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Figures of resonance

Reading at the edges of attention

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Abstract

The introduction of new media has recurrently produced fierce arguments and fears about the future of attention, our ability to attend to meanings, objects, and ideas with care and persistence. In his essay, Koepnick revisits past and present debates about the relation of audiobooks and paper-based texts in order to argue for the need to move beyond worn concepts of aesthetic attentiveness. In Koepnick's perspective, the mobile listening of audiobooks as much as the roaming passage through contemporary sound installations offer compelling test cases to rethink the very logic that makes us discuss (and often misunderstand) new technologies with old arguments. As it (re)introduces the category of resonance to cognitively centered understandings of reading, Koepnick's essay explores the pleasures of half-attentive receptivity as a springboard to develop expanded attitudes about attention and aesthetic experience that meet the realities of a world saturated with information technology.

Even though disruptive technologies have often been cloaked in familiar designs to lessen their shock, the introduction of new media has typically witnessed fierce arguments about the attentional economy of their users. The coming of cinema in the early twentieth century led many critics to believe that moving images would inevitably annihilate esteemed modes of focus, contemplative stillness and durational commitment to aesthetic work. The arrival of the Sony Walkman in the late 1970s caused countless critics to fear that individualised listening would disintegrate Western society and remake it into an assembly of atomised consumers no longer able to sustain prolonged conversations. And the global spread of text messaging during the first years of the twenty-first century has triggered frenzied debates about the extent to which electronic media today directly feed into a culture of pathological attention deficit disorder, a Pavlovian regime of 24/7 distractions depleting what it takes to enable substantial communication.

Nothing in the age of Twitter politics, ubiquitous screen environments and 24/7 media feeds seems to matter more than critical conversations about the history and future viability of attention: our ability – to recall the word's original meaning – to stretch our perception and attach our minds to matters of concern; our adeptness to retain and sustain mental data as a condition for the possibility of retuning, recomposing or disrupting the current state of affairs; our capacity to stay with certain ideas, people, objects, conflicts, emotions, memories and hopes so as to flesh out alternatives to the order of the day; in one word, our ability to face an ever-changing present in the mode of a contemporary, understood as an eagerness to look this present straight in the eye (Agamben, 2009, p. 14). New media's historical role in disrupting the fabrics of attention may often have been overemphasised. The paranoia about the early flicker of moving images, the hedonism of monadic

listening and the speed of networked writing was less about these media themselves, as it expressed much larger dynamics, in particular social processes that put pressure on existing monopolies to define and interpret what is true, good and pleasurable. These anxieties were not about the hardware of technological change, but the past, present and future software of cultural and aesthetic gatekeeping. But to consider this an invitation to brush away any debate about the relation of media and attention would be to miss the point. Because what all this points to, instead, is a pronounced need to historicise, rethink and recalibrate what we mean by attention, and to emancipate this concept from worn formulas that dogmatically and ahistorically juxtapose attention and diversion, static focus and mobile commotion, contemplation and distraction. What all this points to is the fact that the stretching and attaching of attention does not exist in a cultural vacuum, and that we need to develop expanded concepts and attitudes about attention that meet the realities of our own highly mediated world saturated with information technology.¹

The aim of this essay is to pick up on this need to rethink attention in an age of often highly mobile media uses and multisensory media technologies. More specifically, I revisit past and present debates about the impact of audiobooks on traditional reading as a point of departure for reformulating existing concepts, expectations, norms and hierarchies of attentiveness, auditory perception and reading today. This essay introduces the acoustical concept of resonance, in all its multisensorial complexity, to cognitively centred frameworks of perception and attention, in the hope of making scholars, when discussing the attentional economies of new media configurations, face the present's future straight on rather than simply invoke presumed claims of the past. In order to carry out this argument, this essay proceeds in three steps: I will first recall a number of nineteenth-century visions of reading literature with our ears and on the move. Second, I will discuss a peculiar early twentieth-century recognition of multisensorial listening and reading, and third, I will delineate both the affective and scientific contours of what I understand as resonant reading, exploring its dimensions and potentials with the help of a contemporary example of sound art. In a brief final coda, I will finally explore the possible impact of what I call resonant reading and listening, of reading at the edges of attention, on existing practices of literary and cultural criticism.

1. The end of books?

In 1894 *Scribner's Magazine* published a translated story by French author Octave Uzanne and illustrator Albert Robida titled 'The End of Books'.² Though penned by a professed bibliophile, the story featured a gathering of fin-de-siècle intellectuals in London speculating about the future of printed books after the recent arrival of phonography. The tale envisions various technologies delivering books as

spoken texts to the ears of future audiences and it does not hesitate to picture new mechanical modes of transmission as a radical opening of the market towards mass audiences. Many of these reading machines uncannily anticipate future Walkman, disc players, mp3 players and smartphones enabling private access to spoken words while being on the move. They also toy with the idea of a universal phonographic library, a depository of recorded books allowing seemingly unfettered, yet monetisable access – what later generations might call random access – to whatever has been put on file more than a hundred years before the advent of cloud storage.



Figure 1: 'Phonographic literature for the promenade'
(Uzanne and Robida in: Rubery, 2016).

One of the text's illustrations – 'Phonographic literature for the promenade' (Figure 1) – displays a male walker, tubes connecting his ears to some kind of delivery device, his posture indicating a brief moment of pause, as if struck in mid-stride by something that makes him look inward or outward while his whole body harmoniously blends into and in fact visually complements the environment of trees, bushes and man-made structures. We do not know what might have caught his attention. What we do know, however, is that the act of listening to spoken words here does not subtract the subject from his physical surroundings or the material exigencies of his own body. His pose and mien are that of a connoisseur rather than a philistine, enjoying the extent to which the train of spoken words transforms his physical body into a medium of perception and his body into something that mediates nature and culture, perhaps even unsettles their very dichotomy. Attending to literature during a promenade here is to promenade literature. Unlike classical print-based reading and its historical praise as a medium enabling interiorised communion with the spirit, phonographic literature in this illustration is shown as a vessel of embodiment, an engine both driving the body and being driven by the listener's body. As Uzanne and Robida's roaming listener simultaneously moves and is moved by the object of his attention, he cannot but blur clear boundaries between

object and subject, interior and exterior spaces, the physical and the mental. To promenade literature is therefore also to recognise the extent to which reader and read, listener and listened, subject and object constitute each other. It expresses the desire to attach our lives to the sound of literary materials, not because it asks us to transcend the everyday, but on the contrary, because it offers unique techniques of territorialisation, of situating ourselves in space and navigating our existence through time. Audio literature transforms books into matters of the world. It endows them with a form of agency not so different from the one our strolling subject might claim for his own life. To read attentively, for him, therefore means to negotiate, bring into play and calibrate the coexistence of different material forces, wills and agential powers; it means, not to develop stunning interpretations and deep structural analyses, but to learn how to live with and embed audible sound in space and across time.

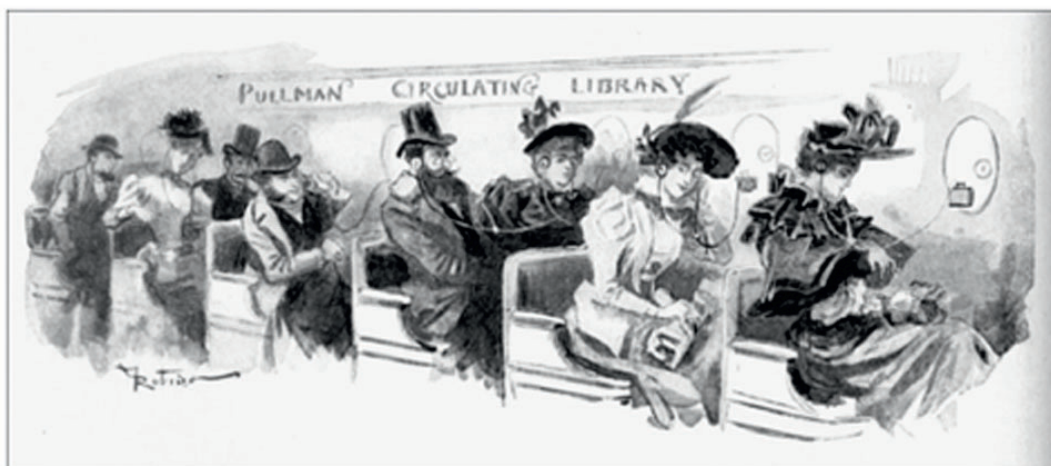


Figure 2: 'Reading on the Limited' (Uzanne and Robida in: Rubery, 2016).

Another illustration features a group of well-situated train travellers, each strapped to an outlet in the wagon's wall, their gaze bent downwards, their eyes no longer perusing passing landscapes outside because they are hooked to the offerings of what the image itself presents as Pullman's Circulating Library (Figure 2). The speed of early train travel was often feared to overwhelm the operations of human perception, its task to register and synthesise passing impressions (Schivelbusch, 1979). Similar to early cinema, the window of the train threatened to fragment the traveller's ability to focus. It supplied a shock-like overabundance of transient visual impression while at the same time reframing traditional relationships of foreground, middle- and background, of figure and ground. None of this is visible in Uzanne and Robida's futuristic vision. Audio here completely dampens the shocks and distrac-

tions of industrial speed. Listening absorbs mechanised transport into the listener's body as much as it absorbs the listener's attention into the speed of mass transit. As if train travel had stopped to pose any more perceptual challenges, Uzanne and Robida's listeners on the Limited traverse individual textual landscapes as much as entire geographies of spoken words in what appears to be a highly contemplative, focussed posture. The imaginary travels of listenership, far from simply cushioning the modern subject against the shocks of the new, here offer an effective mechanism to assimilate one's sensory systems and mental operations to the mechanical voyage of industrial technology. Though it might end the history of the traditional book and of readers uniquely able to focus their gaze and concentration on the visual gestalt of printed words, phonographic literature in this illustration is shown as a dynamic allowing the modern subject to beat a train's abstraction from space at its own game. It reshuffles the Western hierarchy of the senses, allows the individual to build and inhabit worlds within the world and, in this way, complicates what people may want to define as the real, as reality, as the world in the first place. To listen to recorded literature here is to generate worlds that exceed the imagination. It stretches minds and senses to multiply nestled realities without leading the modern subject, as many feared, into an abyss of psychological and pathological disintegration.

In the 1894 vision of *Scribner's Magazine*, the rise of phonographic literature may have caused the future end of books, but it certainly did not terminate people's pleasure of absorbing linguistic materials, let alone usher them into an apocalyptic state of distraction, superficiality and nervous fickleness. Quite to the contrary, Uzanne and Robida's listeners are shown as being deeply attached to their respective audio experiences. The postures of their bodies reveal no signs of inhabiting multiple perceptual realities at once, nor does their visual appearance present them as cultural poachers unable to fully comprehend the cultural cache of literary arts – as aesthetic interlopers drawing the high art of literary expression into the flatlands of modern mass culture.

2. Smoking and reading

History fared much less generous with consumers of audiobooks than *Scribner's Magazine* anticipated long before their actual success story throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Though what *Scribner's* envisioned as phonographic literature has come in different shapes and sizes, and has been designed and released for different media platforms and prospective audiences, a predominant tendency in both scholarly discourse and literary criticism has been, as Iben Have and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen write in their magisterial analysis of audiobook culture, 'to focus and to treat the audiobook as a threat or shortcut, a reading practice that is

uncritical, unreflective, and relaxed, as opposed to understanding deep reading as a contemplative experience' (Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2016, p. 7). At best, audio literature has been greeted as offering compensatory pleasures to those unable to read with their own eyes; or as a medium ideally designed for commuters and roaming listeners seeking easy diversion from tedious daily routines. At worst, it has been denigrated as a medium to sell out what literature is all about – a sad tool designed for modern subjects no longer able to concentrate, not able to sit still and engage their imagination, a form of uncritical consumption that does not deserve the label of reading at all. Because audiobooks – like various other time-based arts – imprint their time onto the listener's time of reception, they – it has been argued over and over again – do not grant the listener time and freedom to step back, contemplate complex or hidden meaning and synthesise textual details, and they therefore evacuate the very basis of good, critical, deep and discerning reading. Phonographic literature, according to a widespread argument, might fascinate, but it does so at the very costs of eradicating what enables the art of slow and close reading, the bread and butter of literary professionals and critical theorists for many decades.

Echoing the work of Have and Stougaard Pedersen, I have argued elsewhere that it is dire time to move beyond critical paradigms, paradigms of criticality, that leave no room to consider audiobooks as books and listening to spoken words as reading (Koepnick, 2013). The point should not be to measure phonographic literature under the rubric of esteemed nineteenth-century categories of absorbed, solitary, close and silent reading, but to explore the extent to which listening to novels on the go might ask us to expand our very concept of reading and how we want to couple certain forms of attentiveness to exposure to and engagement with literary and aesthetic materials. This, however, might be easier said than done, and so the remainder of this essay envisions what such an expanded notion of reading books with multiple senses could look like and how it would recalibrate attentional economies typically associated with traditional practices of print-based literature. In order to pursue this, let me start with discussing a user whose practice of listening to audiobooks, and of listening in general, could not be more distant from how literary scholars and critics have typically envisioned the act of deep and focussed reading.

In 1937, Arthur Copland – a graduate of the Edinburgh School of the Blind – published an essay, 'Talking-Book or Reading-Book?', in the *New Beacon* at once recognising and questioning the value of phonographic literature as an alternative to haptic braille reading. In the ensuing lively controversy, the following statement by some T. ap Rhys entered the pages of the journal: 'Who would choose to sit glued to a book, with smoking out of the question, when he had the alternative of imbibing just the same meaning and being free to smoke, move about the room and, in short, give himself up to full enjoyment?' (Rubery, 2016). Smoking, even moving around in one's study, while reading a print-based book with great care and focus may cer-

tainly also belong to the venerated repertoire of critical readers. But Rhys's talk about the pleasure of mobility and of consuming cigarettes as constitutive elements to make reading the most pleasurable and worthwhile should make us pause. What does it mean to imbibe meaning? What kind of pleasure does mobile readership and reading unlock when it emancipates the eye from the tyranny of the page? How can we think of Rhys, as he walks, smokes and listens, not as a reader who simply anticipates the pathological gestalt of today's multitasker, but as a subject who understands books – whether talking or print – as a portal to joy and meanings that transcend what may transpire between word and mind, page and eye?

Dominant concepts and normative expectations today continue to have little patience with Rhys's way of folding literature and audition, kinaesthesia and multisensorial perception into the act of reading. It is difficult not to think of him as an advocate of a fundamentally distracted form of reading, a form of cultural consumption whose relative inattentiveness violates the poetic integrity of the text. But what if we, not just for hypothetical reasons, considered his engagement with the literary arts as a model of expanded reading in the digital age, of reading in the expanded field of media culture today? What if we considered the imbuing of words as sound in motion and in space as part of what reading, not just for the visually impaired, might be more and more about? This expanded perspective would have to reckon with the way in which such reading might synchronise the rhythms of words, sentences, paragraphs and story lines with the tempo of the perambulating body, one energising and being energised by the other. It would have to have little problem with forms of reading that temporally sway in and out of the text in order to navigate ambient spaces similar to how viewers of video art today typically dip in and out of certain installation spaces.³ It would have to explore how different sensory channels such as smell and taste may affect our relation to literary materials and how readers may layer visual impressions of physical space onto descriptive textual passages, thus allowing the perception and memory of virtual and physical, imaginary and real elements to mesh with, compound, support, destabilise, perhaps even interpret each other. It would mean to focus on the exteriority as much as the interiority of reading, the fact that textual engagements, even when solitary affairs, take place in visible space and allow others to read our own reading. As it would trace how readers during acts of reading write ephemeral figures in space, it would not only emphasise the extent to which there is – in a non-banal sense – no reading without writing, but also redefine the practice of reading as an act of tuning and attuning the reader's place in time, perhaps even the weight of place and time itself. Somewhat disrespectful of the aesthetic autonomy and closure of poetic works of art, reading in this expanded field of literature would mean no less, but perhaps also no more, than to explore possible resonances between seemingly non-contiguous and discontinuous worlds, and to consider literature as a room for

play to probe competing temporalities of being in space and time. It would, in a word, redefine reading, not as a highly attentive search for information and textual meanings, but as a post-representational and highly performative technique of retuning and resonating with what we might simply want to call the world – a technique that may in fact work best in the absence of a reader's full powers of consciousness, focus, intentionality and reflexivity. Let me, in what follows, retrieve and reactivate the historical richness and ambiguity of the concept of resonance in order to explore the pleasures of semi-attentive reading with the ear and on the move in greater detail.

3. Resonant reading and attention

When piano strings trigger the vibrations of a nearby tuning fork and make it sound, the latter will resonate with and allow its acoustic potential to be activated by the excitations of the former. Enlightenment thinkers typically sought to pit reason against resonance, the first representing critical detachment, agency, culture and freedom, the second embodying presence, proximity, touch, submission, nature and necessity, whereby the whole binary represented a construct of reason and rationality itself. As Veit Erlmann has shown in great detail, however, resonance and reason could never be separated as successfully as many a thinker desired (Erlmann, 2010). One often ended up needing the other, both of them energising, grounding, and vindicating the presumed operations of another. Rather than simply leading the subject into an abyss of dark, muted and merely affective interiority, resonance thus, even during the heyday of enlightenment reason, came to serve a double duty:

On the one hand the concept of resonance, having been derived from core epistemological virtues such as intuition, observation, and experiment, names the natural mechanism governing the interaction of vibrating matter, such as strings, nerves, and air. As such resonance is the 'Other' of the self-constituting Cartesian ego as it discovers the truth (of musical harmony, for instance) and reassures itself of its own existing as a thinking entity. On the other hand resonance names the very unity of body and mind that the cogitating ego must unthank before it uncovers the truth (of resonance, for example) (Erlmann, 2015, p. 177).

Though often meant to represent the Other against which thought, rationality, understanding and interpretation were defined and privileged, resonance – in its very stress on the materiality of audition and the physical immediacy of vibratory transaction – served and continues to serve as a potent reminder of the fragility of Western binary constructions of thought, truth, knowledge and understanding, including the kind of constructions that have largely come to fuel our concepts of critical, solitary, focussed and meaning-oriented reading. Similar to how categorical separations of nature and culture, in particular in our age of the Anthro-

cene, no longer appear viable, so we must think of resonance as an echo chamber, not a mere other, of practices, institutions, ideas, values and hierarchies associated with the world of cognition. At the very least, as Erlmann himself concludes referring to the work of Bruno Latour, ‘resonance compels us to call into question the notion that the nature of things resides in their essence and that this essence can be exhausted by a sign, a discourse, or logos’ (Erlmann, 2015, p. 177).

Resonance, then, does not simply mediate between, but recalibrates and collapses presumed divisions between nature and culture, science and the aesthetic, physiology and psychology, affect and knowledge, interiority and exteriority. To describe circuits of resonance is to identify both literal and metaphorical processes that allow different materialities to affiliate different registers of movement and share certain vibrations – and thereby dissolve normative distinctions between the agency of subjects and the dumb passivity of objects. There is therefore no reason to fear upfront that theories of resonant reading – of engaging and being engaged by literary materials in the expanded field of digital culture – would automatically return us to the dark ages of mindless, Pavlovian modes of cultural consumption. Resonant reading may not operate under the banner of highly attentive, controlled, focussed and goal-oriented subjectivity that guides most concepts and pedagogies of reading; it is neither about strategic information gathering nor does it follow the protocols of hermeneutic understanding, let alone see itself as a champion of athletic criticality and textual deconstruction. Resonant reading, instead, takes place at the edges of attention and thereby collapses how we have come to juxtapose, rigidly and normatively, reader and read, focus and distraction, activity and passivity. It hovers at or above the fissure where different worlds, temporalities, states of consciousness and perceptions mesh with or attach to each other. Like the sleeper who in the moment of awakening finds herself in a state of disorientation, yet may also witness different images and frames of reference wondrously mingle with each other, resonant readers never quite know whether they read or are being read all the while experiencing their bodies and perceptions as echo chambers of things that may at first exceed their grasp.

Resonant reading, to be clear, is not about creating fake experiences of universal harmony, of being in unquestionable sync with the world, of total rhythmical alignment and frictionless accord. At its best, it instead results in a probing of how categorically different rhythms, meters, beats and oscillations – the temporalities of narrated stories, of individual words and sentences, of imaginary futures and pasts, as much as the readers’ own memories and anticipations, their sense of physical or virtual movement, their durational commitments, the agitation of their minds and bodies – interact, nestle into, corroborate, rub against or reciprocate in one way or another with each other. Let me explore this in the remainder of this essay in less theoretical and abstract terms with the help of a recent example. Though my exam-

ple does not involve recorded literature in any narrow sense, it neatly illustrates the stakes of what I understand as resonant reading and the productivity of auditory media uses at the edges of attention.

4. Listening and reading at the edges of attention

Visitors of both the Athens and Kassel venues of Documenta 14 in 2017 often found themselves haunted by the sudden sound of whispering voices emanating from loudspeakers that were located across exterior and interior spaces in both cities. These voices spoke with unpredictable intervals, caught audiences at unexpected sites. The exact words and sentences were sometimes hard to make out, not simply because visitors often needed a second or two to realise that they were in the presence of such voices, but also because their murmur tended to blend with other urban noises or the chatter of near-by pedestrians. Being whispered at in public spaces without being necessarily able to identify the source of such intimacy; being haunted by voices at seemingly close proximity without being able to fully comprehend these voices' meaning and intent; finding oneself in a simultaneous state of uncanny closeness to and puzzling distance from something that permeated one's place in time and one's movements through space – all this turned Kassel's and Athens's perambulating art visitors into echo chambers of sounds that may exceeded their immediate grasp, understanding and attention, yet which nevertheless could not but impact the rhythm of their strides, their at once sensate and cognitive relationships to urban space, the way in which they are typically held to draw boundaries between public and private, personal and common, interior and exterior spaces.

This whispering, one might want to say at first, was deeply disorienting: It had the power to derail our steps, catch us off guard, divert our attention without any clear object in sight, cause us to pause, trip, slow down, take stock of our surroundings. More accurately, however, Kassel's and Athens's whispers dissolved what allows us to speak of orientation and a subject's navigation in space in the first place. These voices were, suddenly, simultaneously within us as we were within them. The rhythm of their words resonated with one's perception, so that the visitors no longer knew where their bodies began and where they might end. In unsettling given binaries between inside and outside, in allowing the oscillation of spoken words to act on the matter of one's body, these voices could not but temporarily detach one's sense of kinaesthesia and proprioception from the presumed identity and control of the Cartesian ego, the sovereign self. Words spoken and heard here had as much agency as the bodies and minds of urban strollers.

Whispering Campaign was a sound and performance project by Chicago-based artist Pope.L. It drew on the help of many collaborators recording spoken fragments, mini-narratives about a highly diverse set of personae, random observations

and vignettes and then feeding them in irregular intervals through mostly invisible speakers into art museums, public squares, restaurant toilets, cemeteries and all kinds of other unexpected places. One stream of whispers recalled the Jewish-German philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, another the marathon champion of 1896 who was later said to sell water bottles to tourists in Athens's Panathinaiko Stadium; one speaker funnelled lines from Kassel's most famous sons, the Brothers Grimm, into the urban landscape, another simply repeated with stubborn monotony 'Ignorance is a virtue' to all those in line to enter Documenta's main exhibition venue (Figure 3). The project also included scheduled walks by select city residents, asked to speak observations during their passage into a recording device whose sounds would later be broadcast through one of Kassel's radio stations, thus adding yet another layer to how this project tracked, traced and produced a minor history of both cities. Documenta's official catalogue listed the project's materials and mediums as: 'nation, people, sentiment, language, time'.⁴ Its duration was presented as no less than 9,438 hours, i.e. the entirety of the somewhat staggered time window of Documenta's transnational opening in 2017.



Figure 3: Pope L, Whispering Campaign. Kassel, Germany, 2017. Image by the author.

'Where are we when we think?' Hannah Arendt asked famously in *The Life of the Mind*, a seemingly strange question echoed in the work of philosophers such as Günther Anders and Peter Sloterdijk at different historical junctures of the twentieth century when addressing the place of the listener vis-à-vis musical materials. Arendt's answer was to argue that the thinking self is basically placeless as it engages in an internal dialogue between 'me and myself' (Arendt, 1977, pp. 184-185).

Anders's and Sloterdijk's answers were more complex, the former developing a phenomenological account of how, when listening to music, 'one falls out of the world; that one is somehow somewhere nonetheless' (Anders in: Erlmann, 2010, p. 325); the latter referring to music's percussive and vibrational energies to argue that our relations to the world exceed thought and reason and anything that would smack of me or myself in the first place (Sloterdijk, 1993). Instead of taking a tempting detour through the philosophy of music, let me sketch out possible answers to the question of where we are when listening to Pope.L's whispering campaign and, hence, when we become what this essay understands to be a resonant listener and reader who navigates productively at the edges of attention and for whom the oscillation between semantic and material, cognitive and affective registers, resonance and reason no longer poses unsurmountable challenges.

(1) Like the audiobook listener or the reader of audiobooks on the go, Pope.L's auditory subject is one who does not know of stable or fixed positions allowing detached observation and analytic scrutiny of words and meanings. Sounds catch this subject unawares, and any effort of trying to distinguish perceptible depths and surfaces, intentions and expressions appears futile. What you hear is what you get, and yet, each time Pope.L's whispers engulf our steps, we cannot but wonder about the 'what' as much as the 'you'. Resonant hearing or listening, in this respect, is to experience reading as a mode of reciprocal entanglement with matters of the world, matters of multiple worlds. It places the subject in positions that exceed any sense of mastery, whether this subject may experience some sense of discord or of flow-like concurrence. To be whispered at in public, similar to listening to an audiobook in mid-stride, is to fall out of one world without being able to somehow disambiguate the curious somewhere one has fallen into.

(2) Like Rhys smoking and walking while reading a shellac-based talking book in the 1930s, to come across Pope.L's whispering in Kassel or Athens is to experience resonant reading as the inscription of ephemeral figures in space, a form of writing in which sounds and moving bodies act on each other so as to produce unexpected vectors of movement and standstill, of detour and delay. To allow spoken words to resonate with us here does not mean to enter a state of seamless attunement. In Erlmann's words: 'Just as the interaction between a chord played on a violin and the hair cells of the inner ear can yield anything from the most perfect harmony to the sharpest of discords [...] our cognitive relationship to the larger world, too, can be one of certainty and truth or one of error and delusion' (Erlmann, 2010, p. 342). But to engage Pope.L's whispering, similar to an audiobook, in the mode of a resonant reader is to recognise the extent to which movements in space, bodily innervations, atmospheres and ambient conditions are essential to cognitive processes and can index one amid other forms of interpreting texts. Speakers perform texts as much as resonant readers perform their reading of these texts by means of writing time-

based maps of movement into visible space. If classical literature and pedagogies of reading rested on categorical juxtapositions of writing as an act of creation and reading as an act of absorbed and focussed consumption, resonant reading as one modality of reading in the expanded field of literature today collapses this binary. Reading here is writing; to write is to read. Resonance entangles reading and writing in loops of mutual inflection and transposition that move text and reader beyond the fully focussed intentionality that characterised cognition-driven concepts of reading and writing as separate activities.

(3) In his 1787 book *Entdeckungen über die Theorie des Klanges*, Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni sought to visualise the workings of resonant vibrations by drawing a bow over pieces of metal whose surfaces were covered with sand, creating intricate patterns whenever the metal plate reached a state of resonance and thus arranged the sand into nodal patterns, so-called Chladni figures. Chladni's resonance figures redirected the flow of acoustical time in order to briefly arrest in form of an image what seemed to escape visualisation. They not only transposed vibrant matter and processes, but engaged resonance as a mode of delaying, rerouting, suspending and unsettling the ordinary workings of linear time. Resonant reading, amid our fast-paced times of information overflow and compulsive connectivity, can have similar effects. It has the power to suspend, ripple, fold, unfold, redirect, split or multiply the paths of everyday time and, thus, in face of the timeless time of 24/7, the pressure of always being on, make readers and listeners sense the weight as much as the productivity of time again. Pope.L's *Whispering Campaign* rips through the textures of the ordinary, not as shock or perceptual assault, but to cast the urban subject into a state of surprise, wonder and curiosity. It causes us to stumble and hesitate, it disorients and bewilders, not to make us raise our defence shields, but on the contrary, to explore possible tensions between different perceptual registers and the temporal qualities of competing ontologies. We may not necessarily slow down our steps, but we cannot but sense a certain complication of our sense of what it might mean to live and be in time in the first place, a productive disruption of temporalities that solely measure time in terms of chronological passage. Like Rhys needing the smoke of his cigarette to read talking books most pleasurably, Pope.L's campaign reckons with subjects willing and eager to embrace diffusion and dispersal, to let go of will and eagerness, to pause and drift rather than to rush and act goal-oriented – to allow for unexpected entanglements with the world instead of mastering perceived challenges with the help of preconceived categories and concepts. Situated at the edges of attention, resonant perception and reading thus expresses in the form of a promise a state of being in the world in which we can joyfully surrender our wilfulness and open our senses and minds without fearing trouble, damage or annihilation. It serves as a training ground for possible futures that no longer mobilise

attention for the purpose of self-management and survival – futures in which our lives, contrary to anything we know, could unfold without fear.

Coda: Literature and entanglement

‘Reading’, writes Rita Felski in her *The Limits of Critique*, should be ‘conceived as an act of composition – of creative remaking – that binds text and reader in ongoing struggles, translations, and negotiations. The literary text is not a museum piece immured behind glass but a spirited and energetic participant in an exchange—one that may know as much as, or a great deal more than, the critic’ (Felski, 2015, p. 182). And in her plea for studying how we live with books rather than to dissect them as if they were dead objects, she concludes: ‘The aim is no longer to diminish or subtract from the reality of the texts we study but to amplify their reality, as energetic cofactors and vital partners in an equal encounter’ (Felski, 2015, p. 185).

What I have called resonant reading in the preceding pages, reading at the edges of attention, reading understood through the filters of multisensorial listening, echoes some of Felski’s concerns and interventions. Whether it happens in the streets of Kassel and Athens or on a commuter train as we listen to an audiobook perusing landscapes passing by, resonant reading – precisely because it advocates the coexistence of multiple worlds at once – does not simply recalibrate former models of attention, but encourages us to encounter texts, imagined story worlds and the rhythms of linguistic expressions as vital partners and agents, as objects that may act on us in both physical and psychological ways as much as we act on them. The point should not be to discard resonant reading as a pathological slackening of focus or a dumb retreat from the presumed heights of criticality, largely triggered by yet another new medium and technological innovation, in this case the ubiquity of portable digital media devices. Instead, the point should be to recognise resonant reading’s potential to redefine and enrich what we may want to call reading in the first place, its potential to shape, amplify, effect, energise and complicate reality rather than simply index or represent it.

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Notes

- 1 This essay was first presented as a public lecture at Aarhus University in October 2017. I am grateful to the audience for its many insightful comments. The arguments presented in this paper pick up some perspectives I currently explore in a larger book project on figurations of resonance in contemporary sound art.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of their historical contribution, see Rubery (2016).
- 3 See, among others, Mondloch (2010), Pedulla (2012), Uroskie (2014).
- 4 <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13513/pope-l>