Shelley’s Sound Body[[1]](#footnote-1)

*For Ross, who listened, and heard, like no other.*

Nothing will come of nothing; speak again.[[2]](#footnote-2)

-- *King Lear*

Listen Without Prejudice.[[3]](#footnote-3)

-- George Michael

Can we ever hear the sound of our own voice? When as a child I was asked by my mother, “Do you hear yourself?!”, I would think to myself, “Well, no. But you do. Or do you?” Mladen Dolar calls the voice “the material support of bringing about meaning, yet it does not contribute to it itself. It is, rather, something like the vanishing mediator” that “makes the utterance possible, but . . . disappears in it.”[[4]](#footnote-4) What “persists,” Dolar argues, is the “object voice,” which “does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify in an object of fetish reverence.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Hence a paradox: although “voices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity,” the voice “is *what does not contribute to making sense.*”[[6]](#footnote-6) Voice “is the material element recalcitrant to meaning,” for “if we speak in order to say something, then the voice is precisely that which cannot be said.”[[7]](#footnote-7) I want to explore this incommensurability between voice and the said in Percy Shelley’s lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). If the materiality of voice and sound mediates and grounds meaning and the human, more often than not in Romantic verse (think of Keats’ nightingale) they remain “recalcitrant to meaning,” opening a fissure within human being. This vanishing potential makes transformation possible while at the same time challenging notions of “a unified self-representation.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Examining the moment in *Frankenstein* when Walton hears “the sound as of a human voice” that announces the creature’s presence, David Clark asks, “Would a human voice be thinkable if not for hearing it *differentially* through the other?”, as when a sound recording of our voice confronts us with its “machinic life”:

The difference between a human voice and the likeness of a human voice reproduces a difference within the human voice, making it originarily a likeness of itself: here ‘voice’ stands as a figure for the way in which the human appears *to* itself and *for* itself, that is, *monstrates*, stands out, shows, or portends. In other words, the ‘human voice’ is the figure for the human’s marking of itself *as* human, and thus its re-marking.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Romanticism inherits from the Enlightenment a preoccupation with sight, visuality, and the gaze as both formative and troubling forms of how an emergent modernity increasingly comes to apprehend the world. In its preoccupation with voice and sound, however, Romanticism explores what this apprehension misses as that which necessarily *remains* missing such that human potential “does not solidify in an object of fetish reverence” – the kind of reverence that guarantees Jupiter’s tyranny as a symbol and method of prescribing what humans and thus the human itself can and should be.

In Act One of Shelley’s poem, Prometheus implores the Earth and her elements to recall to him the “many-voiced Echoes” (1.60)[[10]](#footnote-10) of his curse against Jupiter, who has pinned Prometheus to a rock in the Indian Caucasus for daring to defy the tyrant’s authority. Whatever plot the poem has, this, as well as the transforming energy of Asia’s desire, constitutes its single driver, apart from its concrete result, relegated to a stage direction at the opening of Act Three, Scene Three: “Hercules unbinds Prometheus, who descends” (259). But the poem enacts no straightforward feat of recall. For one thing, Shelley’s is not “the individual Mind that keeps her own / Inviolate retirement,”[[11]](#footnote-11) grounded in its ability to reclaim the past within the present and thus gain purchase on the future. Shelley draws his imagery “from the operations of the human mind” (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, 207) as a reflection of “different modifications of the one mind” (“On Life,” 508). But whereas for an earlier criticism the “one mind” signalled a movement from Shelley’s early skepticism toward the metaphysics of “postmortal transcendence,”[[12]](#footnote-12) so much of his verse explores a mind rarely at one with itself. Symptomatic of this unbound and unbinding nature is the fact that Prometheus’ curse has gone viral in the environment. There it remains, ready to haunt, if not return, a “voice” which is both “contagion to the world” (2.3.10) and “an awakening sound” (3.3.14). That the Mountains, Springs, Air, and Whirlwinds echo back the “dread words” (1.99) of the curse indicates a rather more distributed cognition.[[13]](#footnote-13) Recalling the curse itself is beside the point, for “words are quick and vain” (1.303). What matters instead is “the voice / Which [Prometheus] gave forth” (1.112-13). He has less forgotten the curse than he wants to recall the sound of his – its – defiance at the moment of its saying. But again, this is not merely to summon the voice of this defiance. More complexly, it is both to express and to register the autonomous affect of resistance as the vanishing mediator of any attempt to renovate a devastated world.

Hence to recall the curse is not to return to any origin or first principle in order to advance toward some eventual or anticipated *telos*. The poem’s complex movement back to its own future, its relentless pursuit of “the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present” (*A Defence of Poetry*, 535), tracks the primal scene of an experience that can never be recalled but that remains as the habitual performance of its absence. As Fred Moten argues, “It’s the ongoing repression of the primal scene of subjection that one wants to guard against and linger in. . . . the *conjunction* of reproduction and disappearance is performance’s condition of possibility, its ontology and its mode of production.”[[14]](#footnote-14) In this delicate balance between submitting again to the sound of punishment and keeping alive the voice of resistance, what, then, does Prometheus hear, or want to hear, or need to hear? Something to do with the sound *of* sound,[[15]](#footnote-15) the activity of its occurrence, provides the answer, which is why echoes come to signify at once the failure of recall and its insistent possibility. In Shelley’s lyrical drama, a voice, like Echo herself, is nothing more than sound cursed to repeat what it hears, wasted by the desire she can never express for the astonishing beauty of another she can never have. But unlike Narcissus’ perpetually redirected inwardness, that the voice is nothing more means it also has the queerly powerful potential to release itself from the gaze of the other.

Eventually I want to argue that this potential resides with the capacity to listen and to be heard as nearly impossible markers of what it means to be human. Listening is the literal act of a possible communication between individuals. Yet at the same time speaking with and to others is less to listen for and hear the content of what is being said, the grounding of a human relationality, than it is to register what risks getting lost in translation. Listening is facilitated by the materiality of sound, but it transpires as and results in the immaterial or ideational affect and effect of what is possibly being heard. We can, that is, differentiate between hearing and listening. To hear and be heard is to indicate a certain transmission of meaning. To listen is to remain open to the possibility *of* meaning, not as its crystallization but as what cannot be conscripted into meaning, as what takes us always already beyond ourselves. Prometheus listens more than hears and listens for more than he hears. In doing so, listening moves the poem perpetually along the non-human trajectory of what Chris Washington calls Romanticism’s post-apocalyptic future.[[16]](#footnote-16)

II.

At the opening of Act One, Prometheus asks the Earth, “have not the mountains felt?” (1.24), “yon Heaven – the all-beholding Sun, / Has it not seen?” and “The Sea, in storm or calm / Heaven’s ever-changing Shadow, spread below – / Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?” (1.26-29). Feeling, sight, sound. The poem seems to avoid prioritizing one over the other, though it’s not as simple as that. When he encounters the Furies Mercury sends to harrow his soul, Prometheus states, “Whilst I behold such execrable shapes, / Methinks I grow like what I contemplate / And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy” (1.449-51). Here the ominous fixity of the gaze orchestrates the scene of Romantic sympathy. The Furies anatomize what Panthea calls “A woeful sight – a youth / With patient looks nailed to a crucifix” (584-85). This image marks the nightmare of iconography and thus of the visual to supersede and thus oppress all other senses. Or as Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), “man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern.”[[17]](#footnote-17) In *Letters on Natural Magic*, David Brewster argues that “This wonderful organ [the eye] may be considered as the sentinel which guards the pass between the worlds of matter and spirit. . . . The eye is consequently the principal seat of the supernatural.”[[18]](#footnote-18) The statement suggests by the time of the First Reform Bill the enduring post-Enlightenment hegemony of the visual. Yet one of Brewster’s examples is the Spectre of the Brocken, an atmospheric phenomenon by which our shadows, cast upon mist, both magnify and distort the human form. The Spectre reflects the spectral nature of vision itself, the way in which reality passes into consciousness via a logic beyond comprehension, like the hallucinatory doubles of James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) or Thomas De Quincey’s opium fantasias.

In Shelley’s poem the Sea challenges the Sun’s “all-beholding” pre-eminence of the visual as the mirror or “ever-changing Shadow” of Heaven “spread below,” where Prometheus’ “agony” falls on “deaf” ears. Glen O’Malley has explored this transitional space between sight and sound as part of Shelley’s synesthetic aesthetic. Synaesthesia suggests how the neuronal pathways of the poem’s sensorium – the “vitally metaphorical” way in which the transferences of figurative language embody a poem’s experience as it unfolds *in medias res* – produce a kind of involuntary interconnectedness in which subjects hear sight or see sound.[[19]](#footnote-19) Such capacity radicalizes the perceptual juxtapositions of what Blake calls the “Ratio of the five senses.”[[20]](#footnote-20) At the same time, as a synaesthete will tell you, all senses firing involuntarily at once brings its own form of hell, a kind of perceptual deluge that overwhelms and suspends the self, as if to open a fissure within human being. Addressing the capacity of images to compel and fascinate our notice, W. J. T. Mitchell asks “What do pictures want?”[[21]](#footnote-21) Asking how and why the visual arrests our attention is to account for the lack that mobilizes this mutual desire in the first place, one for which neither we nor the picture can account. In a similar way, Shelley’s poem both desires and demands our attention without any guarantee that we will be able to make sense of its felt environment.

The poem thus implicitly differentiates between making sense and the making *of* sense, between what we imagine the result of sense-making to mean and the perceptual actions that make meaning possible in the first place, but on which we can gain no objective purchase. Sound signals this paradoxical embeddedness, what in a somewhat different context Jacques Lacan calls the “filigree” in which we “feel the presence of the gaze” even when “any representation of the human figure is absent.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Put another way, sound in *Prometheus Unbound* confronts us with a subjectivity without subjects, what one might call a transferential subject or subject *of* transference. And in this sense, sound suggests a mode of survival that survives the visual. At the end of Act Three the Spirit of the Earth recounts to Asia that he has heard the “voice to be accomplished” as a “long long sound, as it would never end” (3.4.57). In Act One Ione asks where the Chorus of Spirits that bring the sound of the future from “the dim caves of human thought” (1.658) have “fled” (1.801). Panthea replies: “Only a sense / Remains of them, like the Omnipotence / Of music when the inspired voice and lute / Languish, ere yet the responses are mute” (1.802-5). Something about the loss of sound registers as the enduring sound of loss, the ineluctable transference between invincibility and expiration. Or as Jean-Luc Nancy writes,the “visual persists until its disappearance,” while “the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

The resonantly disastrous sonic effects of Prometheus’ curse denude the earth and dehumanize its inhabitants. They also indicate what Steve Goodman calls “the less anthropocentric *environmentality* or *ecology of vibrational effects*”[[24]](#footnote-24) that will be the poem’s final vision and celebration of a kind of post- or para-human life. In Act Three Earth feels these effects as a “touch” that “runs down / Even to the adamantine central gloom / Along those marble nerves” (3.3.85-87). At first, however, the sound of Prometheus’ curse seems to echo Jupiter’s oppression, resonating as a sound within Jupiter’s hearing that confirms his power. The “Mountains” and “ice Springs” “vibrated to hear” Prometheus’ curse “and then crept / Shuddering through India” (63-65). The sound of the curse was like that of an “Earthquake’s couch” over which the Mountains “stood,” and like “men convulsed with fears / We trembled in our multitude” (1.75-77). This traumatic sonic vibration registers as the involuntary and inarticulate affective vocabulary of groans: “rending groan” (1.85), “the groans of pining slaves” (1.128), “groans and blood” (1.332), “groans half heard, and blood untasted” (1.529), “low yet dreadful groan” (1.578). As Panthea says, revisiting the effects of Jupiter’s curse on earth and throughout history, “those groans are grief enough” (1.593). They manifest what Goodman calls “sonic warfare.” In 2005 the Israeli military used “sound bombs” in the Gaza Strip, “the high-volume, deep-frequency effect of low-flying jets traveling faster than the speed of sound.” The “objective was to weaken the morale of a civilian population by creating a climate of fear through a threat that was preferably nonlethal yet possibly as unsettling as an actual attack.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Such a traumatic deployment indicates how “sound can modulate mood,” for the “intense vibration literally threatens not just the traumatized emotional disposition and physiology of the population, but also the very structure of the built environment.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Part of Prometheus’ desire to recall his curse against Jupiter in Act One, then, is to risk re-instantiating voice and sound for their purely material and thus violent effect and affect.

Yet Prometheus short-circuits this “affectively contagious radiation of sonic events”[[27]](#footnote-27) in order to re-sound sound as the potentiality of a less traumatizing experience. He thus pushes against the deployment of sonic trauma as the “*activity of the future in the present,* and therefore a portal into the operative logic of fear within the emergent paradigm of preemptive power,” what Brian Massumi calls the future affect of terror.[[28]](#footnote-28) The last Fury says, “Blood thou canst see, and fire; and canst hear groans: / Worse things unheard, unseen, remaind behind” (1.617-18). If the sound of grief is felt along the pulses, it also heralds another “unheard, unseen” materiality that here signals an ominous future but, as we later see, is also a redemptive sonic possibility. The Fury’s negative formation embeds its inverse as the “happy sounds” of Earth that remain to this point like the “inarticulate people of the dead” (1.188, 183). Asking to hear the sound of the voice he “gave forth,” Prometheus hears “an awful whisper” that “rises up,” the “inorganic voice” of a “Spirit” that Prometheus feels “art moving near” (1.132-36). That this voice is “scarce like sound” (1.133) suggests the weakening resonance of Prometheus’s curse that he would re-amplify in order to dismiss. Yet the phrasing also indicates a potentiality that “connects every separate entity in the cosmos, organic or inorganic.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This “production, transmission, and mutation of affective tonality” signals a “non-representational ontology of vibrational force,”[[30]](#footnote-30) not sound’s representation *as* sound but its dynamic motion through time and space. As avatars carrying the sonic effect of this movement to Asia in Act Two, Ione and Panthea see the voice as “A Shape, a throng of sounds” (1.226). But this “Shape” is at the same time “awful *like* the sound” (1.233; emphasis added), indicating a metonymic or sideways movement or force that the Phantasm of Jupiter hears as “unaccustomed sounds . . . hovering on my lips” (1.242-43), as if to anticipate their decentering power to overthrow the tyrant. More pointedly, Prometheus in turn hears the voice of the Phantasm as “empty” (1.249), as if to signal it as now void of meaning, just as Prometheus, upon hearing the curse, famously responds, “It doth repent me: words are quick and vain” (1.1.303).

But “empty” also foreshadows within the plenitude of sound the vanishing mediator of voice that is, as Dolar notes, the matrix of sound itself, one that by Act Four will drown out all other voices. Tellingly, when the Fury finally vanishes and the “sights with which [Jupiter] torturest gird [Prometheus’] soul / With new endurance” (1.643-44), Prometheus then says, “There are two woes: / To speak and to behold; thou spare me one” (1.646-47). This spared woe I take to be the sound of words themselves. Earlier Prometheus says, pondering the sacrificial image or “emblem” he might become to “heap / Thousand-fold torment” (1.595-96) on humankind, “Thy name I will not speak, / It hath become a curse” (1.603-5). He is thus spared succumbing to the fixed sound of his original curse, so that its traumatic sonic effects can be released into its more productive vibratory movement. At this point the Earth calls upon a chorus of spirits to voice what “they behold / Beyond that twilight realm, as in a glass” (1.661-62), but a glass darkly that is the mirror stage of sound through which Prometheus and Asia will pass. And what they bear/speak is the sound of “The future” (1.663): “One sound – above, around, / One sound beneath, around, above / Was moving” (1.703-5). Through this medium, as Ione states, “despair” is “Mingled with love, and then dissolved in sound,” which in turn stops up words altogether. As Panthea responds, “Canst thou speak, sister? all my words are drowned” (1.758), and the Spirits having fled, they hear “Only a sense” of their presence, but one that “Like echoes through long caverns, wind and roll” (1.806). Here the echoes that earlier in the Act threatened to die out now resonate with a startling and complex materiality as sound bends (“wind and roll”) through a space that is at once physical, natural, psychological, spiritual, and cosmic.

This resonance, at once material and metaphysical, drives Act Two. Here Asia, long parted from Prometheus in the Indian Caucasus, now occupies the “scene of her sad exile” (1.827), patiently awaiting his return. Yet their impending reunion, meant to signal the rebirth of the world released from the effects of Jupiter’s curse, is less the *hieros gamos* of two identities than their mutual submersion in sound as their very mode of being. Panthea enters with the knowledge of two dreams, the sound of which carries her and Asia to the realm of Demogorgon. One heralds the imminent liberation of Prometheus from Jupiter’s tyranny, a gradual transformation Panthea witnesses while asleep in Ione’s arms in Act One, enacted in Act Three’s stage direction. That dream carries Panthea in Act Two as “the wind / Which fails beneath the music that I bear” (2.1.50-51), which is the “wordless converse” (2.1.52) already transpiring between Asia and Prometheus since Act One. Asia reads the psychic interiority of Prometheus in Panthea’s face, now a site of potential recognition and communication between Asia and Prometheus: “Lift up thine eyes, / And let me read thy dream” (2.2.55-56).[[31]](#footnote-31) Finding Panthea’s “words / Are as the air. I feel them not” (2.1.109), Asia then implores her to “lift / Thine eyes that I may read his written soul!” (2.1.109-10). Yet their transference suggests neither entrapment within the gaze of the visual nor the prison house of language; instead it does the felt work of reading through the medium of sound. The Norton Editors tell us that Panthea’s second dream – which, tellingly, she “remember[s] not” (2.1.610) – is of “the Spirit of Hours that are to usher in the fall of Jupiter and the release of Prometheus, and to the course of necessity” (238n2). I would argue that the purpose of this second dream is to manifest sound as what “has no hidden face; it is all in front, in back, and outside inside, *inside-out* in relation to the most general logic of presence as appearing, as phenomenality or as manifestation, and thus as the visible face of a presence subsisting in self.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

This subjectivity without subjects gradually emerges as the poem’s *modus operandi*. The second Dream tells Asia and Panthea to “Follow, follow!” (2.1.132), then “disappears” (2.132) and “passes now into [the] mind” (2.133) of Panthea, who echoes its sound: “*O follow, follow!*” (2.141). As Panthea speaks the sound of her “words / Fill, pause by pause [Asia’s] own forgotten sleep / With shapes” (2.141-43) that in turn echo the Dream’s sound at lines 153 (“*Follow, O follow!*”), 159 (“*O follow, follow, follow me!*”), and 162 (“*follow, follow*”), what she hears as the “clinging music” of “Low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts” (2.1.157, 158). This *menage-a-trois* of sound signifies the tangled transference between Panthea, Asia, and Prometheus that then resounds in the Echo of the Dream – “Follow, follow!” (2.1.162) – and yet again in “*unseen*” Echoes who announce, “Echoes we – listen! / We cannot stay / As dew-stars glisten / Then fade away” (2.1.166-69). Here, as throughout the poem, Shelley’s syntax is maddeningly opaque. Although sound cannot be seen, it nonetheless announces its presence “as the visible face of a presence subsisting in self.” Like Heideggerian *Schein,* in whichbeing is at once revelatory and illusory, it *appears*, as in the phrase “We are echoes,” a performative speech act that implores Asia and Panthea to “listen” before this presence fades. At the same time, the echoes carry the sounds of this listening and thus do the work of listening itself. As Asia and Panthea approach Demogorgon’s realm, they hear a sound that “Satiates the listening wind, continuous, vast, / Awful as silence” (2.3.35-36). We might ask how wind can listen, but then we need to ask what a sound might be with no wind to carry – to hear – it?

At the end of Act Two, after her descent to the Cave of Demogorgon, where she finds that “the deep truth is imageless” (2.4.116), Asia, hearing only the sound of her thought echoed back by Demogorgon, is told instead simply to “Behold!” (2.4.128). The exclamation is less an injunction to *see* than to *feel* and thus *hear* what the future holds. Or rather, if it is to see, it’s to see what cannot be seen, to see the sound of the future as the picture of what sound might look like. The Spirit of the Hour arrives to transport Asia to her reunion with Prometheus in Act Three. Seeing the change in Asia’s presence, Panthea cannot “endure the radiance of [her] beauty” (2.5.17-18), like the synaesthete unable to withstand all senses firing at will: “I feel, but see thee not” (2.5.17). Yet at the same time this perceptual crisis heralds the emergence of a greater immersive sonic environment, the “sounds i’ the air which speak the love / Of all articulate beings” (2.5.35-36) and sing of Asia as the “Life of Life” (2.5.48) and “Child of Light” (2.5.54). Immersed in this music, Panthea experiences the abandonment of and by sight as the pre-existing condition for transformation by the feeling of sound: “all feel, yet see thee never / As I feel now, lost forever!” (2.5.64-65). At this point Asia, “by the instinct of sweet Music driven” in the “enchanted Boat” of her “desire” (2.5.90, 72, 94), is carried to the poem’s primal scene, as it were, of its sonic imagination[[33]](#footnote-33):

My soul is an enchanted boat

Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float

Upon the silver saves of they sweet singing . . .

It seems to float ever – forever –

Upon that many winding River

Between mountains, woods, abysses,

A Paradise of wildernesses,

Till like one in slumber bound

Borne to the Ocean, I float down, around,

Into a Sea profound, of ever-spreading sound. (2.5.72-74, 78-84)

Drowning, not waving, suggests a loss (“lost forever”) that is at the same time suspension and buoyancy (“It seems to float ever – forever”).[[34]](#footnote-34) This life *of* sound marks the relation of Being insofar, as Éduoard Glissant notes, “Relation is safe from the idea of Being.”[[35]](#footnote-35) To wave would be to signal from the depths of being, what Glissant calls a “poetics of depth,” “like depth psychology.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Such depth signals a knowledge that can be plumbed, exteriorized from the subject, “dispossessing it of the sovereign subject (requiring the knowledge – the gaze, or the hearing – of another) then surrendering it to this subject (speaking ‘in’ the structures of any expressed knowledge).”[[37]](#footnote-37) To drown, on the other hand, is to surrender yet not to submit.

III.

In Act Three Ione announces both what sound prophecies and the sound *of* prophecy itself. Implored by Prometheus, she takes “that curved shell, which Proteus old / Made Asia’s nuptial boon, breathing within it / A voice to be accomplished” (3.3.65-67), as if the sound emanates at once from Ione’s breath *and* autonomously from the shell itself. Similarly, the resulting “sound must be at once both sweet and strange” (3.3.75), familiar and alien, one whose timbre is pitched ambiguously between present and future as well as past. “Must” signals variously as ‘it must be this way,’ ‘it must take this form,’ but also it ‘must already be this way,’ at once given, imperative, and prognostication. As Prometheus announces, Ione will “chant fragments of sea-music” (3.3.27) that signal a “Mutability” from which “man” cannot “hide” (3.3.25), while Asia and Prometheus, “unchanged,” “will sit and talk of time and change / As the world ebbs and flows” (3.3.23-24). Moreover, they shall “Weave harmonies divine yet ever new, / From difference sweet where discord cannot be” (3.3.38-39). This vision is of things “though unimagined, yet to be” (3.3.56). This “voice to be accomplished” suggests a blank utopian future that might never be realized, a sterile ‘no-place’ of only ever potential action. But it also suggests Frederic Jameson’s reading of utopia as an “imaginary enclave within the real social space,” one whose “very possibility . . . is itself the result of spatial and social differentiation” born of two “contradictory features.”[[38]](#footnote-38) This “pocket of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change” is the product of the agitations of transitional historical moments, like the effects of Jupiter’s tyranny or Prometheus’ curse. But it also marks a “distance . . . from practical politics, on the basis of a zone of the social totality which seems eternal and unchangeable,” like the cave to which Prometheus and Asia repair at the end of Act Three.

We can thus read Jameson’s two “contradictory features” in terms of how *Prometheus Unbound* wrestles with the uncanny connection between tyranny/oppression and liberation/transformation. The poem’s utopianism only makes sense by virtue of its emergence both within and apart from the space of discord that is the occasion of Prometheus wanting to remember his curse against Jupiter in the first place. Yet this paradox, as I have explored it to this point, is to map a space of listening negotiation based, not in “discord” but in a “difference” that does not at the same time produce identity. Just at the moment that the Chorus of Spirits announces the song of the Promethean in Act Four, the Chorus of Hours, whose temporality signals the movement of social transition, announces, “Break the dance, and scatter the song; / Let some depart and some remain” (4.159-60). As Kandice Chuh notes, borrowing from Fred Moten, this ‘break’ in sound, which is also an invitation “‘into the break,’” indicates a “radical aesthetics that undermines the privileged position of visual representation and its attendant processes of subjectification/subjection.”[[39]](#footnote-39) As Ione says to Panthea, “Even whilst we speak / New notes arise . . . What is that awful sound?” (4.184-85). Like Demogorgon’s realm, “Awful as silence,” this sound cannot be understood or turned into meaning. Instead it must be felt as part of the subject’s immersion in the matrix of her own coming to being.

This absorption is less to trap the subject between oppression and transformation, which Shelley seems to recognize as an unavoidable capture, than it is to mark a “pocket of stasis” in which a subjectivity without subjects registers a rather more fluid and dynamic possibility. At this point Ione and Panthea “Listen” for “The Ocean-like inchantment of strong sound / Which flows intenser, keener, deeper yet / Under the ground and through the windless air” (4.203-5). This tonal motion heralds the “Two visions of strange radiance” (4.202) whose “path of melody” (4.198) carries the “lovely grief” of “sweet sad thoughts” (4.201). Again, the ambiguity of Shelley’s phrasing indicates the lived experience of listening itself as both active attunement and submission to the act of listening. As the Earth says when in Act Three Prometheus heralds the “thunder mingled with clear echoes,” “I hear – I feel” (3.3.84). Sound and voice but more importantly *listening* to either indicates a sensory intake that is itself constitutive of the poem’s revolutionary movement. This agitation within the social space of a world reeling from both the tyrant’s oppression and defeat that instantiates the very moment of political practice itself as a lived utopian gesture. As Chuh notes, “sound can interrupt the social order more immediately, perhaps more effectively, than can visual representation.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Such disruptive potential also speaks to the fact that Shelley’s text seems more than aware of itself *as* sound, more importantly an aesthetics of “sound, as sound.” Put another way, one engages in listening yet can never anticipate what will be heard. As Glissant states, “The power to experience the shock of elsewhere is what distinguishes the poet.”[[41]](#footnote-41) And what will be heard, once materialized as sound, immediately vanishes into the sonorousness of this materialization.

It’s not the case, then, that sound takes priority over sight. Instead, “listening . . . is the sense that touches upon and stimulates at once all bodily senses, as well as that other sense-making faculty that has been variously called ‘mind,’ ‘spirit,’ or ‘soul.’”[[42]](#footnote-42) For “to listen is both to engage in proprioceptive self-reflection and to be drawn towards other sounding bodies whose resonances both penetrate and envelope the listener.”[[43]](#footnote-43) One might say all of Act One, indeed the entire poem, is engaged in active listening for the synaesthetic good vibrations that signal “the new world of man” that, as the Chorus of Spirits and Hours in Act Four foretell, “shall be called the Promethean” (4.158). This “awakening sound” “shall be / As thunder mingled with clear echoes” (3.3.81-82), yet not in the sense that the echoes themselves provide a clarity of sound for they are “mingled” with the sound of the thunder itself. The poem attends to a rather more complex “loud and whirlwind harmony” (4.237) that is “the deep music of the rolling world / Kindling within the strings of the waved air / Æolian modulations” (4.186-88). Listening, that is to say, is neither an easy nor isolated and solitary task. As Ione says in Act Four, one must “Listen too, / How every pause is filled with under-notes, / Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones / Which pierce the sense and live within the soul / As the sharp stars pierce Winter’s chrystal air / And gaze upon themselves within the sea” (4.188-93). Goodman speaks of the “unactualized nexus of rhythms and frequencies within audible bandwidths,”[[44]](#footnote-44) like the unheard melodies resonating from Keats’ Grecian urn. Goodman calls this the “*not yet audible*” or “*unsound,*” silence as “sound in potential, unactualized.”[[45]](#footnote-45) An as yet unactualized potential both of and within sound at the same time constitutes the sonic’s capacity for mobilizing, orchestrating, and reorganizing pluralistic and relational rather than totalizing or atomizing environments.

Listening thus constitutes the profoundly political dimension of Shelley’s text as a gesture beyond the political. In *Noise*: *The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali unfolds a cultural historiography of music as the prophetic herald of change, “a way of perceiving the world” and a “tool of understanding,”[[46]](#footnote-46) what Shelley in “Ode to a West Wind” calls “The trumpet of a prophecy” (69). Music is the orchestration of sound as noise: “With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion.”[[47]](#footnote-47) As the political unconscious of music, noise is an especially potent idea in a world of capital and the fetishization of music as commodity and spectacle, in a “society of repetition in which nothing will happen anymore,”[[48]](#footnote-48) the prospect of a recursive and redundant historical progress Shelley will confront in his last poem, *The Triumph of Life*. Theodor Adorno associates this fetishization with the “pseudoactivity” and “deconcentration” of an “atomized” or “regression of listening,” which misses hearing “the possibility of a different and oppositional music” and collapses the differentiating force of sound into a mere diversion from the autocracy of sameness.[[49]](#footnote-49) Instead, “concentrated listening,” in Attali’s terms, “heralds the emergence of a formidable subversion, one leading to a radically new organization never yet theorized, of which self-management is but a distant echo.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Within this unstable economy of sound the various forms of listening as “eavesdropping, censorship recording, and surveillance, are weapons of power” that sustain the “dreams of political scientists and the fantasies of men in power: to listen, to memorize – this is the ability to interpret and control history.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

Jupiter’s tyranny is sustained by his capacity to incite hate in those he oppresses; their curse against him is a sign of his power *to* oppress. He listens for it; he yearns to hear it, though like Oedipus confronted by Tiresias, he cannot hear what is being said. When the Car of the Hour bearing Demogorgon arrives at the opening of Act Three, Jupiter demands, “Awful Shape, what art thou? Speak!” (3.1.51). Demogorgon responds, “Eternity – demand no direr name” (3.1.52), which short circuits the master/slave dialectic whose words no longer have power as both “conqueror and the conquered” sink “into the bottomless void” (3.1.78, 76). This pointed, almost traumatically abbreviated exchange symbolizes the absurdly fragile nature of power and its ideological labour. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* pulling aside the Wizard’s curtain to reveal the farce of a utopian wish that has misguided her journey toward a future divorced from reality, the scene performs in political time the paradox of what in Act Two the empty throne in Demogorgon’s cave stages in metaphysical time: the effects of power are all-too-real, but power itself functions in a vacuum. At this point we realize what makes Prometheus’ desire to hear the curse repeated, only to refute its words, so potent (again, as Prometheus earlier notes, “how vain is talk”). This is to bring the two “contradictory features” of Frederic Jameson’s understanding of utopia into sharp relief as a potentiality at once embedded within yet separate from the very sociopolitical and historical reality that makes it possible. Prometheus invokes the words themselves not even to refute, but merely to dismiss their power as “unregarded now” (3.4.179) in order simultaneously to mark and to efface their potency. Put another way, because Prometheus refuses to memorize the curse, he signals instead another form of active listening to the sound of music and the music of sound.

As Panthea enters bringing news of Prometheus’ transformation, Asia asks, apparently rhetorically, “hear I not / The Æolian music of her sea-green plumes / Winnowing the crimson dawn?” (2.1.25-27). The phrasing at once affirms and renders ambiguous the potentiality of sound, a hypostasis that may or may not transpire. In a seminal essay D. J. Hughes explored the poem’s potentiality as its means of “cleansing the ontological situation, restoring our sense of the potential, turning, through a series of verbal strategies, the actual back upon itself,” such that the “world at the end of the poem is a virtual one, with the seeds of decline checked, themselves remaining in potency.”[[52]](#footnote-52) We need to be skeptical of Hughes’ positivity, however. As Timothy Webb is careful to note, “[w]hether we enact and perpetuate a Promethean revolution depends on us; we have the opportunity to move in either direction.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Although Shelley partly intended his poem to complete the mythic arc of Aeschylus’ unfinished Promethean trilogy, in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley leaves the myth incomplete in an “attempt[ ] to realize the potential of a tale *untold.*”[[54]](#footnote-54)

Untelling and the untold resonate with the notion of the narrator’s “thoughts which must remain untold” (21) in Shelley’s final poem. Again, that word “must” troubles us. Leaving something “untold” points to a deliberate self-suppression. Acknowledging “thoughts” to which the subject has no access is another matter. This is to confront us with modernity’s pursuit of the unthought, what is at once “exterior” and “indispensable to [man],” the “shadow cast by man as he emerged in the field of knowledge” and “the blind stain by which it is possible to know him” as we find ourselves “straining to catch its endless murmur.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Like the unthought, Lacan describes “the real” as “what,” within the “the feeling of reality,” “resists symbolisation absolutely,” at which point we encounter “the pressing manifestation of an unreal, hallucinatory reality.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Rather differently for Foucault, however, the unthought constitutes “a certain mode of action,” the “perilous act,”[[57]](#footnote-57) of a possible “symbolisation.” We might say, then, that Prometheus, as the avatar of Shelley’s most difficult poem, figures the “perilous act” of listening for this “endless murmur.” But to listen is not necessarily to capture the meaning of what it hears. This would be, as Foucault says of “the phenomenological project,” to “resolve[ ] itself into a description . . . of actual experience, and into an ontology of the unthought that automatically short-circuits the primacy of the ‘I think.’”[[58]](#footnote-58) To track the interminable process – murmur – of thought itself in the process of thinking the unthought, which is to unthink thought itself in the process of its formation, an unthinking that is, paradoxically, constitutive of thought and being in the first place. As Michele Speitz explores in Wordsworth’s verse, echoes and murmurs trade on “loss and rupture,” not as a counterpose to its restorative nature, but by “revealing . . . the epitaphic nature of sound itself.”[[59]](#footnote-59) As part of his poetry’s “acoustic imaginary,” they register within “poetry’s inexorably elegiac acoustic remains” its “promise of a sometimes vaguely discernible, sometimes illegible yet still audible collective foundation” and thus “draw out a recursive wave of the otherwise broken sonic life of the individuated living being.”[[60]](#footnote-60) The sense of thought as thoughts themselves vanish “Remains” as the materiality of thought itself in the process of its manifestation. Or as Forest Pyle writes of what Jerrold Hogle calls Shelley’s process, “if an aesthetic experience makes us feel *as if* we are gaining knowledge, then when the experience of a radical aestheticism ‘bursts’ upon us, it makes us feel as if we knew anything or, perhaps, *anything else but this*.”[[61]](#footnote-61) In this way listening signifies listening for what can never be heard as the constitutive act and moment of listening itself.

IV.

Asking if one can talk of a “*visual sound*,” Nancy goes on to say, “perhaps it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense (or to be *logos*), but that it wants also to resound.”[[62]](#footnote-62) He calls this the “corp sonore” as resonant and listening body “that includes, but is not limited to, the human body as matrix of resonance.”[[63]](#footnote-63) In this way listening is at once temporal – “embodied time” – and spatial – the *renvoi* or “offering and returning of resonance sense as sonorous presence.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Sound thus also has a materiality that emanates from, extends, and in turn affects bodies *as* bodies of sound. Moreover, it evokes a self that manifests outside of “dichotomies traditionally associated with subjectivity: presence-absence, surface-depth. Rather, this self – as the space of the ‘corps sonore’ (sonorous or resonant body) through which and around which the *renvoi* of sense takes place – has to be described according to a qualitative continuum between diminuendo and crescendo, soft and hard, higher or lower frequencies, expansive and contracting volumes.”[[65]](#footnote-65) As Thomas Christensen notes, the term comes from Jean-Phillippe Rameau, eighteenth-century French composer and musical theorist: “The *corps sonore* . . . was Rameau’s term for any vibrating system such as a vibrating string which emitted harmonic partials above its fundamental frequency.”[[66]](#footnote-66) This sonorous subject – really more of a resonant subjectivity – is also a “listening subject, if it is a subject at all,” that “tends to dissolve, to fuse with and absorb all those elements of self and world that might otherwise be termed ‘objects.’”[[67]](#footnote-67) This listening subject at once emanates from and constitutes the warp and woof of sound, as when in Act Four the Chorus of Spirits and Hours move to “weave the web of the mystic measure” (4.129), such that the “Spirits of the human mind” are “wrapt in sweet sound’” (4.81-82).

Nancy’s idea of resonance informs transactions of meaning in Shelley’s lyrical drama, which give equal priority to the visual and the auditory as forms of restraint and release, a way of visualizing sound that does not reify its meaning. Differentiating narrative from lyric in Romantic writing, Tilottama Rajan argues that the former evokes a “kind of mirror stage in which the [latter's] search for a unified self-representation is enacted and called into question,” “the displacement of the self into an objective world that will disclose it as other than itself.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Karen Weisman associates this de-idealized lyric utterance with transference, which is “never ‘what’ is heard [but] . . . *how* hearing is experienced.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Through this process both analyst and analysand are “seek[ing] to hear the fragments of [hearing’s] dispersed body.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Here Weiskajn refers to Theodor Reik’s notion of ‘listening with a third ear,’ a way of thinking the unthought of ideology, of listening for both the oppressive and liberatory effects and potentiality of its deep resonance. Shelley’s “Sea profound of ever-spreading sound” thus figures a mode of critical listening, the mood of which is inherently revolutionary.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Sound in Shelley’s poem seems to be merely the medium that carries the poem’s message. Yet at the same time it facilitates a mode of relationality that is the matrix of meaning itself without making meaning present. As such, sound insists on its own opacity, the “errantry” of “Totality’s imaginary [which] allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Like the work of feeling in *Prometheus Unbound*, as I have argued elsewhere,[[73]](#footnote-73) sound is the elusive and ineluctable conduit of being in the poem. Its subjects remain unable to grasp its broader network because they exist in its midst as both its products and generators. Sound, like feeling, sustains the poem’s atmosphere as part of what I would call a global sonic ecology. This ecology indicates not just the transfer between subjects and the world, but the vibratory transference that is the very mode and matrix of their (co-)existence. Goodman notes that “*We do not yet know what a sonic body can do.*”[[74]](#footnote-74) I wonder if Shelley does, as his *corp sonore* is by no means *of* sound mind or body, as in the ineffable pauses between the Maniac’s outbursts in *Julian and Maddalo*. Sound*ness* is beside the point here, especially when it indicatesthe potential “colonization of inaudible frequencies by control.”[[75]](#footnote-75) To riff in my own terms on Susan Wolfson’s essay for her editing of an earlier collection of essays on sound in Romantic poetry for this journal, the sound *of* sound functions as its own vanishing mediator.[[76]](#footnote-76) Or as Garret Stewart argues in his essay for the same collection, “Romantic poetry begins with a sigh,”[[77]](#footnote-77) the undertone or real of language as its latent possibility and, like Mladen Dolar’s account of the voice, the constitutive possibility of human sound that is at the same time incommensurable with the human itself. Perhaps this is why Demogorgon, implored by the Chorus of all voices in Act Four to “Speak” so that “thy strong words may never pass away” (4.553), warns us that words are only “spells by which to reassume / An empire o’er the disentangled Doom” (4.568-69), even as they sound and re-sound within the environment. As the echoes that carry Panthea and Asia to Demogorgon, “In the world unknown / Sleeps a voice unspoken” (2.1.190-91). Yet the sound of what remains unspoken *un*nerves us.

In an article for *New York Review of Books* Fintan O’Toole notes the spirit of mourning and restoration that informed the 2020 Presidential race, in the Biden-Harris camp fueled by sorrow rather than anger over what has been lost since 2016, in the Trump-Pence camp by revisiting the nostalgia of 2016 when Trump (like Reagan before him) promised to return America to its former glory. In either case, as O’Toole rather trenchantly remarks, “the point of genuine mourning is that the thing you are grieving for cannot be restored. The grief is an acceptance that the loss is irreparable,” and so what is needed is a “hard, sad, relentless reckoning with the knowledge that much of what [America] has been should be allowed to die.”[[78]](#footnote-78) I take O’Toole’s Freudian primer on the psychology of our political moment as a reflection of Prometheus’ insistence on hearing his curse against Jupiter: he wants – needs – to know that it’s dead. In this case it’s not ocular proof, as Othello demands of Desdemona’s alleged adultery, not the verbal sign of the words themselves, but the sound of their rage. In this sense the curse itself dies, but the affective resonance that sustains its utterance doesn’t. It thus falls to that transformational, even transmogrifying process to carry Prometheus, Asia, and Co., indeed the entire cosmos, toward their collective future. If elections are waged and won by emotion, then we see in *Prometheus Unbound* that sound literally as well as figuratively carries the day. The poem asks us to listen without prejudice, as if that is ever possible. For listening requires the implicit acknowledgement that we can never truly understand what we are listening for. I mean this in the sense of Glissant’s “right to opacity”[[79]](#footnote-79) against the illusions of transparency. So here's the rub: Shelley’s poem tells us how to listen, or at least *that* we should listen, which makes of its fourth Act a staging of the act of listening itself, brought to a close only through the *deus ex machina* of Demogorgon’s arrival. Beyond that, however, the poem doesn’t tell us what to listen *for*. Confronted by the nothingness of sound from which meaning can or might or might not come, we are nonetheless compelled to speak again. Yet *what* for? Or as I now imagine responding to my mother, “I hear you . . . I think.”

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1. I thank Michele Speitz for her timely suggestions, incisive editing, and kind invitation to contribute in the first place. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2000), Act One, Scene One, line 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. George Michael, *Listen Without Prejudice, Volume I* (Columbia Records, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dolar, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Dolar, 14, 15 (original emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Dolar, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tilottama Rajan, “’The Web of Human Things’: Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*,” in *New Romanticisms: Theory and Critical Practice*, ed. David L. Clark and Donald C. Goellnicht (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. David L. Clark, “Last Words: Voice, Gesture, and the Remains of *Frankenstein*,” in *Frankenstein in Theory*, ed. Orrin N. C. Wang (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 18, 22, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. All references to Shelley’s writing are from *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose,* ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002); cited by title, act, scene, and/or line number for poetry and page number for prose. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. William Wordsworth, Preface to *The Excursion*, in *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson; rev. ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), lines19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Earl Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This term is usually attributed to Edwin Hutchins, a general signifier for cognition as both embodied and an extension of our lived environments, hence my use of sound as the matrix of a viral terrain. See Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). See also David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I borrow this phrase from Susan J. Wolfson, “Introduction,” in *‘Soundings of Things Done’: The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson, *Romantic Circles Praxis* (April 2008): par. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Chris Washington, *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-Apocalyptic Life and Hope in the Anthropocene* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* rev.ed, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor, 1988), plate 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic, Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (London: John Murray, 1832), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Glen O’Malley, *Shelley and Synesthesia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964). William Keach calls Shelley’s style “the work of an artist whose sense of the unique and unrealized potential in language was held in unstable suspension with his sense of its resistances and limitations.” William Keach, *Shelley’s Style*  (xvi). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), xviii (original emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Goodman, xiii-xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Goodman, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Goodman, xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Goodman, xviii (original emphasis). See Brian Massumi, “The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 52–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Goodman, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Goodman, xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For Rajan these scenes construct a dialogic “model” that presents “reading as a psychological and not just a semiological process” (*The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990], 308). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Nancy, 13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This is Jonathan Sterne’s “deliberately synaesthetic neologism” to “denote a quality of mind, but not a totality of mind” that is “guided by an orienting curiosity.” “Sonic imaginations are [thus] necessarily plural, recursive, reflexive, driven to represent, refigure and redescribe.” Jonathan Sterne, “Sonic Imaginations,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 5, 9, 6, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On Shelley’s use of metonymy and similitude (“seems,” “like”), see Julie Carlson “Like love: The feel of Shelley’s similes.” *Romanticism and the Emotions*, ed. Joel Faflak and Richard C. Sha (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 76-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Glissant, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Glissant, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities “After Man”* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Chuh, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Glissant, 29-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Adrienne Janus, “Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the ‘Anti-Ocular’ Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory,” *Comparative Literature* 63:2 (2018): 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Janus, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Goodman, xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Goodman, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Attali, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Attali, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1985), 283, 288, 289, 286, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Adorno, 288; Attali, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Attali, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. D. J. Hughes, “Potentiality in *Prometheus Unbound,*” *Studies in Romanticism* 2.2 (Winter, 1963): 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Timothy Webb, “The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound,*” in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 708. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Webb, 711. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*: *An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I, Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 66, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Foucault, 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Foucault, 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Michele Speitz, “The Wordsworthian Acoustic Imagination, Sonic Recursions, and ‘that dying murmur,’” *SEL* 55.3 (Summer 2015): 621, 622. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Speitz, 622, 641, 642. Whereas Speitz is talking about the possibility of an “individuated” Wordsworthian subject, I would argue that Shelley’s poem moves us far beyond any sense of such individuation. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Forest Pyle, *Art’s Undoing: In the Wake of a Radical Aestheticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 10. See Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Hogle reads the nomadic principle of Shelley's aesthetic as “a rootless passage between different formations,” a “primordial, preconscious shift, intimated in the movement of perception, feeling, and language, always already becoming a different enactment of itself at another time and in conjunction with other elements” (15). For Hogle, Shelley’s Prometheus represents “the transitional and disruptive actions of the Titan in his previous [mythic] forms,” which “shifts make him very nearly the activity of transference incarnate” (172). In my reading sound both enacts and undoes this process. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Nancy, 3, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Janus, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Janus, 193, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Janus, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Thomas Christensen, “Eighteenth-Century Science and the ‘Corps Sonore’: The Scientific Background to Rameau’s ‘Principle of Harmony,” *Journal of Music Theory* 31.1 (Spring 1987): 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Janus, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Rajan, “’The Web of Things,’” 87, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Karen Weisman, “Romanticism, Kant, and the Prehistory of Psychoanalysis,” Modern Language Association Convention, Washington, DC (December 1996), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Weisman, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Here I am indebted to Ryan Shuvera’s notion of listening to Indigenous music as a form of conciliation rather than reconciliation, which presupposes the return to some pre-existing harmony. Reconciliation entails the just state as a kind of blank utopian notion that implicitly elides the situational and the everyday and thus any *sense* of social justice. Such a utopia is distinctly at odds with the ‘sense of sound’ that makes the poem’s final act such a powerfully resonant auditorium for political action. See Ryan Shuvera, “Sounding Unsettlement: Rethinking Settler States of Mind and Re(-)cognition through Scenes of Cross-Cultural Learning,” dissertation (London, ON: Western University, 2020). See also Mark Rifkin, “Settler States of Feeling: National Belonging and the Erasure of Native American Presence,” in *A Companion to American Literary Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 342-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Glissant, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See Joel Faflak, “More than a Feeling: Shelley’s Affect,” in *Romanticism and Affect Studies*, ed. Seth T. Reno, Romantic Circles Praxis (May 2018), 23 pars. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Goodman, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Goodman, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See Susan J. Wolfson, “Sounding Romantic: The Sound of Sound,” *‘Soundings of Things Done’: The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson. *Romantic Circles Praxis* (April 2008): 33 pars. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Garrett Stewart, “Phonemanography: Romantic to Victorian,” *Romantic Circles Praxis* (April 2008): par. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Fintan O’Toole, “Night and Day,” *New York Review of Books* (24 September 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Glissant, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)