareness,” and it demonstrates a fundamental interconnectedness between the four language activities. This interconnectedness, or underlying multimodality in which listening plays a key role, is the norm in much of early literacy education.

Despite that interconnectedness, there exists a pervasive tendency to think of reading and listening as the more “passive” language skills, and writing and speaking, by contrast, as the more “active” skills. As Axel and his classmates demonstrate, though, certain types of listening, like his “listening-while-reading aloud,” can actually be quite generative, and must be undertaken with a certain amount of intentionality and effort. The binary of reading-and-listening-as-passive and writing-and-speaking-as-active quickly emerges as much too simplistic a characterization of these language activities. But that initial characterization is a tenacious one: in fact, dominant attitudes about active and passive skills have historically shaped pedagogical methods. Scholars and practitioners of early literacy through the mid-20th century tend to underestimate the role of writing in early education. Instead, reading usually comes first, an approach that implicitly understands reading as a more passive first step, to be followed by the more active writing once a mastery of reading is well underway.

Marie Clay, who I cite above, argues against this tendency to think about reading as a prerequisite to writing. As a prominent early literacy specialist who developed the now-widespread Reading Recovery program, Clay suggests, in contrast, that writing, even before its motor components are fully mastered, has much to offer the development of reading skills in youngsters. “Writing,” she claims, “is easier to attend to than reading when you are little” (Clay 104). “In the act of writing, somehow, what you look at, and how you do it, and what people around you do, are more apparent to preschoolers than the more mystical act of reading, silently or even reading aloud from a book” (Clay 104). Rather than thinking in terms of active or passive, Clay pays attention to the material or embodied differences between writing and reading. What Clay observes is that the act of writing tends to be a more *overtly* embodied activity, one with more readily observable movements of hand and arm, and more palpable

results—a written text, a visible and touchable trace, as opposed to the less visible or trackable act of reading.

So far, I hope to show through Clay and the students of *Être et Avoir* that an oversimplified categorization of the four language acts as active and passive skills can actually prohibit productive ways to go about early literacy pedagogy, ways that acknowledge its inherent multimodality. What I also want to point out about this scene is that Axel’s listening has not yet been channeled into certain performed behaviors: that is, the stillness and quietness. Instead, his listening is embodied and generative, linked as it is to the more visible and audible act of speech. The sensorium has not been partitioned off quite yet—it still exists as an only vaguely-differentiated field.

This will soon begin to change, as reading and writing continue to be developed in school as more and more automatic and silent activities. And although she at first seems to advocate for an integrated, embodied listening, Clay goes on to make a deceptively simple assertion that reveals complex, conflicted attitudes about the role of listening in children’s achievement of literacy. In arguing for the incorporation of writing into reading instruction, she states that “learning to write contributes to the building of almost every new kind of inner control needed to become a successful reader” (Clay 135). Clay reminds readers, here, first of all, that despite seeming “mystical” to young children, reading, too, requires specific, cultivated physical skills—it requires “inner control.” But what is meant by this evocative phrase?

It contains (at least) two possible meanings: first, the inner control of attending to the right elements on the page, and cultivating small movements like eye tracking. Secondly, and possibly more globally, inner control may refer to the idea of holding the whole body still enough—for long enough—to engage in the task of reading. The very phrase “hold still”

contains the idea that stillness requires not just a loss or lack of inertia, but an active effort to contain existing energy, to actually prevent other types of movements in any given moment. Indeed, Clay advocates for writing in reading instruction *because* of its slowness. “Speaking can be very fast,” she writes, while writing, in contrast, is “slowed by the motor, muscular, or movement nature of the task and by the need to construct every detail of the words, not just in forming the letters but also in juxtaposing one against another” (137). So writing, according to Clay, helps as a kind of *transition* into the embodiment of reading, which is more subtle, more “mystical,” and makes heavier demands on students’ ability to exercise physical and attentional control: to *do stillness*.

Doing stillness is no easy task. For much of the scene that I start this section with, the camera frames Axel closely as he reads. Mr. Lopez (the teacher), beside him, is only partially visible, with only part of his shoulder, one hand, and part of his face in the frame. There’s something about this framing that turns the gentle, middle-aged Lopez into a kind of archetypal teacherly presence—a hand, an arm, a voice. Axel, by contrast, rocks and fidgets, as though just barely contained by his chair, as though at any moment, if left alone, his little frame would be up and off somewhere else, moving, touching. The child’s effort to hold still is palpable; Lopez’s stillness serves to throw Axel’s wriggling further into relief. The types of control necessary for the task at hand are numerous: Lopez also helps the boy keep his place in the text, pointing out where to start reading at first, and reminding him where he left off after his moment of distraction. Through the combination of reading, listening, speaking, and global bodily control, all condensed into what we usually call “reading aloud,” Axel works hard at many types of inner control. A little later, he and the other youngest students are shown writing “7’s” on the white board with varying degrees of success, dots and lines guiding their progress. Their slow, visible

efforts, markers big in their little hands, serve to defamiliarize and make palpable, for the viewer, the physical and mental effort necessary for acts of early writing.

A conflict begins to take shape around the role of listening in early literacy. A teacher must encourage a sensorially integrated, embodied listening that informs writing and reading. But then, later, the embodied aspects of listening must be stifled in order for students to read quickly, silently, and without visible motion except for the back and forth of their moving eyes. So listening is asked to do two things: first, operate as an important recursive conduit in the path towards literacy, and then secondly, to be enacted or performed in certain very specific ways, namely, by quiet stillness. In other words, listening's affordances get leveraged to drive towards writing and reading, but its gestural aspects are then strongly disciplined.

A still body, with the exception of the eyes moving back and forth, represents the physical regime of reading that is taught by most mainstream schools. Writing, too, as the transition for a child's body into the stillness of reading, has a distinct physical regime. But even as the language acts become more streamlined, still, and silent, their multimodal roots remain. Vilèm Flusser, in "The Gesture of Writing," refers to the interconnected nature of the language acts when he asserts that "the listening, motionless, concentrated phase is just as characteristic of writing as is the phase of motion" (29). Flusser brings forward two things here: first, that listening still informs the process of writing even when a writer has moved beyond saying a word aloud, as do the students doing dictation. Secondly, he reminds readers that an outwardly motionless body is not necessarily an idle body, an idea which I will be developing later in the chapter.

For now, I would like readers to take away the idea that schooling disciplines the bodies of students. Further, schooling disciplines the language acts *through their production in the*

body: writing through the study of handwriting, and listening through the (much less explicit but no less powerful) instruction of gestural listening. In the next section, I aim to show how many aspects of handwriting instruction come with explicit and explicitly theorized significations, due to its quality of leaving a trace.

5.2 CHARACTER AND CONTROL: THE IDEOLOGIES OF HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION

In an early scene in Être et Avoir, the school's youngest students are seated around a low table, holding big felt-tip markers, practicing their writing by copying words. Lopez sits among them, supervising their slow, careful efforts to make the circles and lines of the word "Maman." Lopez can be seen to lift up a student's hand and place it in the correct spot to begin the next letter. "No, start a circle from the top," he tells a student. Afterwards, Lopez holds up each student's paper, saying, "I want you all to show your work." Together, he and the other students all look at each other's writing. "C'est bien," they say, "it's good," looking at one classmate's writing. With another moment's looking, they say: "It's a little bit good." "There may be something missing here," Lopez says, pointing out an "m" with a missing vertical stalk. Of another classmates writing, they say, "it's leaning."

In this scene, Lopez teaches his students to know what handwriting is supposed to look like. Even at their tender age, they can see that even if the letters are recognizable, it's not quite right for their classmates' handwriting to be "leaning," or tilting, too far to one side, for example, or in different directions within one word. At first glance, nothing seems more natural in early schooling. Students need to be able to write, and their writing must be legible. But upon further investigation, there are distinct ideologies that underpin handwriting instruction, especially the

demand on students to be able to produce a written alphabet that is within a certain range, visually and physically, of a standard.

Three important concepts emerge from tracing the history of handwriting instruction: class, character, and individuality. More specifically, handwriting history reveals the way those aspects of the self came to be perceived as visible in the act of handwriting. In “*Handwriting in America: A Cultural History*,” Tamara Plakins Thornton puts together a history of handwriting, dwelling, among other things, on moments in media history that were especially important to perceptions of print versus script. In this section, Thornton serves to bring forward some of the ideologies that have defined handwriting instruction historically. I also complicate her narrative, however, with observations from my study of seven 19th- and 20th-century handwriting instruction manuals in the University of Pittsburgh’s Nietz Old Textbook Collection. Examining the penmanship manuals reveals a number of contradictions in the instruction of handwriting, as well as some of its characteristic tropes.

While contemporary readers may think merely of print and cursive as their two handwriting “options,” writers in centuries past made use of many different scripts, which were class-bound, and important in marking one’s social position. “Thus the gentleman signaled his social superiority to his private secretary when he signed a letter in an au courant italic,” Thornton writes, “leaving the body of the letter unmistakably the product of a hired hand who had been relegated to the old-fashioned, workmanlike secretary hand” (Thornton 23). Varieties of handwriting took on social significance in centuries past, delineating the social position of those whose hand produced it. A written text, of course, has the ability to be circulated beyond the place and time of its creation. It’s likely this impact beyond the physical person of the writer that gives handwriting its stakes—without the physical presence of the writer, handwriting must

do the work of conveying certain information about the writer. This preoccupation with trace is as old as Plato's *Phaedrus*. It's writing's trace that makes it possible for handwriting to convey information about its author beyond the author's physical presence, and that quality may also be what makes handwriting such a central element of schooling.

But if handwriting initially served to reify distinctions in class and social standing, Thornton argues that it took on even more complexities with the rise of printed texts (here, I refer to printing as in printing press). "Sometime in the eighteenth century," Thornton writes, "the cultural trajectories of print and script were set by their respective relations to the hand, and from that time they did diverge. Print lost any association with the hand just as pointedly as script retained it" (30). When print became more widely available, that is, script took on even stronger associations with the hand of its writer. "Handwritten matter necessarily referred back to the hand, the body, and the individual in new ways," Thornton argues:

Handwritten texts could be read for both substance and form. Words transmitted their authors' ideas; scripts, the authors themselves...As men and women exploited the impersonality of print to the fullest, they came to understand handwriting in contradistinction to print and to make handwriting function in contradistinction to the press, as a medium of the self" (30-31).

Handwriting "as a medium of the self" is an important change in perceptions of handwriting. Thornton makes the point, here, that the idea of handwriting as reflecting aspects of a writer's character, a commonplace to contemporary readers, was actually a culturally-situated, historically-specific idea that may have existed even before print, but which gained further traction with the rise of print technology. The sense that handwriting conveyed something not just about class or wealth but about the *self* of its author further raises the stakes for handwriting instruction. Realistically, though, Plakins overstates her point here, as early fonts often retained calligraphic aspects of hand-written script. Further, it's a mistake to see print as handwriting's

opposite in terms of what can be derived from its form in addition to its substance, to use Thornton's terms. Font, aspects of layout, and the quality of a document's paper, for example, are all materials that give a reader information about its origins, and contribute to its effectiveness or lack thereof. Nevertheless, what I want to convey is that the association of handwriting with the "self" is a deeply entrenched idea informing the way handwriting has been taught in the 19th and 20th centuries.

By the 1870's, the field of graphology had emerged, or the interpretation of handwriting. Rather than trying to produce generic "men of character" through normalized handwriting instruction, that is, teaching students a reliably reproducible standard alphabet, Thornton notes that Americans began to take interest in looking for *deviations* from the proscribed handwriting norm that might reflect characterological individualities. This implies, among other things, the perception at the time that each individual is in fact unique, and further, that the gesture of handwriting could "reveal" or provide evidence for a person's uniqueness. From this perspective it is easy to see how a certain pride in illegible handwriting may have come about for doctors and other highly skilled professionals. It reinforces the idea that in illegible handwriting may lie the mark of "genius," which seemingly can't be contained, and necessarily disrupts the usual standard for legible written communication.⁴

What Thornton doesn't manage to reconcile is that in spite of widespread ideas about handwriting and individuality, in schools handwriting instruction has always worked to standardize the production of writing, to subordinate originality and individuality to legibility. To

⁴ The conception of handwriting here is of handwriting as a type of gesture that "betrays" individuality even as it is trained to produce a standard. This gives rise to questions about what it controlled, or "put on," and what on the other hand is in some way a "natural," organic, or spontaneous movement. This is a major discourse in gesture studies but goes beyond the purview of this chapter.

this end, the importance of physical control and discipline in handwriting instruction never go away in spite of other changes. The major players in the development of handwriting pedagogies all display a deep preoccupation with muscular control. Especially memorable and apt are passages where Thornton collects images of classrooms engaged in handwriting instruction:

Victorian manuals spelled out methods by whereby extreme levels of physical control might be maintained over pupils. Teachers distributed writing manuals in numbered, standardized steps, ('Position,' 'Open books,' 'Monitors about face,') marked by predetermined signals. They counted out loud of barked commands ('up,' 'down,' 'left curve,' 'quick,') as pupils performed their handwriting exercises; some manuals recommended the use of a metronome. By such means, commented the Spencerian authors with pride, 'entire classes may soon be trained to work in concert, all the pupils beginning to write at the same moment, and executing the same letter, and portion of a letter simultaneously.' Thus will the penmanship class proceed 'with all the order, promptness and precision of a military drill' (50).

This passage illustrates a particular attitude embedded into muscular handwriting pedagogies: the attitude that handwriting instruction could shape people of all walks of life into the *right kind of body*. The right kind of body, furthermore, was one that was able to be a part of the working and industrial world, able to act precisely and on cue, producing a standardized script suited to the bustling world of business.⁵ Earlier, I argue that listening at first serves the instruction of reading and writing, and then is itself relegated to stringently controlled performances. Like listening, handwriting contains conflicting functions: first, to be close enough to a standard to demonstrate a writer's physical, bodily control, but also to be far enough away from that standard to show something about an individual's character and uniqueness.

Nevertheless, a drive towards muscular training and standardization usually prevails over an interest in individuality. In fact, all of the handwriting textbooks that I examined in the Nietz Collection include (and usually begin with) instructions on the positioning of the whole body

⁵ Also notable in this passage is the group mentality: these approaches not only discipline each student's body, but serve to calibrate them to each other, like athletes or soldiers.

during handwriting practice. The earliest textbook that I looked at, *The Art of Writing*, includes a section detailing the “Position for Sitting to Write,” in which John Jenkins includes recommendations even for classroom furniture. Students’ desks and chairs should be of the appropriate height, “so that they may bear a proportionate weight on their feet, which will naturally help to steady their hand in writing” (86). In specifying the right way to position the body to write, Jenkins asserts: “Sitting in this position, the body will naturally lean upon the left arm or elbow; the natural consequence of which is, that right arm and hand will be at perfect liberty to command the pen with freedom and ease” (91). Much later, in 1915, the editor of the Palmer Method handbook reminds readers that “muscular movement writing means good, healthful posture, straight spinal columns, eyes far enough away from the [page] for safety, and both shoulders of equal height” (3). He continues: “It is impossible to do good muscular movement writing in twisted, unhealthful positions, or with still and rigid muscles” (3). One trope that emerges from penmanship manuals is the idea that good handwriting corresponds to the healthful use of the body.

In some ways, the tying of penmanship to healthy bodily comportment seems like a good impulse. It gives the sense that the bodies of students are being treated as a whole, rather than the arm or hand being unhealthily isolated. But at the same time, this type of direction that leads of handwriting instruction reinforces the idea that being in school requires a kind of global control, that the whole body of each student must be shaped and positioned in a certain way in order to succeed at what school asks. Schooling, then, is as much a physical education as a social or intellectual one. As a kind of thought experiment in response to this notion, here is a question that may seem odd at first: what if handwriting was not taught at school, but was taught to children by each individuals’ parents? Of course, parents may also enforce a similar whole-body

control, but the opportunity would also arise for unique, artisanal ways of arriving at the right letter-forms. The question here is if students could arrive at the correct letter-forms without the same physical training. It strikes me that Russian and American figure skaters train differently but arrive at the Olympics with most of the same figure-skating vocabulary, if not the same exact tricks. Some students learn to draw while others don't, for another example, and two children who do learn to draw may arrive at a recognizable picture of an elephant in totally divergent ways.

A powerful scene comes to mind from Jim Sheridan's 1989 film *My Left Foot*, depicting the life of Irish writer Christie Brown, who was born with a form of cerebral palsy that prohibited him from free, normal movement. A major turning-point in Brown's life, as depicted in the film, occurs when Brown seizes a piece of chalk with the toes of his left foot, apparently the one part of his body better under his control, and, with great effort, writes the word "mother" on the boards of his family's living room floor. This is the moment that gives his family more definitive proof of his mental abilities and begins his literate life. The role of Brown's achievement of literacy as a disabled person is worthy of further thought, of course. But this scene, and Brown's unusual writing technique, also gives an example (albeit a somewhat far-fetched one) of one individual's arrival at a physically unique form of handwriting-- indeed, it's actually "footwriting." In fact, before becoming a professional writer as an adult, Brown actually sees himself as a painter, creating an exhibit's-worth of paintings with the extraordinary control he develops in his left foot. Brown certainly does not begin the journey of developing handwriting by learning the right posture to adopt at his desk in a classroom. His is a form of making that shows the extent to which the "mold" for handwriting instruction can be broken, and

it lends support to the idea that there might be myriad other modes for teaching and producing handwriting.

The handwriting manuals that I examined for the purposes of this chapter, however, all take for granted that handwriting needs to be taught in a systematic way, and that handwriting instruction is the domain of school. Some of the manuals are explicitly for teachers to use in classrooms, creating almost a “paint-by-numbers” form of teaching. Indeed, Jenkins writes: “It is...of the first importance, especially where there is a frequent change of masters, to have some regular, fixed standard; whereby to attain the Art of Writing; so that, even though the teacher should not write an accurate and elegant hand, yet the pupil may be still improving” (59). Here, he refers to the models in the textbook, pointing out that they can serve as the “regular, fixed” standard even if instructors should come and go. A handwriting teacher may or may not even really need to be a good penman himself, as long as he can competently evaluate the penmanship of his or her pupils. A teacher may not even need to be present at all, in fact: other textbooks are intended for their users to undertake a course of self-study in penmanship.

The implication that teachers may not even need to be present, combined with the textbooks emphasis on mechanical accuracy and mastery highlights the issue of *automaticity*. Two of the manuals I looks at consisted mostly of blank pages headed by sample words or phrases. These include textbooks from the *Barnes National System of Penmanship* (1886) and the *Spencerian System of Penmanship* (dated between 1873 and 1884). The lines on each page indicate that the student is supposed to imitate the models at the top of the page over and over in order to master the letter-forms. The aim here seems to be to achieve a kind of automaticity. On the one hand, that automaticity, once achieved, makes handwriting the ready vehicle for each student’s further studies. On the other hand, this form of handwriting instruction seems to liken

the human hand to a machine. But Jenkins and the Palmer Method (intriguingly the earliest and latest textbooks I examined, respectively) argue strenuously against this approach. Jenkins writes, for instance: “Children should never be obliged to write more than four or five lines of copy at a time; as there are but very few copies, which do not contain four or five of the leading strokes; and as the letters in all copies are made by the same rule; there can be no disadvantage in gratifying the fancies of children in this respect” (136). Handwriting should become automatic, then, but not to the extent of becoming a robotic or mechanistic activity. This is another trope characteristic of penmanship instruction—the necessity of balancing the need for automaticity with care for the bodies of young writers.

The National Penmanship Compendium by A.D. Taylor is the one textbook in the group I examined that takes a slightly different approach to handwriting instruction. It provides sample documents in genres important to business: receipts, addresses for envelopes, bills of exchange, and promissory notes, for instance. In doing so it becomes not just a handwriting manual but also a set of models for professional writing. This is the only textbook I encountered that used “real-world” genres to teach handwriting, and only *after* extensive isolated exercises of letter-forms.

In handwriting instruction, everything works to some extent, but at the same time, no method emerges as fully satisfactory. Penmanship seems to be highly subject to nostalgia: the notion that there was once a time in the past when beautiful penmanship could be relied upon from all educated people. The introduction of almost every penmanship textbook points out. Of the copybooks that dominated handwriting instruction before his own method, for instance, Palmer writes: “No one ever learned to write a good, free, rapid, easy, and legible hand from any copy-book that was ever made” (2). Practicing based on the copy-books perfected model, he writes of the typical student: “No wonder he fails!” (2). That supposed moment in the glittering

past is replaced by chaos and bad techniques in need of reform. When painted with this kind of nostalgia (another trope), handwriting actually emerges as a kind societal issue, with bad handwriting reflecting a general decline in society. A tension emerges between handwriting as a mark of personal character and handwriting as a reflection of general social decay. Either way, handwriting as a cultural artifact is heavily fraught.

What I want to convey here, overall, is this: handwriting instruction emerges as a kind of epitomized vision of how the bodies of students are disciplined by the tasks of schooling. Almost every part of handwriting can be seen, controlled, practiced, and assessed, from the positions of the students' bodies, the height of their desks, the materials they use (think of the large, blue-and-red-dotted lines on paper passed around for handwriting instruction in school, and early education's insistence on pencils before moving on to pens), and their smallest of movements. The very fact that such a wealth of historical artifacts exist related to handwriting pedagogy reflects the liveliness of ongoing efforts to teach, control, and evaluate handwriting. But perhaps most importantly, as I've mentioned above, handwriting produces a *trace*. The written texts produced by students of handwriting allow for a whole other arena of assessment and control. The handwriting of students can be further marked and corrected by an instructor, for example. A text can be *interacted* with by another, separately in time and space, in a way that listening behaviors don't allow for in the same ways.

By contrast to handwriting's clear tracefulness, then, listening is not taught in anywhere near a similar level of explicit detail. The exception perhaps is in music education, but that is not always—or equally—included in students' educational experience. Nevertheless, listening behaviors are indeed taught in some ways, and to some extent, as a part of early schooling. Further, like handwriting, listening behaviors are seen to “reveal” aspects of the self, and to

reflect elements of class and other identity categories. But as a result of listening's less tangible materiality, listening instruction plays out in ways that are often oversimplified, unregulated, and implicit. It's time to pay them further attention.

5.3 THE INSTRUCTION OF GESTURAL LISTENING

While reading a story about falling asleep, Lopez prompts Axel to talk about nightmares, and whether he has ever had one. Another child across the table jumps in, responding to Lopez's questions. He looks over at her, making the "shushing" shape with his lips and shaking his head at her. When she continues to interrupt, Lopez intervenes, saying, "Axel's telling me about his nightmares. Shall we let him?" Leaning towards the other student, he asks her, with eyebrows sternly raised, "Will we let him tell us?" Then the other student, offscreen, is quiet while Axel speaks.

In a moment of seemingly casual conversation, Lopez is engaged in teaching his students about preferred modes of interaction and sociability. He is also teaching the children how to perform listening, and the idea that "correct" listening in many social situations involves, among other things, repressing the urge to say something until the appropriate time. In doing so, Lopez is also, more broadly, cultivating the right kind of comportment for being in the classroom.⁶

⁶ In addition to correct physical comportment, he gently teaches his students what types of emotions and affects are appropriate for the classroom space. Later, he does the same with a new pupil, a young boy who begins to cry during his first day at school. This is the only scene in which Lopez can be seen to pick a child up, a move quintessentially parental or familial. Picking the child up, Lopez prompts the boy to look at the other children in the room, which include his sister, and notice how none of them are crying. This moment of teaching the child what types of emotions are appropriate for the classroom hearkens strongly back to Perry Gilmore's text, which I cite in Chapter 2. In it, he makes note of a moment when a teacher tells the students what they "should" and "shouldn't" be feeling, in terms of resentment towards the teacher.

Listening, as it follows from this scene, is about holding oneself still and directing one's gaze towards the speaker. It's about refraining from saying anything while someone else is already talking. Although this moment has a quality of subtlety and conversational mundanity to it, it is actually one of the more explicit moments of listening instruction that I have been able to find. Most listening instruction, in contrast, does not get nearly the type of elaboration or critical distance with which educators approach handwriting instruction. Witness Thornton on 19th-century handwriting manuals: "Open a copybook of the eighteenth century," she writes, "and you will find model alphabets, words, and copy phrases" (46). Nineteenth-century handwriting manuals, on the other hand, go much further into a philosophy of penmanship, often containing "lengthy catechisms on the theory of penmanship and whole chapters on hand and body position [that] dwarf the visual models for imitation" (46). Thornton concludes: "The roles that mind and body played in the execution of script had been entirely rethought" (46). As far as I know, no similar "listening manuals" exist. While handwriting is thought and rethought over centuries, listening behaviors are taught as a kind of "given," as naturalized, or perhaps as just another element of a broad category called "classroom management."

In *Discipline and Learn*, Australian educator and researcher Megan Watkins provides an example of how listening instruction in primary and secondary education is often elided into classroom management, or thought of as part of something much broader and more nebulous, a "disposition." When beginning to teach at the middle-school level, her students aged 12-14, Watkins notices that some of her students seem to have work habits, or what she calls "dispositions" that characterize their approach to learning. She calls them "*as much corporeal as they are cognitive*" (Watkins 2, italics mine). Furthermore, these "dispositions" already appear to

be deeply engrained as a result of their earlier years of schooling. Throughout her book, Watkins develops the idea of “pedagogic embodiment,” or “scholarly postures” that lend themselves to the tasks of academic work. She writes:

In class, students are constantly told to ‘sit still,’ ‘put up your hand,’ ‘don’t call out,’ and in the playground, ‘don’t run,’ ‘line up properly’ and ‘don’t litter.’ The myriad of instructions given to children are designed to elicit a particular behaviour which when habituated constitutes a discipline that invests their bodies with the capacity to act in a manner both effective and efficient for schooling (23).

At first, the list of instructions Watkins enumerates here lands with the tiresome pedantry of early schooling: do this, don’t do this; do that, don’t do that. The phrasing in the last sentence takes a different turn, however: Watkins writes that the habituated disciplines of school “invests” students bodies with the “capacity” to do well in schooling. This resounds as a strikingly positive formulation for what it means, ultimately, for students to enact all the “myriad instructions” of schooling.

Indeed, it’s important to note at this point that the corporeal discipline of schooling is not necessarily a bad thing. While one approach would be to say that students’ bodies are forcibly shaped by schooling to their detriment, the flipside is one that Watkins believes in strongly: that, in fact, the physical training of the classroom is an extremely important form of *enabling* students to succeed in the world. On handwriting, Watkins writes: “Bodies need to be invested with the discipline to sit still and work at a desk for sustained periods of time to complete the often tedious process of mastering the mechanics of handwriting: a skill habituated through repetition” (98). Although she describes handwriting acquisition as “tedious,” here, Watkin is careful not to overemphasize the negative connotations of school’s forms of physical and mental discipline. In fact, she uses the exact same wording as the first moment that I cite above: bodies

are “invested” with discipline, a process which, she implies, culminates in the freedom of reliable, legible handwriting produced with minimal effort.

But the moment in Watkins’s book, above, also includes the type of repetitive directions that, over time, shape students’ listening behaviors. When she notes the familiar commands to “sit still,” “put up your hand,” and “don’t call out,” readers get a glimpse, and perhaps remember from their own early schooling, how directions for how to behave physically are just “in the environment,” enforced unilaterally by any adult in the vicinity. Further, Watkins illustrates how rules that guide listening behaviors are often barked like commands, short imperative phrases that also serve to underscore the authority of those speaking them. They are one and the same with a form of physical control.⁷ What emerges from this is the realization that the instruction of listening behaviors tends to be at once less explicit, less critically examined, and less likely to be guided by extensive pedagogical theory. By the same token, listening instruction and its resulting listening behaviors tend to be more rigid, more stringent, than their handwriting equivalents. “Correct” listening looks essentially like one thing in early education: quiet stillness. This is a problem because, as I’ve shown in earlier chapters (especially Chapter 2), listening behaviors do in fact provide a source of information about listeners themselves, which classroom instructors often respond to in ways that remain little understood and little talked about. That is, listening behaviors do signify and are communicative in ways that handwriting is as well, but listening behaviors are not consciously taught with anywhere as much detail or subtlety.

⁷ One of these commands that I remember vividly from my elementary schooling was the phrase, uttered by countless teachers countless times: “Eyes on me.” It was a call for attention, but also for the room to become silent and still, for chatter and movement to cease. It’s very interesting that this direction, which is really about sound and movement, refers specifically to the eyes, as though looking at the teacher is what actually prohibits any other movement or noise.

In spite of stillness being a major element of school's preferred comportment, stillness constantly battles the negative connotations of passiveness. In writing about the development of scholarly dispositions, Watkins writes: "this discipline predisposes students to the regimen of academic work, listening and watching attentively and completing tasks in line with the teacher's instructions" (24). Listening and watching "attentively" is a move on Watkins's part to make sure the reader knows that listening and watching are effortful activities. Further, in her phrasing, "listening and watching attentively," Watkins seems to refer to a physical performance of attention in addition to the inner focus required to accomplish all the tasks of a school day. That is, she conflates the *performance* of listening and watching with what might be called "actual" listening and watching. Although that distinction is not a simple one, Watkins demonstrates here how easy it is to elide the instruction of "correct" outward listening behaviors with the cultivation of cognitive listening processes, or mental processes that actually help draw meaning out of sounds.

In the wording of the last paragraph, I've precipitated an issue that haunts this dissertation, and which I need to address at this point. In reality, it may not be possible to separate the cognitive processes of listening, seated internally in the brain, and, on the other hand, embodied listening behaviors, or what I'm calling listening performances. Further, data proving the existence of "purely" internal, cognitive listening falls more into the domain of cognitive and neuroscience or areas of psychology. Even in those fields, imaging tests that measure processes of listening may not necessarily be exact or definitive. My solution to this problem has been to approach listening gesturally, that is, as a set of embodied practices. In this way, it becomes possible to analyze the *rhetorical* effects of listening behaviors. What I focus on in this dissertation are embodied listening acts that can be used and leveraged in different ways,

ways that are rhetorically significant. If pushed though, I would argue for a kind of irreducible knot at the heart of this question, where “performed” and “actual” listening are not usefully separated, and maybe not even able to be separated. But if embodied listening behaviors feed back around to affect listening in the brain in any way, constraining listening’s physical manifestations starts to seem like a potential problem. It brings about the question: what else might listening be capable of if only a wider range of listening behaviors were acceptable?

To come back to Watkins, though: writers on education respond constantly to a felt need to mitigate listening’s potential, or “apparent,” passiveness. Watkins, like Clay and Thornton, is acutely aware of the active/passive binary. She feels compelled, on multiple occasions, to strongly reject the idea that stillness and physical control translate to mental passivity. She writes: “This formative period for the embodiment of scholarly posture does not signal the beginnings of a passive approach to learning. It is the necessary precursor to the self-discipline required for independent learning and academic work” (27). Later, she writes: “The so-called passivity of students’ bodies within more traditional pedagogies is generally considered representative of a passive mind, yet it may actually be indicative of a disciplined body in which corporeal governance allows for a highly engaged and therefore ‘active’ rather than passive mind” (99). At this point in the chapter, with the tropes of active and passive having appeared several times, the question arises: why exactly is the active/passive binary so fraught, so loaded with positive and negative connotations, especially in contexts of education?

What results from this question is the need to begin to see “active” and “passive” as value-laden terms. Many readers will be sensitive to this when it comes to gender, but maybe not when it comes to race, for example, or other categories of identity. From Watkins’s perspective about how effortful it is for children to demonstrate the physical self-control required by the

classroom, the quiet stillness of many student listening performances takes on different significance. It changes things to think of our students not as automatically still, but actively *holding themselves still* in our classes. Axel's classmate above, for example, is learning to hold herself still.

Stillness, as I've shown in prior chapters, is only one version, or possibly one element, of gestural listening. Stillness alone, furthermore, does not reliably mean that listening is taking place. It does, however, emerge as a practiced behavior—taught by school—that becomes a kind of “preferred” listening performance. The widespread preference for a still, focused, quiet listening is perhaps demonstrated in no better place than in recent research suggesting that the opposite may actually be better. An abundance of research in recent decades suggests that forms of movement may be connected to better focus and better performance in both work and school (De La Cruz). My preliminary research into this area has turned up the rise of education movements aimed at incorporating much more motion into the school day (i.e., activity breaks), trends in some schools to have student sit on large exercise balls instead of chairs, and movements to support or even encourage the use of “fidgets” to improve focus during class (Carlson, Jordan & Engelberg, Jessa & Cain, et al; Rotz and Wright). Fidgeting, a term most often associated negatively with an “inability” to sit still, refers in new studies to small movements with certain objects to help prevent distraction and keep the mind on task. Some research points to evidence that listening to music, in distracting the brain somewhat, may actually help some individuals focus on a main task (Rotz and Wright). All of these pieces of new research challenge the idea that still, quiet listening is the “best” or most effective kind.

What I want to convey here is that the instruction of strict codes of gestural listening may actually limit broader processes of listening, blunting their potential. Further, I want to suggest

that the ideologies of handwriting begin to shape the instruction of listening behaviors once listening has fulfilled its early function of facilitating reading and writing. That is, physical manifestations of listening eventually get shaped by the same types of disciplinary control that guide the development of correct handwriting. The result is a kind of “standard” gestural listening, consisting mostly of quiet stillness, possibly punctuated by friendly nods at key moments.

In the next section, I dwell on two examples that might be described as “extreme,” or perhaps, non-normative performances of listening that point to the ways in which the limited nature of preferred gestural listening performances can marginalize certain students.

5.4 NON-NORMATIVE ATTENTION: THE “RIGHT” AND “WRONG” BODIES IN SCHOOL

Bobby sits in the back corner, almost as far away as he can get. During class, I’m rarely able to see him look up to the front of the room. He vocalizes a comment only occasionally. He’s often the first to pack up and get his body poised to rise, ready to leave.

He seems somehow active back there, though, with his head down and his hands busy. Industrious. In spite of myself, I assume he doesn’t care much about our mandatory writing course; I assume he’s doing work for other classes. I tell myself: don’t be so insecure. Don’t take it personally.

His writing assignments are interesting and on time.

On a couple of occasions, he approaches me after class with a question that I’ve answered already—sometimes multiple times—during class. Sometimes, at the start of class, when we’re assembled but haven’t begun yet, he’ll address me directly—from his customary spot

in the back— with a question about an assignment. “Can you go over citation?” he’ll ask, as though on behalf of the whole class.

In group work, he always works with the same two other students in his proximity in the back corner. They often are the group that moves the fastest through the tasks I give them—too fast. On one of these occasions, I approach their group to see how things are going. “I’m finished so I’m drawing a house,” he says, showing me a doodle in pencil on a sheet of paper. He says it a bit sardonically, a bit bored but tolerating it, a bit like he’s dutifully drawing on a repertoire of ways to keep himself busy that he’s been encouraged to develop in the past. I imagine a teacher saying to a younger Bobby: “Okay, if you’re done, draw a picture.”

In a mid-term conference, he’s concerned with grammar. He says he’s always been a terrible speller. He’s concerned with being able to write like the authors we’ve read in class. “That was just one assignment,” I tell him. He comes across, in conference, as independent, concerned with improving his performance in the course, and slightly apologetic.

In Chapter 2, I briefly discuss how expectations for listening behaviors are no more obvious than when they are being broken, especially with regards to students with autism whose listening behaviors are sometimes notably different from those without autism. Here, I would like to focus on another group of people whose performances of the type of attentive listening privileged and taught in schools are often compromised: individuals with attentional disorders such as ADD and ADHD.

Bobby demonstrates several behaviors that are consistent with a diagnosis of ADHD. But although I had of course heard of attentional disorders, I did not have a sense of the many different ways in which it can manifest. I was not able to recognize its patterns or characteristics. Then, two students in my class, including Bobby, of their own accord, chose to write about their

experiences with attentional disorders, focusing in particular on what it was like to be in school with these issues. In his paper, entitled, “The Spazzy Kid,” Bobby writes:

I remember almost every desk and classroom I’ve had to sit in. I remember the walls, the decorations, the teacher’s desks. I memorize them not on purpose, but because they are there. “Bobby? What are you looking at?” “Nothing I just got distracted” I must have had this exchange hundreds of times now. The only reason it doesn’t happen anymore is as I got older people became expected to be able to control their own thoughts. So now it’s no one’s job to keep me on the subject.

First, Bobby makes observations about his own memories of class that demonstrate a different *kind* of attention—he remembers sharply, just not what may seem like the right things to be committing to memory. He attends to things, but only those tangential to the stated aims of the curriculum. Then, he gives a sample of the types of interactions that perhaps most characterize his experience in school, in which he is called out for not paying attention. Indeed, he’s not, or at least not to the material. But what that type of interaction reinforces is that there is an expected performance of what attention looks like, how it manifests in the body. Bobby is unable or unwilling to perform it. What was okay as a child isn’t okay anymore; it’s Bobby’s own job to “control” himself now. Actually, it’s not mandatory to control one’s thoughts in school. What’s more mandatory is to control one’s physical comportment, to *look* as though one’s thoughts are where they should be.

Interestingly, the term ADHD doesn’t appear until almost two-thirds of the way through Bobby’s piece. Even without naming it, though, Bobby depicts it, demonstrating some of its qualities for the reader. The prompt for this writing assignment turned out to be especially well-suited for Bobby to write this essay. In class, we had read an excerpt from Susan Griffin’s *A Chorus of Stones*, which makes use of a segmented, collage-like style which juxtaposes different elements that ultimately enrich and illuminate each other, but which may not always seem to go

together at first. As a kind of style exercise, I asked students to produce a collage of their own, which explored the affordances of this stylistic approach. In his essay, Bobby juxtaposes sections of narration from his experiences in school with influential quotations, inspiring ones, and ones that appear to have shaped him in other ways, like a parent telling him to “just look around the room and do what everyone else is doing.” “Everyone falls in line eventually,” Bobby writes, with more than a touch of cynicism. “Kids raise their hands, they write when asked to write and generally as time goes by they become extremely obedient. There are however the ones that don’t fit in. Those who don’t seem to grasp this mentality like all the others, the ones that just don’t seem to want to listen.” This moment illustrates a keen awareness of the physical regime of school, to which Bobby struggles to adhere. What’s interesting, furthermore, about this moment is the close connection Bobby creates between writing “when asked to write” and just not seeming to “want to listen.” The conceptualizing of listening in school that Bobby conveys here is one that is value-laden, forced, the action of those in a less powerful position in a given situation. *Not* listening takes on the flavor of defiance. But although Bobby writes about listening (and not listening) from the perspective of obedience vs. defiance, what makes his observations more difficult to parse is the line between defiance/obedience and, on the other hand, a real, neurologically-based struggle to listen in the ways required by classroom environments, the way other students are willing *and* able to. The point that I want to make here is that Bobby’s writing often deals with attentional problems not just as a question of neurological attentional abilities, but also as more of a social phenomenon that requires students’ bodies to behave in certain ways.

Also of interest here is the way Bobby mentions writing that makes it sound like a mechanically-produced outcome, performed solely for the pleasure of a teacher or a school’s

curricular requirement, rather than any kind of tool for intellectual engagement or discovery. In another passage, Bobby conveys another less-than-ideal experience of writing:

I really do try to keep my eyes on the board, but all that's ever on it are boring little squiggles. My eyes follow as the teacher moves the chalk, my hand mimics hers and copies the material into a book. I learned none of it. All the while I'm thinking about the blueprints for a fort that I could never build, or taking an estimated guess at how many airplanes fly over my head on a given day. Then as if someone snaps in my ear, everything before my eyes registers again and I have to raise my hand and ask what's going on. A question from me that the teacher is probably already sick of answering. Ill rapidly catch up, re-teaching myself what I had absent mindedly written down, and just like that I'm lost again. Lost in space and time, fantasy and reality, flicking through thoughts like a detective following a lead.

Especially striking are the following sentences: "My eyes follow as the teacher moves the chalk, my hand mimics hers and copies the material into a book. I learned none of it." Here, Bobby gives a vision of writing that is trace without any kind of inner change—that is, he forms the words, but the motion does not correspond to any kind of "inner inscription," which writing is often meant to help bring about. It's an automatic, dutiful enactment of the physical skill of writing without any of the learning that's "supposed" to come from it.

Bobby's piece is dominated by themes of struggle: the struggle to be himself in a world where his way of being does not suit the structures he's required to be a part of. This, however, is only one of the many ways in which ADD and ADHD can manifest. By contrast: Emily.

Emily's there almost every day. She's on time and prepared. Sometimes, she seems slightly detached, on the quiet side. She's intentional about performing attention, though, looking up and nodding from time to time, always quite still, always facing forward. She pushes herself to make comments on a regular basis, even at times when an intimidating quietness has crept over the room. I think I see in her forehead that she's attending to the conversation.

Emily's assignments are thoughtful and consistent, but after mid-term, she emails me to tell me that she's disappointed with her mid-term grade. I suggested that we meet to talk about how to improve a recent paper, due the day of our meeting. Her paper addressed her experiences with ADHD, and included the excerpts below.

Emily's paper about her condition focuses on different kinds of struggle: this time, for credibility and respect. "Some people thought I was a bad kid," she begins. "I ran around, yelled, screamed, sang, I just couldn't sit still. As I grew as a student I realized people looked at me different, I wasn't given the same opportunities as everyone else." The last sentence in her first paragraph reads: "ADHD clouded how I was viewed as an intellectual and respected classmate." Emily seems less concerned about the need to change herself, as Bobby is, instead focusing on how to compensate for her attention problems in a way that will help her achieve her goal, to gain the respect of her teachers and peers in school. The following two passages encapsulate that concern:

When I entered high school, I was determined to become a respected student. Throughout my education, I had been looked down upon and scolded by those in positions superior to myself. I couldn't let this continue. For most, it seems like an easy task to sit down at a desk and focus for a few hours. This skill has crippled me my entire life. However, today I have come up with tactics to control my attention problems.

When thinking about my personal experience, I felt bias in the way I was evaluated by my teachers. It was a subtle difference; but they didn't treat me the same. Due to my behavioral problems, I lost credibility in my efforts as a student. On paper, I did well; I did my homework, I did what I was supposed to do. But socially it was quite the opposite. I was constantly scolded for acting out in class, I didn't fit in with all the other kids. I was looked at as unusual, a problem, a pain in the neck. I lost respect from my peers.

Emily makes a notable distinction when she writes that "on paper, I did well; I did my homework, I did what I was supposed to do." What I take from this is that in spite of her inability to comport herself *physically* in the preferred way, Emily did fine in her academics. Meaning,

she found ways to listen or otherwise learn the material even without being able to sit still or stay quiet. Nevertheless, “socially, it was quite the opposite,” and Emily felt that she was not able to earn the respect of teachers or classmates. At one point, she even muses about whether it’s wise to reveal her attentional disorder to me, her instructor, in her essay.

Schooling is a group activity, and a certain amount of conformity and cooperation is necessary for a whole class to be able to move forward. Like Watkins, I also see elements of schooling’s physical regime as enabling students’ success, as a necessary guiding of energy towards productive ends. I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that forms of classroom management be abandoned or that neurodiverse students be allowed to ongoingly disrupt or take away from their neurotypical peers’ education. What I do want to suggest, rather, is that students with ADD and ADHD *exemplify the conflict* between gestural listening performances that are preferred and what listening’s other affordances might be, or how listening might most effectively happen. The body is taught the performance of being in school in various ways. Certain performances are preferred, and they preclude and foreclose other possibilities, which may be of use to neurodiverse students like Emily and Bobby, and may make their listening behaviors legible to instructors and peers. To reiterate: I am not saying that there is no biological basis for attentional differences, and I am not arguing that they should not be seen as a medical issues. To say that would be to ignore current research and to undercut or disrespect the very real struggles of some who deal with it. Rather, I suggest that some individuals with ADD or ADHD diagnoses could also be understood as individuals whose physical ways of being do not align well with the traditional compartments of schooling, and that more diverse forms of gestural listening will need to be developed and recognized. I elaborate on what this could look like later in the chapter.

Interestingly, much of the research that I cited above about movement benefiting attention emerges from an urgency, in recent years, to understand the marked rise of ADD and ADHD diagnoses. For decades, ADD and ADHD were seen as primarily behavioral problems. Consciousness is rising now, however, about its chemical reality as a set of chemical impairments to the brain, especially its “management system,” or executive functioning. In a major recent book on attentional disorders, *Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults*, Thomas E. Brown writes: “ADHD children often have combined problems in listening, speaking, and pragmatics. Each of these communication activities involves executive functions” (102). “Listening,” he continues, with what is now a familiar trope, “is not a simple or passive skill. It involves actively receiving and organizing verbal and nonverbal information: words spoken, tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures presented by the speaker” (Brown 102). From the perspective of tasks the brain must perform, Brown goes on to break down some of listening’s demands. “Listening also involves grasping elements of the other’s message that are implicit,” he writes, “or that refer to facts or experiences linked only indirectly to the present moment or topic. Also involved are processes of ‘putting the pieces together’ to understand what the other person is saying, sorting out the important facts, ideas, and feelings, as well as monitoring the interpersonal interaction. These tasks all involve use of executive functions,” he concludes (Brown 102). Brown’s word choice is telling here: listening involves grasping, putting pieces together, sorting, and monitoring. “Monitoring interpersonal interaction,” in particular, smacks of gestural listening. For students with compromised executive functioning, the added layer of making sure to perform physically a acceptable form of listening for school is no small thing. As educators, it is important to remember the diversity of what

listening can look like, and how damaging it might be to some students to limit the “correct” performance of attention in school to a narrow margin of behaviors.

It’s illuminating to look at some of the major debates in the conversation around ADD and ADHD from a distance. For instance, one strain of an ongoing conversation about ADD and ADHD is a debate around whether attentional disorders are “real” or if we, as a society, are in fact just “taming” our children. Why is it that vastly more boys than girls are diagnosed, for example? What accounts for the dramatic rise in diagnoses over the last decade (Schwartz and Cohen)? Without denying the existence of a true disorder that some people really have, a New York Times Magazine article in 2017 argues that “the rapid increase in people with A.D.H.D. probably has more to do with sociological factors — changes in the way we school our children, in the way we interact with doctors and in what we expect from our kids (Koerth-Baker). This theory has it that diagnoses of ADD and ADHD ultimately help fund schools by increasing a calculated average of test scores that takes into account students performing with an attentional disorder (Novotney). This confusion, or vagueness, about what’s neurologically “real” in terms of diagnosing attentional disorders emphasizes an underlying concern with the control of students’ bodies in the classroom, and their conformity to its corporeal demands. Many individuals who are later diagnosed with ADD or ADHD are often exposed to the exasperation of their parents and teachers, who voice concerns about whether it’s a question of “can’t” or “won’t” for their children or students. Emily is told by her father that she just “had to deal with it,” that “everyone has internal issues that they must figure out how to solve.” Bobby’s language blends the distinction between can’t and won’t when he writes that there are “those who don’t seem to grasp this mentality like all the others,” whom he also calls the ones that “just don’t seem to *want* to listen” (italics mine).

The final paragraph of Bobby's paper reads as follows:

There is a quote attributed to Einstein that goes "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." The trouble here lies in that most people function in a very similar way and as a result it doesn't quite matter how well you function in your own way so long as you function in a way that's practical to those around you. Although this leads to a lot of self-loathing and frustration for those who think a little different, and although there is a shared desire to "just focus for once in your life." I can assure you that it's not all bad. Talk to anyone with an attention deficit disorder and they will see the world for so much more. They will see it for the little details and the big picture. The mind that conjures up fifty thoughts in the course of one minute will often have an advantage over those who can hold one thought for fifty minutes. People with these types of brains are able not to process but to acknowledge much more than their counterparts. If one were to choose the more practical process it would be that of a normal brain. If one were to choose the more entertaining one, well I assure you they wouldn't be focused on the board either.

In this passage, Bobby once again confronts strains of the dominant contemporary rhetoric and research on attentional disorders, with its dual, exasperated "just focus for once in your life" (implying that the ADHD individual *could* focus but won't, or doesn't want to), and on the other hand, the discourse that produces the phrase "people with these types of brains" (a phrasing that reflects newer understandings of attentional disorders as neurological differences). But even as he confronts both of these dominant strains, he also pushes back against them, and their insistence that having different attentional abilities is inherently negative. When Bobby writes "it doesn't quite matter how well you function in your own way," the implication is that the ADHD brain *functions, and even functions well, in its own way*. He hints, furthermore, at what the ADHD brain may actually actually *make possible*, what it does especially well, maybe even better than those with attentional abilities that fall into the clinical bracket of "normal." In doing so, Bobby points towards forms of attention that may have as yet unexplored affordances, but which require an expanded range of acceptable listening behaviors in order to be recognized at all.

5.5 NON-NORMATIVE ATTENTION, PART II

Bobby and Emily represent students whose non-normative attentional capacities affect their ability to produce the preferred listening performance in the writing classroom. In *Teaching Queer*, Stacey Waite details experiences with another student who stands out for his particular listening behaviors, but who falls on the other side of what might be called the “attentional spectrum.”

Waite begins by articulating a preferred form of presence in the composition classroom, one that will likely sound familiar to many teachers in humanities or other discussion-based classrooms. This is a collection of commonplaces so engrained into pedagogical methods in the humanities that it may at first seem difficult to challenge them, what feels like their general good sense. Waite writes: “First, I should say that before Andy Dejka was my student there were things I took for granted—that class participation means *talking* in class, that class participation is good, that the best students will participate in class, that the best model for teaching writing is a model in which students talk out loud to the group” (72-3). In this description, of course, it’s possible to hear strong echoes of Mary Reda, whom Waite also cites, along with the work of Krista Ratcliffe and Cheryl Glenn. This is Waite’s “before.”

Waite goes on to describe the student further, writing: “Andy spoke twice over the course of the semester, both times because I spoke directly to him, and because the students were doing a kind of ‘go-around-the-room’ participation.” So far, this description sounds remarkably like mine of my student, Rob, in Chapter 2. The same determined quietness and stillness, a similarly inscrutable presence. Then, however, Waite’s account takes a turn:

Andy was, for the most part silent—though any look over to his corner of the room on any given day, and Andy was locked in. His eyes are a pale green-blue, reflective in a quite striking way, which is not surprising, given that this student is probably one of the most intensely reflective students I have had the gift of teaching in many years (74).

A striking phrase here is Waite’s choice of the term “locked in” to describe how Dejka emerges as something other than “just” a “checked-out” student in class. First, it conveys a sense of personal effort on Dejka’s part. Readers get the sense that Dejka comes to class with the intention and the necessary energy to “lock himself in” to a high level of sustained attention, which he may even reserve for being in class. “Locked in” conveys that Andy’s way of being in class is an active, effortful one.⁸

Next, in dwelling with Waite’s reading of this student, it’s necessary to make note of which physical details Waite provides, which details are chosen to convey the situation. In Chapter 2, I make note of Duffy’s choice to begin with a description of her student’s skin and her own skin, going on to describe the student’s hair in a way that also marks her race. Here, Waite includes the detail of Dejka’s “pale green-blue” eyes. Even without having seen Dejka’s name, this detail cues the reader to imagine him as white. At first blush, it seems like it might be unnecessary to pause on a physical detail that may indicate race. In writing about Dejka’s listening behaviors, it seems a very natural move to include a description of the student’s eyes, which as I’ve shown in Chapter 3, play a privileged role in gestural listening. And in describing a person’s eyes, what detail is more important than their color?⁹ This may just be an instance in

⁸ A second connotation is one of imprisonment—a very different form of being locked in. Students, especially younger ones, are often more or less “locked in” to school, simply by merit of legal ages in each American state for mandatory schooling. Other possible readings of the phrase “locked in” are certainly imaginable, as well.

⁹ Waite could consider the movement of Dejka’s eyes, instead, or perhaps move to the student’s hands or other movements, like nodding, or simply being in class on time, etc. Writing about the shape of the eyes might also be a possibility, but offhand it seems like that may also bring up certain issues around race.

which a writer runs up against the limitations of existing language with which to write about listening. As I argue in Chapter 2, new vocabulary and new syntactical structures will need to be developed in order to write about more complex conceptions of listening. It's possible, nevertheless, for a reader to come away with the sense that brown eyes may be less able to convey the intensity associated with "correct" or "good" school listening.

The very idea of reflectivity is something to pause on as well. Waite refers to Dejka as one of the most "intensely reflective students" they have ever taught. One reading of this line, informed by this chapter, would be say that *this student is still able to perform an acceptable version of listening in class*, even though he doesn't participate verbally, behaviors that are part of an important "norm" or ideal for gestural listening in college. Part of what that acceptable version means, furthermore, is the ability to convey something called "reflectivity." Reflectivity is a term that I, Waite, and other writers fall back on to convey something about a student's mental life, a sort of privileged form of cognition. In writing classes, instructors often ask students to reflect on their experiences, a reading, or on earlier writing, for example.

Importantly, reflectivity seems to imply, or indicate, the presence of an *interiority*. I would even go so far as to say that there exist preferred types of interiority in writing classrooms: full ones, active ones, complex ones, bubbling ones. If a student deviates from preferred gestural listening performances, they need to find a way to convey a complex interiority in another way. Dejka does this powerfully.

Yet another possible interpretation would be to say that this is a conclusion Waite arrives at after a particular encounter with Dejka's writing. Indeed, Waite goes on to write about an essay Dejka writes which changes everything. This is the turning point which leads to the "after" in this "before and after" scenario: "In his essay, Dejka tells a compelling and powerful story

about his brother, who was diagnosed with selective mutism and often seen by teachers as not intelligent, or even illiterate, because of his silence. And while DeJka does not identify himself with the diagnosis, his writing captures his identification with his brother, his sense that quiet is positioned as failure” (77). Waite quotes a particularly moving passage from DeJka’s essay in which his brother is being prompted repeatedly to read aloud in a way that he cannot respond to. ““What does Frog ask Toad?”” an exasperated teacher asks. DeJka’s brother ““wanted desperately to follow her command, but his mouth refused to obey. His eyes shifted furtively from the book to the woman then back to the book, searching for any escape” (82). It’s an anguished passage, one that gives a vision of an even more non-normative listener, one who can not reliably speak to confirm the presence and the nature of his interiority, and whose performance of listening is not enough.

Earlier, Waite writes about DeJka this way:

“His silence is not at all about disappearance or death. In fact, through his silence, Andy shows up. I started to recognize this after I read his paper. I started noticing the energy around his body in the classroom. I started to truly understand participation as a kind of embodied practice. Andy leans into a conversation. He’s not afraid of it, he’s not refusing it. He listens to it without interjecting. And not because Andy is passive. In fact, he is as much a generator of ideas as he is a sponge for them. Others’ words (in speech and in reading) wash over him” (78).

I leave this passage here in its entirety as an example of the ways in which Waite tries on for size several ways of conveying listening. The images that emerge are striking: Andy’s silence is not about “disappearance or death.” There is an “energy around his body,” which leads Waite to “truly understand” DeJka’s “embodied practice” of participation. He leans in, unafraid, “not refusing it.” He does not interject. He is a generator, and a sponge. Words “wash over him.” This passage also figures explicitly the type of before and after that seems to characterize a study of listening and attention, in which a teacher’s initial response to a student is transformed after an

encounter with the student's writing, or after a one-on-one conference, in the cases of Bobby and Emily. Several questions arise: Is this a bad thing? Should we preempt this kind of encounter by expanding our definition of class participation? Or is this one of the unique affordances of writing courses? Lastly, we once again see a defensive rejection of passivity. It may be that as educators we should be striving for something between active and passive, or possibly attuning ourselves to shades of gray in between: some kind of active passivity, or passive action.

At times, in an effort to transcend the active/passive binary, Waite turns listening into something that strikes me as a little too mystical: they write, for example, that "Andy Dejka was a student whose capacity for listening was beyond what a 'speaker' like me can even imagine" (79). This makes what Dejka is doing seem far-fetched and only available to a few preternaturally gifted individuals, something almost magical, unaccountable. Better would be to bring an understanding of how gestural listening is taught in schools in tandem with reading and writing, and to see Dejka as demonstrating a non-normative, possibly even radical performance of listening.

The students in this chapter demonstrate how the lack of a trace is at once listening's downfall and its primary affordance. Because of its slippery materiality and lack of a readily-measurable trace, listening is uniquely vulnerable to disciplinary forces, but also uniquely able to avoid those forces. Jonathan Crary, in his book about attention and subject formation, refers to this element of "resistance" when he writes:

Though its history will never be formally written, the daydream is nonetheless a domain of resistance internal to any system of routinization or coercion. Similarly, institutional models of attention based on imperatives of recognition, identity, and stabilization are never fully separate from nomadic models of attention that generate novelty, difference, and instability (77).

Although the term “daydream” most obviously connotes visual fantasy, it implies a sensory fluidity that could also include the sonic. The gestural listening taught by school represents an example of what Crary means here by “institutional models of attention,” but Bobby and Emily show how “nomadic models of attention” exist anyway. Further, Crary suggests that nomadic models of attention may generate “novelty, difference, and instability,” qualities I imagine Bobby in particular would approve of and value. This “novelty, difference, and instability” may be what Bobby alludes to when he writes that people with his “type of brain” can “not process but acknowledge much more than their counterparts,” seeing the world for “so much more.”

Along these lines, Malcolm McCullough, in *Ambient Commons: Attention in the Age of Embodied Information*, draws a distinction between types of attention that resonates with Crary’s (and Bobby’s) recognition of the value of nomadic attention. McCullough encourages readers to notice “the distinction between attention as something that you pay and attention as something that flows,” which he goes on to write is “a distinction subtler than the distinction between voluntary and involuntary” (85). This more subtle distinction represents a start at building a vocabulary for more diverse forms of attention, which would include the “intentionality, sensitivity, conditioning, and contextual clues [that] usually enter the process of attention” (McCullough 85). Lastly, in *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, Brandon LaBelle also challenges a hyperfocused model of listening in an effort to value equally listening’s other affordances. He suggests that “...listening should be appreciated not solely as a plentiful act locating the individual within the power of meaningful exchange” (183). “Rather,” he writes, “listening situates us within a relational frame whose focus, clarity, and directness are endlessly supplemented and displaced by the subtle pulses, mishearings, and fragmentary richness of relating” (183). LaBelle suggests that listening offers rich, productive

“supplementation and displacement,” in which even mishearings may be of value. He concludes: “listening may be so intensely relational by operating as a weak model of subjectivity, to ultimately nurture more horizontal or distracted forms of experience” (183). Taking a cue from these theorists, the task of educators may be to find pedagogies that acknowledge and even harness the possibilities of a more diffuse listening. Scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition may want to consider more fully what might be afforded by LaBelle’s “weaker model” of subjectivity.

5.6 BUT WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

I have argued here that teachers should consider the possibilities for a weaker model of subjectivity and both recognize and acknowledge expanded visions of how listening can manifest in the bodies of students. I want to briefly elaborate on some examples of how this might manifest in classrooms and give a few suggestions for how composition teachers might more intentionally incorporate broadened notions of gestural listening into their courses. I begin with a list of some manifestations of listening that are often overlooked by college-level instructors, and which may benefit from further development. My last two points are suggestions for assignments to highlight the role of listening in the classroom.

1. Drawing. Taking inspiration from Bobby’s doodled house, consider that some students may draw in class. But not just anything, and not without some reflection. Students might be asked to briefly explain (in a non-judgmental way) why they think they drew what they drew, for example. The need also arises here for teachers to be able to “interpret” the in-class drawings of students. Not in the sense of interpreting a Rorschach test or a piece

of landscape art, but rather in the sense of determining whether the drawing comes from boredom, from distraction, from trying to understand course material, etc. It may not be necessary to interpret in an extremely specific or diagnostic way. Rather, the point here is just to begin to take seriously different physical manifestations of listening that students enact in the classroom.

2. Note-taking. Students and teachers could develop idiosyncratic forms of note-taking in class. Not just brief summaries of key ideas being discussed, as is typical of note-taking, but also stray thoughts, associations, questions, even emotions coming from the effort of being in class. Teachers may specify what should be included in notes, and/or students and teachers could decide together what should be included in class notes. Notes might be collected, or they might simply be glanced at. Students may be asked to share or generate ideas based on their notes (perhaps later on in any given class session) in a way that enriches the lesson plan or drives towards an assignment's pre-write.
3. Other means of accountability, like pieces of informal writing that are collected at the end of class. These may include feedback about how class is going, or responses to ideas that arose in class that day, for instance.
4. If a group of students seems receptive to this approach, ask students to consider what listening looks like for them, and to write about it in an informal assignment. This may help them become aware of their listening performances and give instructors insight into students who may not enact listening in the expected ways.

5. Ask students to write a “listening autobiography,” in which they consider times in their lives when listening was especially important. Start with some suggestions: singing in a choir concert, solidifying a new friendship, locating a lost pet by hearing it rustle in the grass, or even being called out for their listening behaviors in past schooling environments. This assignment might take the form of a segmented essay, for instance, or an associative piece that intersperses quotations meaningful to the student, as Bobby quoted parents, teachers, and others. Individual instructors can decide how this assignment might fit into a reading list. Consider following up with a workshop session in which students examine the writing of one of their classmates both for its construction and the ideas about listening that it brings forward.

I want to be clear that I am not advocating, as a result of this chapter, for listening behaviors to become more regulated, subject to the same explicit control that characterizing handwriting instruction. In fact, listening practices may be an important remaining place for subversion and idiosyncrasy, which I will be exploring in the next chapter. Those who study more specifically the classroom conduct of students with attentional disorders, trauma, learning differences, and other aspects of difference will need to weigh in on non-normative performances of listening, and how they can be made to work well for diverse students. I hope that in some published form, this will be the beginning of a cross-disciplinary conversation.

5.7 DEFIANT LISTENING

In some ways, Andy Dejka’s performance of listening is radical one. Dejka is defiant in his adherence to his own code of behavior, declining to speak in class even after Waites indicates to

him, in a one-on-one conference, that his participation grade would benefit from more verbal contributions in class. In the next chapter, I move to examine performances of listening that are rebellious, subversive, and defiant, acts of public listening which call attention to the interiorities of the listeners in ways that have social and political significance.

I have focused on pedagogical situations thus far not just because I work in those situations, but also because the classroom is one of the earliest and most profound training grounds for how people are to present themselves in public, and as a key part of that, how listening should be performed. The next chapter goes beyond pedagogical situations into other arenas where the performance of listening figures significantly. These public performances of listening necessarily respond to the preferred gestural listening of the classroom, but they also subvert those performances.

I end this chapter with a few key points of summary, which I feel emerge from the work of this chapter, and which will inform the next:

1. Because of widespread perceptions of listening as primarily silent and internal, outward listening behaviors—acts of gestural listening—form a privileged mode of conveying the existence of a person's interiority.
2. There are ways in which handwriting and gestural listening *co-constitute* in the process of schooling. That is, it's useful to think about gestural listening, and maybe even listening more generally, through existing practices of writing instruction. I've made one attempt at that in this chapter; others are imaginable.

3. Prevalent tendencies to categorize reading, writing, listening, and speaking into active and passive designations limit possibilities for all four. Strict active and passive categorizations of the language activities also run the risk of disregarding the way all four emerge in deeply interconnected ways, especially in sites of early literacy instruction. To the active/passive pairing that I've explored in this chapter, I will be adding related ideas about expressiveness and impressiveness in the next chapter. Also related and worth exploring further would be the pairing of *automatic* and its opposite—something like “considered,” “deliberate,” or “taught.”

4. Here is my most speculative claim: when we limit listening's embodied manifestations, we may also limit what listening can *do*. That is, there may be therapeutic, diplomatic, or educational uses for listening that we don't know about because of the way we tend to limit listening's physical expression. Bobby and Andy DeJka, in particular, point towards these possibilities, as do the theorists I include in the last section, who optimistically consider the affordances of alternative attentional states.

6.0 GESTURAL LISTENING IN PUBLIC: PROTEST, WORSHIP, AND ENSEMBLE SINGING

Following the mass shooting that killed seventeen at Margaret Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14th, 2018 in Parkland, Florida, President Donald Trump conducted meetings with Parkland students that his administration referred to as “listening sessions.” Zoomed-in photos of the meeting showed Trump holding a single sheet of White House notepaper that bore, apparently, his notes about what to say. The punchline of many late-night jokes--and the target of much ire--was the last visible bullet point, which read simply: “I hear you.”

Conducting these meetings, publicizing, them, and calling them “listening sessions” represents, perhaps, one of the most cynical examples of the way language about listening can be used to defray responsibility, making it look as though something’s being done, or as though real responsibility is forthcoming, when that is not really the case. This type of public listening performance is a tactic used by governments at moments of high tension between administration and populace.¹⁰

It may seem strange to start a chapter off with this example in a dissertation that argues for the genuine power of listening as a rhetorical force. It speaks, nevertheless, to the power of *appearing* to listen. It was extremely important for the Trump administration to conduct a performance of listening in the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, even as its response was characteristically chaotic and, on the issue of gun control, essentially gridlocked.

¹⁰ See Andrew Dobson’s *Listening for Democracy*.

Contrast this to the space for powerful listening constructed by Judge Rosemarie Aquilina, who presided over the suit brought against Larry Nassar, a sports doctor for the University of Michigan and USA Gymnastics who assaulted hundreds of athletes during his decades-long tenure. In allowing every athlete to speak about the crimes they experienced at Nassar's hand in the form of impact statements, Aquilina found a way to create a nationwide audience. Having created this space in which to listen in judgment, Aquilina served quietly but impactfully as a listening force that helped bring about recognition and changes in public conversation about the exploitation and abuse of female athletes.

The prevailing language around the case against Nassar has been that of "speaking out," led in particular by gymnast Ali Reisman, whose leadership and performance in the 2012 and 2016 Olympics made her a key player in the trial. The case also dovetailed with the rising wave of the Time's Up movement happening concurrently in the Hollywood film industry. This, in turn, corresponded to a groundswell in many American industries of women coming forward to speak about their experiences of assault, harassment, and exploitation in their working lives. These acts of speaking out are momentous and important.

I want to point out, however, some of the limitations of focusing solely on the idea of voice and speech to the exclusion of careful attention to listening. I draw attention specifically to the role of listening, and especially gestural listening, in situations like Trump's so-called "listening sessions" and the case against Nassar, aiming to show that the embodiment of listening is a key factor in the effect and momentum of these types of events.

This chapter, then, is about the power of collective, public acts of listening. It looks at an array of public listening acts to argue for the power of listening as a rhetorical force. The results of this analysis disrupt binaries of active and passive, public and private, and blurs the line

between expression and reception in listening acts. As in prior chapters, I will be reading and analyzing situations for the types of listening they involve and the dynamics of listening that emerge. First, I consider defiant listening, including two examples of protests on college campuses and the national anthem protests led by Colin Kaepernick. I then briefly look at the gestural listening in elements of Jewish and Islamic worship. Lastly, I go to choral singing, which I point to as containing heightened examples of communal, embodied listening practices. Through this array of examples in which gestural listening emerges as a rhetorical force, I aim to show that listening shapes subjects and communities in diverse and powerful ways, and how listening can be used to reinforce, and, at other times, defy existing conventions and perspectives within those communities.

In the previous chapter, I arrive at the realization that gestural listening, in making the act of listening more readily observable, brings about “proof” of a listener’s interiority. So much so, in fact, that certain performances of listening emerge as “preferred,” and allow people who listen in certain ways to be treated differently. In particular, listening makes observable their complexity and vulnerability. Complexity and vulnerability are, in particular, the qualities that are needed to precipitate conversation about rights. To this end, public “performances” of listening make especially effective protests, magnifying the need to protect the precarious. That is where I start.

6.1 THE DEFIANT LISTENING OF STUDENTS AND ATHLETES

6.1.1 MIDDLEBURY AND HOWARD

In February of 2017, students at Middlebury College in Middlebury, VT, staged a protest during a talk given by author Charles Murray. Murray is perhaps most notably the author of a

controversial book published in 1994 called *The Bell Curve*, a chapter of which makes the claim that intelligence may be racially determined. They did this first by interrupting the introductory speakers, and then by rising, turning, and chanting in chorus when Murray took the stage. In the minutes that followed, they jumped up and down, held up signs, and crowded forward, their arms raised in the air as they performed a number of chants against white supremacy.

In doing this, the crowd of Middlebury students demonstrated refusal, showing that a respectful performance of listening would not be a given. As Judith Butler puts it, they leveraged the power of “enacted and plural performativity” (26). Public response to the protest at Middlebury, however, has been strikingly negative. Specifically, much of the backlash the Middlebury students received came in the form of accusations that they had disallowed dialogue, that in refusing to hear the speaker’s ideas that day, they were actually recreating the very exclusive, totalitarian dynamics of silencing that they sought to protest. The student protest was further complicated by the presence of anti-fascist groups from outside the college. Notably, Dr. Alison Stenger, professor of political science at Middlebury, was injured when her neck was wrenched by a protest participant after Murray’s talk, which was ultimately moved to a different room and made available via livestream.

In fact, the whole story is much more complicated, as is so often the case. Murray’s talk, according to more detailed accounts written later, served not only as a platform for protesting white supremacy in light of the Trump campaign, but also as a kind of lightning rod for an accumulation of various slights sustained by Middlebury students in the prior weeks. But the negative backlash that the Middlebury protesters suffer comes from the same active/passive binary that, as I argue in my previous chapter, hamstring students and teachers in earlier years of schooling. The students’ chosen form of protest filled the space of the auditorium with sound,

their own sound, defiant vocalizations of their own beliefs. This presumes, however, that a “passive silence” is the only alternative to speech, and that having something to say, and speaking out, too prominently dominates the language about protest.

An awareness of gestural listening could be one corrective to this problem. The typical, expected performances of listening and rebellion are not the only ones available. Another option might have been something like this: what if Middlebury students had stood in concert as Murray took the stage, turned their backs on him, and remained that way for the duration of his talk? They might have even held the same signs throughout, with their messages turned to face the stage. Murray would have confronted a wall of turned backs-- an unsettling, disarming subversion of the usual performance of a listening audience. This way, the students would have balanced a performance of listening--a self-conscious, intentionally subversive gestural performance of listening--with the body language of defiance and refusal. But they would not have opened themselves to accusations of *not having listened*. After all, people can clearly still listen if a sound comes from behind them. But they would be showing that it is the Middlebury student body that creates the orientation—literally-- of the school.

Here, public listening would become itself an act of protest. In my hypothetical “back-turning” protest, furthermore, many variations are imaginable. Other students, perhaps those who did not stand with their backs turned, might be designated ahead of time as tough question-askers in the Q&A session that followed. The key thing is to consider the performance of listening as an important rhetorical factor in the success of a demonstration.

Another complexly auditory and gestural protest took place in September of 2017, when a group of students at Howard University drowned out former FBI director James Comey when he rose to give their annual convocation address. This group of students at Howard, a historically

Black university, reportedly “sang and chanted continuously throughout the speech” (Politico). I bring up this protest because of the strikingly listening-heavy remarks Comey made in the face of the protest. Further, Howard University’s identity as a historically Black university heightens certain dynamics at play. After standing at the podium, unable to speak for a while, Comey is quoted as saying: “I hope you’ll stay to listen to what I have to say...I just listened to you for five minutes.” The problem with this is that five minutes of listening is, of course, totally inadequate compared to the scale of the grievance with which the Howard students were confronting Comey. “I love the enthusiasm of the young folks,” Comey continues.

“I just wish they would understand what a conversation is. A conversation is where you speak and I listen, and then I speak and you listen. ...and then we go back and forth and back and forth. And at the end of a conversation, we're both smarter. I am here at Howard to try to get smarter, to try to be useful, to try to have healthy conversations.”

Unfortunately, Comey’s remarks come off as condescending. Foremost, “five minutes” of listening is inadequate to the type of systemic oppression for which the students of Howard University were trying to hold Comey, and the CIA by proxy, accountable. Expressing his desire “to try to be useful” is perhaps the most unusual part of Comey’s comments here. He comes close to articulating the idea of listening as a method for bringing about understanding and change, but his taking center stage at Howard as a speaker rankled, and provoked resistant listening. Recent events, not least the March 24th, 2018 nation-wide march for gun control have likely spurred the political awakening of many students. A word to convocation and commencement speakers henceforward: expect resistant listening.

It’s important to note, however, that at Howard, the audience appeared much more ambivalent about the student protest than was visibly the case at Middlebury. A Politico article on the event observes that “at one point much of the auditorium started their own chant: ‘Let him speak.’” Politico also notes that the crowd of around 1,500, mostly students and faculty, “seemed

divided on the protest along generational lines” (Politico). Rather than figures on a stage fighting occasionally for a word against the purposeful cacophony of the Middlebury students during the Charles Murray event, a different dynamic takes shape at Howard, with different currents of sentiment dueling within the audience itself. Perhaps this can be attributed to a more positive perception of Comey by the older generation. It would be interesting to investigate further, however, whether the older members of the audience wanted Comey to be able to speak because they knew from experience the value of appearing to listen, and knew in advance that accusations that would come their way if the event was dominated by protestors who drowned Comey out.

Whatever the reason, at this event, protestors subverted typical acts of “audiencing” and forced Comey to listen, instead. As I have argued in earlier chapters, who forces whom to listen reveals the existing power structures in any given situation. Comey’s use of language about listening is less obviously inadequate than Trump’s “I hear you,” but it’s still important to note when a brief period of apparent listening is not the answer, is not enough. The protestors and counter-protestors in the audience also made visible and audible the complexity of differing attitudes toward listening that can exist within one group of people.

Looking briefly at the Middlebury and Howard protests brings about this realization about students: they will always be able to be accused of laziness, being sheltered, being privileged, being entitled, etc. As I have shown in earlier chapters, students’ listening behaviors, especially in the classroom, stem from the way they perceive their relationship to their college or university, and extend outward to the structures of power that comprise that institution. This brings about the need to examine the culturally and historically-constructed role of “the student” in society, an important inquiry but one unfortunately outside the purview of this chapter. Here it

might be enough to simply say that the same qualities that make students vulnerable to the criticisms above also makes them especially effective at agitating for social change.

6.1.2 THE KNEELING PROTESTS

Students are only one of several types of actors whose diverse, intentional acts of public listening attract attention and have the power to bring about conversation and change. In recent months, the “kneeling protests” of American football players have done this on one of the biggest American stages. Like the protesters at Middlebury, the kneeling protests led by Colin Kaepernick have received strong and mixed responses. Those who see standing for the national anthem before sporting events as an act that honors the US Military and its veterans seemed to respond negatively to kneeling protests. Those who see it as protesting racial injustice, especially in the form of police brutality towards black Americans—which was the goal of the protest as stated by Kaepernick himself-- were in favor of the protest in that it drew necessary attention to an important issue.

Those differing perspectives also make the gesture of standing take on different valences. Those who see Kaepernick’s kneeling as disrespectful to the US military make standing into a gestural act of respect and recognition. After all, standing tends to be more effortful compared to the ease of sitting and watching a game. Kneeling, though, also contains age-old valences of respect and deference, perhaps even more so than simply standing. Kneeling, from Kaepernick’s and other protestor’s perspective, comes to seem like a different gesture of respect, like flying a flag at half-mast: deference, mourning, and the recognition that something is not right. The bigger point, though, is that it’s a change from the current accepted convention for pre-game national anthem listening, which makes it a gestural listening act that is itself a form of protest, defiance, and refusal.

What's especially interesting about the Kaepernick-led kneeling protests is that the players are still, ostensibly, listening. It would be a very different gestural performance if the protesting players actually covered their ears during the playing of the national anthem, for example. They are, however, subverting the typical embodied performance of listening. That traditional gestural performance is obviously quite important to many people. In kneeling, protesting players are not making their bodies conform to the expected physical norms for listening to the national anthem. By not conforming, they perform a defiant listening.

In tracing the trajectory of Kaepernick's protests beginning in the preseason on 2016, a distinct moment emerges when Kaepernick moved from sitting as a form of physical protest to kneeling. This is an important change, brought about, according to Kaepernick, by conversation with a former NFL player, Nate Boyer, who had served in the US military. Following this interaction, Kaepernick changed the gestural idiom of his protest, and began to "take a knee," which is now the dominant gesture of this type of protest. Others include linking arms and raising fists, but the kneel emerges as the key gestural idiom. This gestural variation on the anthem demonstration has teams once again standing, but at the same time borrowing some of the classic body language of protest.

Notable in the Kaepernick-led kneeling protests is the kneel's resemblance, even overlap, with the gestural idiom of prayer. In fact, a Snopes article from September 2017 investigates a photograph of the Navy Midshipmen football team apparently kneeling together on the field. The original poster initially thought, as indicated in her caption, that the picture was of a Kaepernick-style kneeling protest during the national anthem. Snopes reports from an email exchange with Chris Maxon, director of the Golden Hurricane Club, on whose field the match took place, that the team was, in fact, kneeling in prayer, not in protest, and not during the national anthem.

Nevertheless, this post and subsequent investigation shows how easily the acts of taking a knee in protest can be mistaken for the readily-recognizable kneeling posture of prayer. In fact, “mistaken” may be the wrong word. Rather, the knee-taking of protest *overlaps* and *references* the kneeling of prayer, as well as the kneeling of deference to an honored individual or group. This reminds us that gestures are complex, and historically- and culturally-situated.

The history of political protest in sporting events, to which the kneeling protests are connected, is a long one. Kevin Quashie, in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, focuses on one of the most famous instances of athletic protest: the raised fists of 1968 Olympic runners Tommie Smith and John Carlos as they listen to the national anthem during the medal ceremony in which they won first and third, respectively. To do so, Quashie theorizes the term “quiet,” writing, in a move that should at this point feel familiar: “In everyday discourse, quiet is synonymous with silence and is the absence of sound or movement” (21). But Quashie further nuances the term to make it something quite different. Rather, he argues that “quiet” needs to be understood as a “quality or a sensibility of being, as a manner of expression” (21). Expressive quietness resonates strongly with the idea of gestural listening, of course. Like Kaepernick, Carlos and Smith employ a distinctive physical performance of listening that turns the listening act into an act of resistance, refusal, and defiance.

As Quashie goes on, he complicates the relation between expressiveness and publicness. He continues: “This expressiveness of quiet is not concerned with publicness, but instead is the expressiveness of the interior. That is, the quiet of a person represents the broad scope of his or her inner life; the quiet symbolizes—and if interrogated, expresses—some of the capacity of the interior” (21). Quashie reminds readers here that expressive quietness might not always refer to listening. It may clue an observer into the presence of the listener’s inner movement, inner work,

their cognitive action which does not correlate with outer movements. It makes the presence of an interior palpable to others in a public arena. He writes:

If we go back to the image of Smith and Carlos on the podium in 1968, it is evident that quiet is a call to rethink expressiveness. That is, rather than imagine expressiveness as public and dramatic, the argument for quiet asks about expressiveness that is shaped by the vagaries of the inner life. Such expressiveness is not necessarily articulate—it isn't always publicly legible, and can be random and multiple in ways that makes it hard to codify singularly (103).

Here, Quashie invites readers to separate, at times, expressiveness from publicness. While this is a tricky distinction, it provides a welcome variation on the active/passive binary that so often dominates discussions of listening. More recently, for example, some teams have opted not to come onto the field at all for the national anthem. This is, of course, quite a different choice, because it disallows a public display of listening, and with it, listening's ability to drive home the idea of a complex personhood and interiority.

Quashie helps viewers to understand Kaepernick's protest in particular, focusing as he does on questioning norms of expressiveness in black culture. He writes: "And yet reconsidering expressiveness is important, given the high premium that publicness carries in black culture. So, what can a notion of quiet do for how we understand expressiveness? Specifically, what are the qualities that characterize expressiveness? (103). I would like to propose that one key factor in characterizing expressiveness is *choice*: the choice not to convey a publicly legible inner life. The ability to fall back on the assumption of complex subjecthood. Even a quiet individual, that is, whose expressiveness is not "publicly legible" should be assumed to have an interior, to have human needs, desires, and imagination, and should be protected by default.

Black subjects have particular reasons to practice refusal through listening practices. It has historically been safer to be defiant through listening than through speech, although not

completely safe, by any means. As Jennifer Lynn Stoeber illustrates in *The Sonic Color Line*, expectations for listening behaviors in American history markedly vary based on race. Her term, the sonic color line, refers to “how racism works through sound,” and how American listening habits have been historically shaped by “our experiences as raced subjects and by dominant ideologies of ‘correct,’ ‘proper,’ and ‘sensitive’ listening” (277). For example, Stoeber locates the contemporary sonic color line “when you know that in order for you to stay alive, ‘to listen’ must become ‘to obey,’ no matter what; when you know your irritated tone of voice at a traffic ticket stop might mean your death, as happened to Sandra Bland in Texas; when the police hear ‘OK OK OK’ as aggression, and it costs you your life like it did Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri” (278). Defiant listening combines some of listening’s most contradictory facets: its power, on the one hand, and its valences of obedience and deference on the other.

In *Listening to Images*, Tina M. Campt also brings to the table a welcome variation on the active/passive binary that so often hamstring discussions of listening. Campt focuses on the choices in comportment that characterize the female subjects in two photographic archives: one of photographs taken at the Trappist monastery “Marianhill” in late 19th-century South Africa, and one of the Bavenda people, taken by Alfred Duggan-Cronin in 1928 and published in *Bantu Tribes of South Africa*. Although it may be possible to interpret these images as submission to the identificatory imperative of government systems, Campt instead focuses on their profound and intentional stillness. “We must engage them instead as tension,” she writes, “a tense self-fashioning of/in stasis” (Campt 57). Stasis, here refers to “restraint and constraint,” as “each of [the women] appears to hold back, hold in, or keep something in reserve— in preparation or anticipation of something to come” (Campt 57). “Engaging the women in these portraits as tensely embodied, muscular subjects shifts the meaning of self- fashioning in important ways,”

she continues, allowing viewers to confront them as “neither inherently transgressive enactments of resistance nor thoroughly abject supplicants” (Campt 59). Campt’s “stasis” gives us an example of a way to understand the choices people make in their efforts to transform quotidian moments into acts of refusal in the face of racism.

Dressed in his uniform, representing the most elite of American athletics, Colin Kaepernick is recognizable as a subject, and a valued one, highly paid and often in the spotlight. What he brings attention to is the fact that many other young black men who are appearing on the street, in public places in their own neighborhoods, are distinctly not seen as recognizable subjects. As the shootings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and many others illustrate, young black men are often seen by police as intensely threatening, as sources of violence to be “contained” at all costs—often the cost of their lives. In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler describes the problem of appearance this way: “But what if the highly regulated field of appearance does not admit everyone, requiring zones where many are expected not to appear or are legally proscribed from doing so? Why is that field regulated in such a way that only certain kinds of beings can appear as recognizable subject, and others cannot?” (35). In kneeling, Kaepernick challenges what Butler goes on to call the “compulsory demand to appear one way rather than another,” which in fact “functions as a precondition of appearing at all” (35). The reader is likely to recognize Quashie, Campt, and Stoeber in Butler’s assertion that “...embodying the norm or norms by which one gains recognizable status is a way of ratifying and reproducing certain norms of recognition over others, and so constraining the field of the recognizable” (35). In kneeling, Kaepernick uses his own body and his own position as an elite football player to work to expand the field of the recognizable.

Once again, the story of the national anthem kneeling protests gets more complicated, with many players joining the anthem-kneeling after Trump's tweets about firing athletes who refused to stand. What began as a protest of a broader "climate" that allows for disproportionate police brutality against African-Americans became additionally an act of resistance against Trump himself, and the erratic, highly irregular White House that often seems to troublingly conflate Tweets with policy.

But protest, of course, is not the only example of rich, purposeful public listening. Another arena in which collective public listening takes place is in religious services. In the next section, I want to examine more deeply the possibilities for gestural listening in religious settings. In religious contexts, gestural listening moves away from a performance of defiance-- which emphasizes uneven power relations-- and towards a more horizontal relationship between members of a community, shaping and cohering individuals and groups through ritual.

6.2 THE COMMUNAL LISTENING OF CONGREGANTS

Readers may think of the responsive readings of prayers that characterize parts of many religious services. They may also imagine congregations listening to a sermon or homily. Community singing in religious settings also gives a striking example of collective listening, which I will be delving further into in the next section. Here, however, I would like to focus first on aspects of Jewish worship that are familiar to me. It may not be that there exists anything about Judaism that is uniquely inclined towards a listening disposition, although the exhortation of the Shema (an essential prayer declaring monotheism, recited twice a day) is a compelling possibility for that claim. Rather, I go first to my experiences of listening in Jewish traditions in order to show

how these types of religious situations, in which listening emerges as a vital rhetorical force, are widespread, and to show how there are many types of arenas that we can begin to analyze for their diverse and complex uses of listening.

There are a number of examples to turn to in identifying particular types of listening in Jewish ritual. On Rosh Hashanah, a key duty of congregants is to hear the sound of the shofar. The Amida prayer is done twice, once read silently by congregants standing, and once sitting and chanted aloud. The Bar'chu represents a call to prayer. The centerpiece of the morning service is the reading of the weekly Torah portion, which is read aloud and heard by the congregation. Prayer itself is an act that seems to bring about a simultaneous addressing and listening.

As I mention above, no discussion of listening in Jewish service can begin without mention of the Shema, widely considered the central articulation of Jewish faith. The word “shema” is most often translated to “hear.” During the recitation of the Shema, congregations often stand and cover their eyes with their hands. This gestural ritual heightens the sense that listening is the privileged mode of relating at this moment. Taking away visual input, after all, tends to emphasize other types of sensorial or intuitional input. It also emphasizes the deliberate nature of this moment in the service. In “‘Shema Yisrael’: Listening in Judaism and What It Has to Teach Us,” Joy Arbor explores some of the rhetorical dimensions of listening in Jewish tradition. She writes: “Moreover, the Shema comes from the moment in Deuteronomy when Moses is giving God’s law to the Israelites. The Israelites had to participate in God’s speech act (by way of Moses) by choosing to be silent in order to listen. (166-7). Arbor builds on the importance of effortful choice by adding a dimension of creating a kind of mental space, suspending one’s own internal voices and opinions. “When a listener struggles to understand,” she writes, “the listener must also be silent, not only refraining from speaking but also actively

silencing one's internal voices, whether chatter or responses to the speaker, in order to really focus on the other and his or her statements. In short, one must consciously make space inside one's self for another's words and ideas" (167).¹¹ The material metaphor of "making space" within in order to listen is an evocative one.

Building upon this point, Arbor then makes note of the role of listening in *havruta*, which refers to the system, a long-standing tradition in many yeshivas, of studying religious texts in conversation with a study partner. She goes on to refer to this kind of listening as a kind of "inner work that can be difficult" because it "includes denying the self on behalf of another for a time. This temporary quieting of the self in order to make space for another's words is a sign of humility" (168). Humility, of course, reminds readers of the idea that listening is sometimes forced upon those in any given situation who are in a position of lesser power. But it also may simply acknowledge that we, when we decide to become listeners, do not already know everything. Further, it makes listening into a method for building knowledge together.

Here, though, I want to focus for a moment on the choreography of the Mourner's Kaddish. At the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, those observing a *jahrzeit*, or the anniversary of the death of a family member, are invited to stand. Standing serves as a sign of respect to those being mourned, but also makes the mourners visible to the rest of the community. In the speaking of the prayer itself, the rabbi and the mourners chant the whole prayer together in unison. The entire congregation joins in on one line towards the middle of the

¹¹ A noteworthy aspect of Arbor's point here is the idea that a person's ongoing internal monologue can actually become a kind of noise. To listen, according to Arbor, involves hushing the voices or other sounds that we "audiate," or auditorily imagine. There's a material "slip" implied here, from the vibrational materiality of soundwaves to something that's cognitive in nature. The neurology of audiation is beyond the scope of this chapter, but will be worth further investigation.

prayer. This has the effect of a group of voices rising like a wave around the mourners. Both spatially and vocally, then, the congregation surrounds and reinforces the mourners. In the Mourner's Kaddish, the spatial, choreographic organization of the congregation creates individuals, even as it reinforces existing social roles.¹² By listening, congregants enable the mourner to fulfill their obligations. They also provide a witnessing public that acknowledges the grief of the mourners, reassuring them that community and meaning await once their grief has lifted.

This represents a social performance of grief, of bringing an act of grief, the recognizing of loss, into the public. Jewish tradition requires that mourners be surrounded with people every evening for a week during the *shiva* period immediately following a death, and then the mourner is required to attend weekly services every week for a month. So Jewish tradition builds in the public recognition of grief, and the presence of community during a period of bereavement. Even more generally, further, even the usual weekly service cannot take place unless a *minyan* is present, which refers to the assembly of ten adults (traditionally male, but now including women in denominations of Judaism that are not Orthodox). This tradition, based on wording from the Talmud the Old Testament, makes ten the minimum number to count as a congregation.

The forms of gestural listening that I've touched on in this section are not defiant in the same ways as the listening of students and athletes that I in the previous section. Rather, they seem to reinforce the role of community. The recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, in particular, in the midst of a minyan, brings about a form of gestural listening that emphasizes communal recognition and solidarity. Interestingly, the forms of gestural listening that I've described here,

¹² See Richard Cullen Rath's "No Corner for the Devil to Hide," about acoustics in religious architecture in England and North America.

especially the scene of the Mourner's Kaddish, do not underscore an uneven power relationship between the community leaders, namely the rabbi and the cantor (who normally stand at the front of the congregation on an elevated *bima*--or altar--of some kind) and their congregants. Rather, it underscores the formation of a congregation and the social cohesion and responsibility that arises from the presence of a community. While I certainly would never argue that Jewish services are devoid of such hierarchies (they definitely are not), this spatial and acoustic relationship is remarkably different from the highly structured ways that many churches throughout Europe and America have, for centuries, reinforced power dynamics through acoustic architectural design.¹³

Distinctive listening practices, of course, are not unique to Judaism and Christianity. In *The Ethical Soundscape*, Charles Hirschkind undertakes a study of tape-recorded sermons given by Muslim *khatibs*, or preachers, that circulate throughout Cairo. In this study, Hirschkind outlines a type of listening that puts the responsibility on listeners themselves to *become the right kind of listener*, especially through the lifelong cultivation of somatic responses to spoken religious rhetoric. Here, Hirschkind formulates the type of listening he argues characterizes Islamic worship. On the term "sam'," or "correct hearing," he writes:

'Sam,' in other words, is not a spontaneous and passive receptivity but a particular kind of action itself, a listening that is a doing. For this reason, what the divine message requires within this tradition is not so much a rhetor as a listener, one who can correctly hear what is already stated in its most perfect, inimitable, and untranslatable form; not a speaker's persuasiveness, but the instrumentality of God acting through his words on the heart of a listener. One might say, in other words, that within this interpretive tradition the rhetorical act is accomplished by the hearer and not the speaker (35).

At this point, the initial reassurance that listening can in fact be conceptualized as active and intentional should be a familiar opening move. Further, from Hirschkind's analysis of listening in Islamic traditions in *The Ethical Soundscape*, we can derive three things. First, listening is

¹³ This is Rath, again.

embodied. Secondly, it is not “natural” or arbitrary, but cultivated over time with specific cultural influences and aims. Thirdly, as he states above, it is the responsibility of the faithful individual to become the right kind of vessel, or channel, for the word of God, which is considered to be already perfect. This is a vision of what the rhetorical situation entails that is very different from the Western tradition likely to be familiar to many readers, especially in its embodied dimensions.

According to Hirschkind, gestural listening in Islamic settings is characterized by a repertoire of distinct physical responses to liturgical language and ritual. “For such a person (properly tuned, body and soul),” Hirschkind writes, “auditory reception involves the flesh, back, chest, and heart—in short the entire moral person as a unity of body and soul. To listen properly, one might say, is to engage in a performance, the articulated gestures of a dance” (76).

Hirschkind’s book focuses much less on the effects of this dance on an assembled group of worshippers, or the role of fellow worshippers in legitimizing certain ritual acts. Rather, the gestural listening that characterizes Islam seems to focus more on the individual’s relationship to the text, and the spiritual “force” that the text, via a preacher’s voice, can channel. This may, however, simply reflect Hirschkind’s particular research focus, so more investigation would be required to make an assertion along these lines, or to claim that this is a way in which Jewish worship is essentially different from Islamic worship.

Moreover, the point of this is *not* to make a generalized assertion about how gestural listening in Jewish traditions is different from that of Islamic ones. Rather, what I want to convey is that a focus on gestural listening can reveal the ways in which religious ritual plays a role in shaping subjects and communities. Indeed, many other remarkable examples of listening in religious settings exist which merit closer attention in our field’s further research. The Catholic

practice of confession springs to mind, for example, as does the peaceful, non-confrontative listening of a Quaker Friends meeting. This is not meant to be an extensive study of religious listening. Rather, I go to examples of collective listening practices in religious environments to exfoliate the power of gestural listening as a rhetorical force. For even before they begin to speak, Judith Butler argues, “assemblies assert and enact themselves by speech or silence, by action or steady inaction, by gesture, by gathering together as a group of bodies in public space, organized by infrastructure—visible, audible, tangible, exposed in ways both deliberate and unwilling, interdependent in forms both organized and spontaneous” (156). In the next section, I look more closely at choral singing, which is often embedded into religious services. While also emphasizing aspects of the communal in similar ways to religious performances of listening, choral singing calls greater attention to somatic aspects of gestural listening that often go unnoticed.

6.3 THE ENSEMBLE LISTENING OF CHORAL SINGERS

I hope to have shown, by this point, that it is possible to find examples of gestural listening often, and in many different arenas. Here, I want to take a brief look at a specific area where communal listening practices are central: singing in choir. Singing in choir has been shown in recent research to be one of the most robust forms of participation in the arts in the United States. Additional research into the myriad social, academic, and health benefits of singing in choir have reinforced the growth of choral participation, especially among students in school. While it’s difficult to track exact numbers of choirs in the United States, and in so doing argue that they

have risen over the last few decades, it's safe to say that the last decade in particular has seen a surge of interest in singing in community.

Many of the qualities that characterize powerful performances of choral music depend largely on listening. Effective choral conductors, in particular, use gestures to evoke sound from the groups they direct, but they also respond to the choir's sound with their gestures. Through this give and take, a conductor can modify the choir's sound by showing the choir-members what they're doing too much or too little of. Think of a conductor making a "shush" shape with his or her mouth if the group attacks a phrase too loudly, or using a "come on!" gesture with one hand if the group is singing too softly. These types of gestures, typical to the idiom of choral conducting, represent a highly refined and stylized example of gestural listening. The champion of responsive choral conducting is conductor and scholar James Jordan, whose 1996 book *Evoking Sound* remains a classic of choral conducting pedagogy. In his guidelines for conducting practice, he writes:

When you conduct other persons, let the sound be your teacher. As you conduct with your partner or a group of persons, remember that the sounds you hear are directly reflective of your body and gesture...If the sound is not what you want, you must be willing to accept that the sound is a mirror image of your conducting. When the sound is not 'good,' try to change it toward your ideal by understanding the interrelationship of gesture to sound" (Jordan 77).

While it may seem natural to think of the conductor leading or producing the sound of the choir, Jordan conceptualizes conducting as more importantly an ongoing act of responsive listening. Among other things, Jordan's conductors must respond to the choir's breath: "When conductors listen to their choir's breath," he writes, "they instinctively synchronize and coordinate their own breath with that of their ensemble" (Jordan 72). The conductor, then, is at times actually cued by the choir. "When heard, the sound of the inhalation signals to the conductor when the choir should release sounds from their bodies," he continues (Jordan 72). This aural clue helps the

conductor know when to most effectively signal the choir. Furthermore, an “aural sensitivity to the breath provides conductors with the opportunity to ‘set the sound’ of the choir and insure a proper ‘attack’” (Jordan 72). So while the conductor must communicate the breath at first, he or she must also respond to the audible breath of the choir in order to best shape the sound.

Jordan continues in a way that draws attention to the listening that takes place not just between ensemble and conductor, but between members of the ensemble, as well: “Not only must the conductor listen to the breath in the choir,” he writes, “but choir members must listen to *each other* breathe so as to establish an ensemble sense” (Jordan 76, emphasis mine). “That sense of ensemble begins in the communal breath,” he asserts (Jordan 76). This aural signal, then, springs from the physical togetherness of the choir and their ability to hear each other’s bodies, beyond just their voices.¹⁴ Common practice has conductors visibly open their mouths and actually breathe with the choir although he or she is, of course, not singing along. The very sight of someone breathing, this technique suggests, influences the breath and through the breath, the musical tone and phrasing of the singers.

Another major concept in choral singing is the idea of “blend.” Blend refers to the way that individual voices combine to produce an overall group sound. Complementing the idea of blend is “balance,” which refers to the volume of each section, or voice-part. Managing both blend and balance depends on listening. Attention to blend and balance brings about a form of responsive listening. If one section hears that they are singing too loudly or too softly, they

¹⁴ Few scholars in the humanities take on the breath as the site of their research. Roland Barthes’s “Grain of the Voice” essay springs to mind here, in which Barthes, in studying singers, calls attention not to their “actual voices,” per se, but to the way that their voices interact with the structures of the throat, lungs, sinuses, and mouth. This is what he refers to as the “grain,” or the body in the voice. I also think of Adriana Cavarero, who emphasizes in *For More Than One Voice* that every voice comes from an embodied person, rather than from a kind of disembodied presence, as is often implied in the field of philosophy.

reflect their listening in an embodied way simply by adjusting their volume. Lastly, a discussion of choral singing and listening cannot exclude the elements of intonation and tone quality. These too, are important elements of choral singing that are managed by the listening of choir-members. If the choir is singing “under pitch,” conductors can often be seen to make their gestures more buoyant, even raising their eyebrows and hovering on tip-toe, to influence the group sound.

Building on the complex relationality between members of a choir, a well-known piece of advice given by music educators to their singers, at any age is to “listen louder than you sing.” Deborah Kapchan gives a striking example of this when she reflects on the ethnographic work she has conducted with women participating in Sufi Muslim ceremonies, particularly the devotional rituals of the Qadirriya Boutshishiyya order. Even more specifically, Kapchan works with members of this order who live in France, and who are often not fluent speakers of Arabic. For these women in particular, who have not grown up with the melodies or words of the devotional music, listening emerges as the primary means for learning the sacred music. Not only is listening (rather than reading from a score) the primary mode of learning the music, however, Kapchan argues that the listening characterizing these ceremonies also brings about the transmission of affect. She writes: “Just as one person looking at the sky will cause others to direct their gaze upward, one deep listener in a room will first change the vibrations of her own body and then affect the somatic attention of other bodies, sentient and non” (Kapchan 227). This happens, in part, through a blurring of subject and object, which creates an engaged individual also profoundly connected to a community. “Sama‘,” Kapchan points out, “is both the genre of Sufi music as well as the verb “to listen” in Moroccan Arabic:”

Sama‘ contains both subject (listener) and object (sound) in its very meaning. Indeed, the performers of this music are not called “singers” (mughaniyyin) as in other musical genres, but are called “listeners” (musama‘yyin). It is not an ordinary listening, however, but a genre of listening informed by the intention (niya) to find another way of being. (279)

I have separated the choral and the religious into different sections in this essay, but that is really the result of an imperfect effort at organizing a writing project. In fact, the “other way of being” that Kapchan refers to here points to a blending of the choral and the religious. Choral singing, that is, can almost be understood as a kind of religious method, a tool in the religious repertoire, to which listening is as important as vocal production. Drawing on her observations of Sufi ceremonies of conversion, remembrance, praise, and lament, Kapchan clearly conveys the idea that the devotional singing taking place has therapeutic effects for its participants, bringing about for them an immediate sense of catharsis, and also the sense of being connected to a somatic history of Sufi people who have worshipped similarly over thousands of years.

Indeed, in her focus on Sufi Muslim ceremonies, Kapchan’s study walks the line between musical situations and situations of public listening more generally. Kapchan later goes on to describe the kind of affectively transformational singing that Sufi women engage in as a form of “public intimacy” (286). Public intimacy through listening has a unique ability, perhaps more than vision, to bring about visceral connections between people that are difficult to ignore. “Unlike a visual witness,” Kapchan writes, “listening to the sounds of trauma is ‘unbearable,’ precisely because listening involves both subjects and objects in an interacoustic space” (282). Kapchan takes this even a step further when she asserts that “listening to the pain and praise of others forces an encounter between these two bodies and thereby *transforms both*” (283, emphasis mine). Any chorister may enthuse about how powerful it can be to sing in choir. Kapchan’s work gives us a more fully articulated way to understand what may be happening

when participants feel profoundly affected by their choral experiences. It may be listening, in tandem with vocal production, that makes singers feel connected and like they may have been in some way transformed.

In addition to being a religious method, Kapchan also develops the idea of listening as a political method. “Listening to these sounds, lingering in the discomfort that they may produce, is itself a method that takes us into otherness,” she writes (283). And further: “At a moment when philosophy and theory announce the end of metalanguage and representation, attuning ourselves to the materiality of the in-between, to the place of instability, to moment upon moment of openness, is a method that may be more politically viable than any theorization” (288). Kapchan suggests here that it may be possible to leverage the capacity for interacoustic encounters that blur subject and object towards better understanding of others, which is the type of interaction that may eventually lead to changes in policy and more the more habitual, day-to-day interactions between people.

Choral listening, then, even embedded as it often is into religious settings, may actually provide tools for change. This is a perspective that may allow people to usefully recuperate some elements of religious practice or thought that have more recently been the source of so much alienation, like aspects of conservative Christianity or Islam that have tended to shut down dialogue along demographic lines. It seems appropriate for me to mention here again, as I have earlier in the dissertation, that it will be important to remember that the point of using listening towards political dialogue is often simply to *keep communication going*, to keep small, ongoing changes churning. Listening is relentlessly a process, constantly slipping here and there, rarely settling into something quantifiable or concrete. This is its greatest affordance as well as one of its trickiest limitations.

For teachers, another set of concerns precipitates. After all, the classroom is a kind of public. If we take this to be true, how does it help refigure listening in the classroom? Part of what students are asked to do in school is to think in public, which can be usefully understood as one of Kapchan's forms of "public intimacy." One of the most urgent questions, then, is how or even if instructors should try to convey this idea to students in some way. The notion is fraught with potential problems and approaching it practically will require further consideration.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Through my examination of students, athletes, congregants, and choral singers in this chapter, I hope to have shown further how listening can affect communicative situations in a variety of ways, ways that can be by turns expressive, defiant, communally plural, forceful, and even transformative. It can function as a form of therapy, through its powers of acknowledgment, recognition, and calibration within a group.

Moreover, I hope readers take away the idea that analyzing certain situations for listening can be both fruitful and necessary. By analyzing listening, we can begin to arrive at answers to the following questions, among many others: What type of interiority is being conveyed? What type of public is forming? What relationship between public and private takes shape? What possibilities exist to fruitfully disrupt habits of being and interaction? For readers who want to begin developing listening-focused analyses, I offer the following list of guidelines, approaches, and key questions to keep in mind.

When considering a listening-focused analysis of any given situation, begin by asking:

1. How is listening working in this situation? What different types of listening seem to be present, and in which directions do they flow? Essentially, I am recommending a “close reading” of listening dynamics in the situation.
2. In your inquiry, what do you *mean* by listening, exactly? In my dissertation thus far, have tried to show that what we commonly call listening is often a combination of sonic materiality entwined with less tangible things associated with listening: empathy, cross-cultural understanding, etc. It will be important to articulate what your particular combination or focus is.
3. How is listening to be recognized? I have shown that listening is difficult to measure, so it is necessary to articulate what *counts* as listening behavior in the situation being analyzed. Of course, I suggest using gestural listening. When considering gestural listening, you may want to specify what gestural elements are of special importance and why. Be sure not to try to create overly-simplified, one-to-one equivalencies between gesture and concrete, immutable meanings.
4. What does an analysis of listening bring about that other types of analysis don't? That is, why take special note of listening in this situation or text?
5. In the listening behaviors being observed, are there any ruptures, disruptions, or subversions of existing conventions?
6. In the situation being observed, is listening being *taught* in some way? If so, what type of listening is being developed or promoted? Why might this be?

7. What do the particular types of listening being identified bring about? That is, what effects do they seem to produce?
8. What new vocabulary or syntactical invention might be necessary to convey what's happening?

These, then, are the questions and approaches that I recommend to guide analyses of listening. As I hope to have shown in this dissertation, listening is not easy to pin down, which makes it both a powerful and difficult rhetorical force. In the coda that follows, I offer a briefly-sketched example of how listening behaviors can be used as a locus for interpreting fiction, in this case *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, by Carson McCullers. I hope literature will be one of the many arenas in which scholars recuperate listening.

7.0 CODA

Blount and Mick both kept their eyes on Singer. They talked, and the mute's expression changed as he watched them. It was a funny thing. The reason—was it in them or in him? He sat very still with his hands in his pockets, and because he did not speak it made him seem superior. What did that fellow think and realize? What did he know? (McCullers 134).

John Singer is the central character in Carson McCullers's 1940 novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, which focuses on the converging stories of several characters—variously disenfranchised—living in the impoverished American south of the 1930's. Throughout the novel, Singer is referred to consistently as “the mute,” but in fact, this is only half the story: he is actually both deaf and mute, a fact introduced within the first few sentences of the novel. Continuously referring to him as “the mute” emphasizes the character's inability to speak, but seems to leave intact, at least in the minds of other characters, his listening powers.

Singer, mostly unwittingly, exercises an unusual influence on the townspeople, all of whom find themselves deeply relating to him. In another scene during which Singer is surrounded by the conversation of other characters, McCullers writes: “Each person addressed his words mainly to the mute. Their thoughts seemed to converge in him as the spokes of a wheel lead to the center hub” (211). In line with this dissertation, I would suggest that Singer is, in fact, still listening, and powerfully. That lip-reading can be understood as a form of listening is in and of itself rich with implications, but I want to suggest that Singer's unique style of listening goes further even than that striking modal shift. He forms a “center hub,” seeming to summon, or magnetically draw towards him the attention and addresses of others, serving as a point of

confluence. This merging has special importance in the town that McCullers renders as emptied by economic depression, its inhabitants disparate and often desperate.

Singer's listening capacities give rise to a huge amount of speculation amongst the townspeople. Everyone has an origins story for him. McCullers writes:

So the rumors about the mute were rich and varied. The Jews said he was a Jew. The merchants along the main street claimed he had received a large legacy and was a very rich man. It was whispered in one browbeaten textile union that the mute was an organizer for the C.I.O. A lone Turk who had roamed into the town years ago and who languished with his family behind the little store where they sold linens claimed passionately to his wife that the mute was Turkish. *He said that when he spoke his language the mute understood. And as he claimed this his voice grew warm and he forgot to squabble with his children and he was full of plans and activity.* One old man from the country said that the mute had come from somewhere near his home and that the mute's father had the finest tobacco crop in the county. All these things were said about him. (200, emphasis mine)

Singer's quiet but knowing way of being sparks a range of conversation among the townspeople. And his listening even influences other aspects of what happens, as in the case of the "lone Turk" who "forgets to squabble with his children" and finds himself "full of plans and activity." The Turk has been affected by the rhetorical force of Singer's gestural listening, which makes the him feel as though he is understood, as though he shares a vital bond with Singer himself. This feeling of connection actually affects the Turk's actions momentarily, even in the tiny vignette that McCullers sketches of his life behind the linen store.

This passage, which gives a sketch of the town and its types even as it helps describe Singer's presence, also underscores the idea that listening can be generative. Not just in the sense that silence is a complex signifier, but in that it allows ideas to coexist before they begin to compete. "All these things were said about him," McCuller writes simply. They "all were said," not "arguments were had," or any other available option. Even the passive syntactical construction of "these things were said" underscores the image of the townspeople's varied

rumors coexisting, rather than fighting for dominance. Notably, Singers is not pushing an agenda of his own; he is not especially trying to persuade anyone of anything. This makes his listening, as a rhetorical force, less immediately recognizable than verbal genres more commonly associated with rhetoric: a town-hall speech from a mayor, a pastor's sermon, or a coach's pep talk, for example. Nevertheless, Singer exerts force—the badly-needed forces of cohesion and coexistence.

It's never really clear whether Singer knows that he presents such a deeply sympathetic front or not. Likely, he does not, spending most of the novel grieving the loss of his friend, another deaf and mute man with whom he had lived in another town for several years. In one remarkable scene, Singer confronts the listening of another. Here, Singer invites Mick, the fourteen-year-old daughter of the family that owns his boarding house and an aspiring composer, to listen to his radio. Why a deaf man has acquired the radio speaks to the deep forms of isolation that are one of the novel's main themes. Most likely, Singers has bought the radio in order to entertain the friends who visit him. Here, he watches Mick's listening:

Mick Kelly did not understand when she saw the radio. Her face was very red and she asked him over and over if it was really his and whether she could listen. She worked with a dial for several minutes before she got it to the place that suited her. She sat leaning forward in her chair with her hands on her knees, her mouth open and a pulse beating very fast in her temple. She seemed to listen all over to whatever it was she heard. She sat there the whole afternoon, and when she grinned at him once her eyes were wet and she rubbed them with her fists. She asked him if she could come in and listen sometimes when he was at work and he nodded yes. So for the next few days whenever he opened the door he found her by the radio. Her hand raked through her short rumpled hair and there was a look in her face he had never seen before. (210)

This passage, rich with the gestural dimensions of listening, defamiliarizes the act of listening by bringing it to the reader through Singer's eyes. Mick "works the dial for several minutes," for instance, a word choice that reflects the fact that the "working of the dial" doesn't mean much to Singer—it corresponds to auditory information that doesn't signify for him. In illustrating the

physicality of Mick's listening, when Mick "sits leaning forward with her hands on her knees, her mouth open, a pulse beating very fast in her temple," and later, when "her eyes were wet and she rubbed them with her fist," the selected details here embed mental and emotional valences into Mick's motions. And her lack of motion. After all, the radio makes her stay in place "the whole afternoon," and this effort at stillness, unusual for the restless and rambunctious Mick, also reflects her intent listening. But of course, it's not a passive or effortless stillness: when Singer notes that Mick "seemed to listen all over," that phrase evokes several of the main ideas I've worked on in this dissertation: 1) That listening as an embodied process is not physically limited to the ears, 2) that it involves more than a relatively simple translation of soundwaves into electric signals interpreted by the brain as music, and 3) that a listener's intention or motivation can affect what and how material is heard. Mick doesn't just listen—the effort she displays here might be likened more to immersion, imprinting, maybe even ingestion. Suffice to say, her experience of the sound is not a superficial one.

No detail in the wording here indicates that Singer sees something of his own listening in Mick's. For Singer, too, could be said to "listen all over," though in a different way.

The reader surmises, of course, that Mick is listening to music. Earlier in the novel, Mick becomes especially besotted by Mozart and Beethoven. So this passage presents a listening that may be specific to music, and as I note in my review of literature about listening in Chapter One, music has its own discourses around listening that are disciplinarily-specific.¹⁵ Nevertheless, other moments too demonstrate an unusual attention to listening. At one point in the novel, Mick's younger brother, Bubber, accidentally fires a loaded gun at a neighborhood girl, Baby.

¹⁵ German Romanticists, for example, wrote many characters who seemed to become "possessed" by listening to especially powerful music, often women's voices in opera. (See: E.T.A. Hoffmann, etc.)

Although Baby recovers, Bubber initially runs off. Shocked, remorseful, and afraid, he can't be found, and Mick's family is thrown into a frenzy. Finally, Mick is the one who finds Bubber hiding up in a climbing tree. Exhorting him to come down, she oscillates between threats and tenderness. When she pauses to gauge her effect, the narrator notes: "It was like she could hear Bubber listening" (McCullers 169). Here, Mick "listens to listening" in a way that acknowledges listening's dual metaphorical and embodied dimensions.

The force of Mick's and Bubber's mutual listening here is that of focus, tension, concentration, anticipation, expectation; the "right-before" something happens.¹⁶ Although Bubber can't be seen, hidden in the branches, sound would indicate whether or not he was moved to come down or whether he would remain suspended, both in the air and in a moral sense, having not yet confronted the consequences of his accidental crime. So Mick listens to hear whether her words have worked, whether her brother will come back to his life. Bubber listens to hear whether Mick will continue to exhort him, or whether she will abandon him after his youthful crime. The forces of their listening are complex and, as Mick notes, almost palpable.

Of course, any comprehensive analysis of John Singer's character in this novel would require a foray into disability studies. The representations of Singer's disability, here, follows a certain trope of the disabled individual developing or possessing powers beyond the ordinary, either as a form of social compensation or as a "result" of the disability, a kind of God-given gift or anointment; one who is set apart, "chosen." I am in no way trying to oversimplify the representation of disability, and I don't present Singer and Mick here as case examples, necessarily. Rather, I want to show in this briefly-sketched analysis of McCullers's novel that it is possible to begin to "read for listening," in literature as well as in many situations in day-to-

¹⁶ See Erin Manning on the "pre-gesture."

day life. As I've shown in the preceding chapters, possibilities for listening exist in education, therapy, diplomacy, and many other fields, but accessing those possibilities will require us to better understand listening as a profound rhetorical force.

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