

PRICK UP YOUR EARS: LISTENING WITH BARTHES AND OTHERS*

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Abstract: The article considers broadly psychoanalytic accounts of listening, in particular through the motif of the “rustle” of meaning evoked by Roland Barthes on several occasions across his œuvre. At the outset this motif is discussed in connection with the Ancient Greek practice of “cledonomancy”, or divination through attention to random and impersonal sounds such as the rustling of the “Oaks of Dodona”, an allusion Barthes draws from Hegel. It is subsequently engaged from a psychoanalytically informed perspective, in the content of Barthes' discussion of psychoanalytic listening in a late encyclopedia entry on “Listening”. The piece concludes with a discussion of the motif of the “erection” of the ear in Freud and in other psychoanalytic texts.

Keywords: Cledonomancy; Rustle of Meaning; Attention; Psychoanalytic Listening

Resumo: O artigo considera, em termos gerais, os relatos psicanalíticos da escuta, em particular através do motivo do “rumor” do significado evocado por Roland Barthes em várias ocasiões ao longo da sua obra. No início, este motivo é discutido em ligação com a prática grega antiga da “cledonomancia”, ou adivinhação através da atenção a sons aleatórios e impessoais, tais como o sussurro dos “carvalhos de Dodona”, uma alusão que Barthes faz a Hegel. É posteriormente abordada numa perspectiva psicanalítica, no conteúdo da discussão de Barthes sobre a escuta psicanalítica numa entrada tardia da enciclopédia sobre “Escuta”. A peça conclui com uma discussão do motivo da “ereção” do ouvido em Freud e noutros textos psicanalíticos.

Palavras-chave: Cledonomancia; Rumor do sentido; Atenção; Escuta psicanalítica

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1 THE OAKS OF DODONA

In the *Philosophy of History* Hegel considers the status of the “Greek spirit”, a prefatory stage in the history of classical Greek philosophy, in relation to the subjective mediation of “signals from the external world”. These signals remain unsynthesised in a “massive” or “comprehensive” conception, because: “the Greeks only *watch* the objects of Nature, and form *surmises* respecting them; inquiring, in the depth of their souls, for the hidden meaning”¹. These objects or signals, however, are predominantly auditory; Hegel characterises this attitude under the name of the god Pan², and describes the way in which sensations arising from nature are transformed and interpreted subjectively: “the Greeks listened to the murmuring of the fountains, and asked what might be thereby signified; but the signification which they were led to attach to it was not the objective meaning of the fountain, but the subjective – that of the subject itself”³. To this interpretative act, Hegel adds, the Greeks “attached the name “*manteia*”⁴. The “interpreter, [the] mantis”, moreover, was “wanted to explain [...] dreams and delirium” and is equally integral to the consultation of the Oracle: “The Oracle was originally interpreted exactly in this way. The oldest Oracle was at Dodona [...] The rustling of the leaves of the sacred oaks was the form of prognostication there. Bowls of metal were also suspended in the grove. But the sounds of the bowls dashing against each other were quite indefinite and had no objective sense; the sense – the signification – was imparted to the sounds only by the human beings who heard them”⁵. A similar process is also at work with the “unintelligible sounds” of the Delphic priestesses, to whose intoxicated delirium the mantis gives a “definite meaning”⁶. Distinct from superstition, the essentially poetic, creative intelligence of the Greeks is associated by Hegel with the transformation of the sensual into the intelligible which takes place in *manteia*.

Hegel’s evocation of the *manteia* of the Greeks and the oaks of Dodona is something of a recurrent motif, if not an obsessive figure, in the work of the French (post)

¹ HEGEL, 1902, p. 244.

² For a comprehensive account of the role of the god Pan in the “Greek musical pantheon”, see LEVEN, 2020, pp. 49-59. Thank you to Igor Reyner for the reference.

³ HEGEL, 1902, p. 244.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁶ *Ibid.*

structuralist critic Roland Barthes. It appears in at least three separate instances in his work, the first in a 1963 essay “*The Structuralist Activity*”:

According to Hegel, the ancient Greek was amazed by the natural in nature; he constantly listened to it, questioned the meaning of mountains, springs, forests, storms [*il lui prêtait sans cesse l'oreille, interrogeait le sens des sources, des montagnes, des forêts, des orages*] without knowing what all these objects were telling him by name, he perceived in the vegetal or cosmic order, a tremendous shudder of meaning [*un immense frisson de sens*], to which he gave the name of a god: Pan⁷.

While nature has become ubiquitously social, Barthes continues, “structural man” is not so different from the ancient Greek: “he too listens for the natural in culture [*il prête l'oreille au naturel de la culture*], and constantly perceives in it not so much stable, finite, “true” meanings as the shudder of an enormous machine [*le frisson d'une machine immense*] which is humanity tirelessly undertaking to create meaning, without which it would no longer be human”⁸. Beyond the theoretical proposition of an affinity between Ancient Greece and the “structural man” of the modern era, what is striking here is the emphasis Barthes places on the activity of listening, on the attention to the auditory from which the *frisson* of sense may arise. Although the object has changed, from nature to the socius, the act or disposition of “lending an ear” (*prêter un oreille*), or, in more colloquial language, *cocking an ear*, is common to the Ancient Greek and to structural(ist) man.

The question of the “semanticisation of sound” – the “translation” of things heard into meaning – is a concern for Barthes throughout his life and work, and specifically at this juncture. “*The Structuralist Activity*” appeared in the same year in which he devoted his seminar at the École pratique des hautes études to the “*Inventory of Contemporary Systems of Signification*” (*Inventaire des systèmes de signification contemporains*), in the notes for which we can find this embryonic proposition:

Music: immense and infinite metaphor, but empty or rather filled with everything, which is to say pansemic: the feeling that there is meaning. This recalls the description proposed by Hegel of the relation the Ancient Greeks had with Nature: everything (trees, springs, flowers) is interrogated as meaning: it is the *frisson* of meaning, of which Pan was

⁷ BARTHES, 1972, pp. 213-20, pp. 218-219; [1966, pp. 221-28, pp. 226-27]. Barthes specifies that his reference to Hegel is to *Leçons sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Vrin, 1946, p. 212

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219; [p. 227].

the God: the panic and musical god who invented the flute, the pipes, the syrinx”⁹.

As Christophe Corbier has demonstrated in a recent and compelling monograph, the coincidence of the two vectors of Ancient Greece and music is effective across the entirety of Barthes’ œuvre and builds on and out of Barthes’ persistent interest in incantatory forms in Ancient Greek tragedy studied in the early University thesis *Evocations and incantations dans la tragédie grecque*¹⁰. Barthes’ seminar at the Ecole pratique des hautes études in 1963-64, from which the note above derives, was in part focused on the links between music, sound and meaning, as Corbier proposes: “After several sessions devoted to photography [Barthes] studies the case of music and focuses on the *semanticisation of sounds* [*la sémantisation des sons*], on *practices of listening* [*les pratiques d’écoute*] and on the relation between literature and music”¹¹. It is the second of these areas of interest – practices of listening – which will preoccupy us here.

The figure re-appears in the essay “*The Rustle of Language*” [*Le Bruissement de la langue*] from 1975. Here, Barthes is “cocking an ear”, again, to the use of sonorous and musical metaphors with reference to the dysfunctions of language and the “good” working order of the machine: “Now, just as the dysfunctions of language are in a sense summarized in an auditory sign, stammering, similarly the good functioning of the machine is displayed in a musical being: the rustle [*le bruissement*]”¹². In Richard Howard’s translation *bruissement* is rendered as “rustle”, a choice which initially appears misleading, given that Barthes uses *bruissement* here to qualify machinic sounds, whereas to my mind *rustle* connotes fabric, or the vegetal, rather than the machine. The *hum* of language might be more apt, especially since this minimal *vocable*, *mmmmm*, suggests a sound at the threshold of sound, as Barthes intends, almost the evaporation of sound, and the utopia of a collective utterance, perhaps a chorus, which Barthes says he finds in a sequence showing a group of children reading in Antonioni’s 1972 film *Chung Kuo, China*. On second thoughts, however, *rustle* may be perspicacious, given the equivalence

⁹ Cited in CORBIER, 2022, p. 205.

¹⁰ BARTHES, 2023.

¹¹ CORBIER, 2022, p. 195 (my emphasis).

¹² BARTHES, 1984, pp. 76-79, p. 76; [1984, pp. 99-102, p. 99].

Barthes seeks to establish between Ancient Greek listening to nature, on the one hand, and his own “textual” listening, on the other:

I imagine myself today something like the ancient Greek as Hegel describes him: he interrogated, Hegel says, passionately [*avec passion*], uninterruptedly, the rustle of branches [*le bruissement des feuillages*], of springs, of winds, in short, the shudder of Nature [*le frisson de la Nature*], in order to perceive in it the design of an intelligence. And I — it is the shudder of meaning I interrogate, listening to the rustle of language [*en écoutant le bruissement du langage*], that language which for me, modern man, is my Nature¹³.

In addition to the recurrence of the reference to Hegel and the parallel figuration of listening Barthes elaborated here what might strike us here is Barthes’ insistence on the *passion* of listening, or passionate listening, through which he brings himself affectively closer to the Ancient Greek. Together with the repeated motif of the *frisson* of sense and informed by the previous discussion of the benevolent “hum” of the well-orchestrated erotic scenario in Sade, there is clearly eroticisation of listening at work here¹⁴. Listening affords a *jouissance* of language, as of Nature, for the Ancient Greek. We will return to this further on.

A fuller and more complex elaboration of the figure is given in Barthes’ contribution on “*Listening*” (“*Écoute*”) to the Einaudi Encyclopaedia in 1976:

By her noises, Nature shudders with meaning [*la Nature frissonne de sens*]: at least this is how, according to Hegel, the ancient Greeks listened to her. The oaks of Dodona, by the murmur of their boughs [*par la rumeur de leurs feuillages*], uttered prophecies, and in other civilizations as well (derived more directly from ethnography) noises have been the immediate raw materials of a divination, cledonancy: to listen is, in an institutional manner, to try to find out what is happening (it is impossible to note all the traces of this archaic finality in our secular existence)¹⁵.

¹³ BARTHES, 1984, p. 79; [1984, p. 102].

¹⁴ [...] “it is happy machines which rustle [which hum]. When the erotic machine, so often imagined and described by Sade, an “intellectual” agglomerate of bodies whose amorous sites are carefully adjusted to each other—when this machine starts up, by the convulsive movements of the participants, it trembles and rustles: in short, it works, and it works well” (*ibid.*, p. 77). Barthes thus derives the paradox of a “convulsive” yet happy” operation in the sexual orchestration described in Sade’s texts, one which is notably evoked as collective.

¹⁵ BARTHES, 1985, pp. 245-60, p. 250; [1982, pp. 217-30, p. 221].

The context of the essay requires a lengthier exposition. In this piece co-written with Roland Havas, Barthes devotes a third section to the subject of psychoanalytic listening. Having cited at length Freud's "instructions to physicians" to keep their attention "evenly hovering" (*flottante*) and avoid concentration or selection, Barthes comments that this rule is "difficult if not impossible" to follow, and that Freud himself invariably departed from it, particularly in those instances where he had a "concern for an aspect of theory"¹⁶. The originality of psychoanalytic listening, Barthes observes, lies in an oscillation between the "neutrality" and "suspension" of attention that Freud says is required and "something like the resonance" of certain "major elements", for which the analyst may be led, in Howard's translation, to "cock an ear" (*tendre l'oreille*)¹⁷. This "major element" may emerge either from the content of what is being said, or from its "phonic modulation" (Barthes citing Lacan), in other words from the voice¹⁸. Or rather, and here Barthes quotes from the (Lacanian) analyst Denis Vasse, the "signifier" for which the analyst listens out arises in the split between "body and discourse", in their desire¹⁹. This is why psychoanalytic listening involves a risk: "to recognise this desire implies that one enters into it, ultimately finding oneself there"²⁰. To mitigate this risk, Barthes will then argue, Freud adopted a mediated procedure, that of narrative, the logic and texture of the "case", and this narrative form, Barthes implies, displaces listening by concerning itself with *images*. Here dream provides the logic for the treatment; Barthes points to the observation that dreams are primarily visual, that in dreams "the sense of hearing is never solicited"²¹, following Freud's insistence on the "conditions of representability" of the dream work²². Sounds are translated into images; listening is translated into looking.

Barthes recalls how, in the dream of the Wolf Man, in the case discussed by Freud, "the wolves" "ears were cocked [*étaient dressées*] like those of dogs when they are alert to something", and that: "The "something" towards which the wolves' ears are cocked is *obviously* [*évidemment*] a sound, a noise, a cry"²³. Audition is "translated" into the

¹⁶ BARTHES, 1985, p. 254.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 255; [1982, p. 225].

¹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹ *Idem.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²² See FREUD, 1953, p. 340.

²³ BARTHES, 1985, p. 257 (my emphasis); [1982, p. 229].

images of the wolves cocking their ears. In fact, Barthes proposes a different interpretation of the pricked-up ears of the wolves in the dream of the Wolf Man than the one proposed by Freud. In “*From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*” the dream image of the wolves with “*their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something*” is interpreted as the transposition of the “strained attention” or “attentive looking” in the primal scene of the infant Wolf Man witnessing his parents’ copulation; active looking is transformed in the dream into the passive “being looked at”²⁴. In a further twist in the tale (the *tail?*) Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham, drawing on the later correspondence between Freud and Sergei Pankeiev (the Wolf Man), explain that the wolves’ ears are not “pricked” at all, that they are not wolves, “but white *spitz* dogs [police dogs] with pointed ears [in German, *spitzen Ohren*]”²⁵.

It is “obvious”, then, that the transposition of something heard into an image, in the dream, is not as straightforward as it seems, and that what needs to be taken into account is the other transposition of the dream image into words, into things heard (which Freud hears). Moreover, in this “second” transposition, which succeeds in rendering unconscious contents conscious through the association of word-representations, issues of translation are at stake. The transpositions from the auditory to the visual and from the visual to the auditory, from things heard to things seen (or dreamt) and thence to things spoken and heard passes through a further set of transpositions, not only between different languages (German, French, English) but also through the encrypted memory within each of these languages of other languages (which would include, for the Wolf Man, Russian). Freud’s “*ihre Ohren waren aufgestellt*” is re-heard (by Barthes) in the French translation “*leurs oreilles étaient dressées*” and re-heard again in Strachey’s “*they had their ears pricked like dogs*”²⁶ and Louise Adey Huish’s “*their ears were pricked up like dogs watching something*”²⁷.

(At least) three different directions come into play here: 1) the pricked-up ears of the wolves as the dream image of the infant Wolf Man’s rapt attention to the primal scene of his parents’ copulation (Freud) 2) the pricked-up ears of the wolves as the dream-image

²⁴ FREUD, 1955, pp. 3-124, pp. 29, 34, 35, 43.

²⁵ ABRAHAM, N; TOROK, M., 1986, p. 93. *Spitz*, in German, and by extension, is a breed of dog so-named because of its “pointed” (*spitzen*) muzzle.

²⁶ FREUD, 1955, p. 29.

²⁷ FREUD, 2003, p. 227.

of police dogs (Abraham and Torok, the Wolf Man himself) 3) the pricked-up ears of the wolves as the dream image of an overheard noise or cry (Barthes). Across all of these associations is it not the phenomenal quality of being “pointed”, a certain phallic intentionality, that one hears? What one cannot help hearing, what I cannot help hearing (hearing cannot be helped) is the association of erectness.

2 CLEDONOMANCY

Psychoanalytic listening, for Barthes, is thus significant insofar as it transforms the paradigm of listening from an intentional act of acoustic attention to indices or signs to a receptivity to “unknown spaces”, a movement from hermeneutic intent to a receptivity to an open textuality²⁸. Outside the strictly psychoanalytic framework of the unconscious, this involves attention to what Barthes calls its “lay forms” (“formes laïques”): polysemy, the supplemental, the indirect, the delayed²⁹. For Barthes this indicates a kind of “loop of the historical spiral”, and a return to the “*panic* listening” of the Greeks³⁰. Following Barthes’ intuition of the spiral, we can follow the route back in the essay to illuminate again those instances where the motif of panic listening is evoked to find the reference to Hegel and here the more specific evocation of the oaks of Dodona. Distinct from the ethos of interiorised listening, or as Barthes phrases it, “taking soundings”, informed by the Christian confessional, this mode of listening involves an attention to “Nature” in order to “find out what is happening”; listening is thus a form of “cledonomancy” – a form of divination based on chance events or encounters³¹.

As we see with the quotation cited above, Barthes, drawing again from Hegel’s commentaries in the *Philosophy of History*, hints at the residues in contemporary life of the antique form of divination known as *cledonomancy*, a *dispositif* whereby the truth spoken by the Oracle and the course of future events could be heard in the rustling of leaves of the oaks of Dodona.

The displacement which Barthes wants to effect, from auditory attention to the sounds of Nature, from the ethos of listening to the adventure of signification in language,

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

is already inherent, in fact, in the practice of cledonancy, which is not limited to the sounds of nature. Its more poignant purchase relates to the words of human beings, to the random statements of strangers heard in passing. Lidell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* defines the Greek κληδών as an “omen” or a “presage contained in a chance utterance” and notes its occurrences in works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Homer³². Barthes, for his part, notes the status of cledonancy as an “institutional” form or mode of divination, that is, as a culture or custom enshrined in collective practices³³. These notes suggest the wider relevance of cledonancy beyond an arcane form of divination, outside the benign dimension of listening to the sounds of nature, and its potential as a way of approaching contemporary forms of listening. Here cledonancy takes on a tragic dimension.

This wider relevance, and the tragic dimension, is also promoted in an illuminating article from 1969 in *The American Journal of Philology* in which John J. Peradotto discusses “*Cledonancy in the Oresteia*”. Peradotto’s account of the practice defines it as follows: “A κληδών is an apparently casual utterance heard by a man when he is deeply preoccupied with some plan, project, or hope, and understood by him as an omen of the outcome of his preoccupations”³⁴. The *kledon* is an *omen* or a *presage*. Peradotto contrasts the quite different attitudes towards signs and towards the origins and dynamics of meaning of the “scientific standpoint” of the present and the “mythical” perspectives of the ancient Greek world:

κληδών were thought to have been more fully certified as divinely inspired if, as in the examples cited, they were completely unexpected. And the speaker’s intention and meaning were remote from the preoccupation of the hearer. Calculated anticipation of kledones generally tended to render them doubtful to a Greek because it is impaired the purely accidental character of the revelation. To the ancient mind, it was in circumstances which we, from a scientific standpoint, would call “purely accidental” – free of human intervention and control – that divinity seemed most operative in signalling its intentions³⁵.

³² See: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=klhdw/n> [Accessed 23rd March 2024].

³³ BARTHES, 1985, p. 250.

³⁴ PERADOTTO, John T. *Cledonancy in the Oresteia*. In: **American Journal of Philology**, vol. 90:1, 1969, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

There is a contrast then between the idea of meaning as arising from an active intention and meaning as arising from the accident of speech and occurrence. True meaning is outside human control. The “loop of the historical spiral” to which Barthes refers inheres perhaps in this apparent return of kleidomancy, of listening out for the accident, in psychoanalytic listening. In the psychoanalytic session, the auditor of the *κλήδων* is displaced from the subject themselves to the analyst, and the “casual utterance” takes the form of the parapraxis; it may also arise from the other scene of the dream, in the analysand’s dream narratives, wherein the “chance utterance” does not obey the internal logic of the subject’s deep history, but is in effect an external and aleatory factor which has a function and produces effects within the subject’s treatment. Even if as Freud insists the dream obeys the “conditions of figurability” and speaks the “pictorial language” (*Bildsprache*) the analyst *listens* to the dream in the voice and in the body, so to speak, of the patient³⁶. In the ancient Greek context any explicit connection to the intention of a human agent is disallowed; the *kleidon* is divorced from *vouloir dire* and other kinds of linguistic agency. Its origins and source must be “other than the meaning or intention of the person who carelessly uttered it”³⁷.

Peradotto also refers to Ernest Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, where kleidomantic listening, described as a “tendency to find the divine in the “accidental” or to accept the notion of an ‘uncaused’ event” – is held to be a “particular characteristic of mythical thought” if not, Cassirer adds “an abiding habit of the mind”³⁸. The connection of “mythical thought” to the terrain of habit and compulsion should immediately alert us to the persistence of archaic contents in the psyche, obscured by the instrumentalizing tendencies of reason, in which we attribute meaning to the conscious intention of the speaker, according to a logic of cause and effect: I am the cause of my meanings.

Kleidomancy, then, reverses this logic, and alters the regime of truth which underlies the practice of listening. I am not alert to the secret behind the other’s words, because the truth does not lie inside. Rather, truth and authority lie precisely in what is extraneous to the human. In this respect we can say that it foreshadows the structuralist

³⁶ Freud, *op. cit.*

³⁷ PERADOTTO, 1969, p. 2, citing W.R. Halliday, **Greek Divination** (London, 1903).

³⁸ PERADOTTO, 1969, p. 3, fn. 7.

insistence on the arbitrary nature of the sign and the Lacanian insistence on the Symbolic dimension. The truth is out there.

There is a tragic dimension to *kleptomancy*, whence its manifestations in the *Oresteia* as discussed by Peradotto. The *kleidon* is an omen, a presage: it tells of what will occur, and is thus a sign of fate, of the will of the gods. Its tragic dimension arises out of the split between the human and the divine and is located precisely in the refusal of the hubris of the human belief in the agency of their own meaning. It is the punishment inflicted on man for having stolen (the gift of) language from the gods. Or perhaps, rather, the tragic arises out of the institution of the original crime of the appropriation of language to the logic of causes and actions. Whence the tragic dimension of psychoanalysis. The tragic dimension of listening is then that mode of listening which arises at the edges of the voice, in dis-attunement from the voice and intention of the other and in the anxious oracular listening out for the rustle of the Other.

3 THE RUSTLE AND THE LOOK

In light of this, or perhaps, we should say, in echo of this, we can recall Lacan's observations, in Seminar 17, on the scenario of the voyeur in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in which the voyeur, surprised at the keyhole, provokes an encounter with the Other. Lacan's point is that this is not an intersubjective dynamic:

If you turn to Sartre's own text, you will see that, far from speaking of the emergence of this gaze as of something that concerns the organ of sight, he refers to the sound of rustling leaves, suddenly heard while out hunting, to a footstep heard in a corridor. And when are these sounds heard? At the moment when he has presented himself in the action of looking through a keyhole. A gaze surprises him in the function of voyeur, disturbs him, overwhelms him and reduces him to a feeling of shame. The gaze in question is certainly the presence of others as such. But does this mean that originally it is in the relation of subject to subject, in the function of the existence of others as looking at me, that we apprehend what the gaze really is? Is it not clear that the gaze intervenes here only in as much as it is not the annihilating subject, correlative of the world of objectivity, who feels himself surprised, but the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire?³⁹

³⁹ LACAN, 1977, p. 84-85.

Lacan's point is clear enough: that the voyeur is not necessarily surprised by an actual other and that the gaze is not necessarily embodied in another subject present at the scene. It is not a matter of subject to subject, but a sudden shift in corporeal awareness. What we also see, however, and it is something that Lacan, on this occasion, does not foreground, is the split of the eye and the ear, the *schize*, as it were, of looking and hearing. The tragic dimension, we could say, in which the subject is confronted with an agency that is not his, lies in the split between the eye as a function of desire (to see the prey one is hunting or to look through the keyhole at the object of desire), sustained by that desire which is a function of action, and the ear which hears the sounds of rustling leaves. It is through the sound of rustling, in the hearing of these sounds, that we find the emergence of the gaze, which puts the look to shame. Why call it the gaze? What is the relation between gaze and sound? Between the lines of Lacan's commentary on Sartre we can read that the sound of rustling leaves signals an unseen other, an other precisely who does not appear in the visual field, just as the leaves of the oaks of Dodona signal the presence of the unseen gods, because they do not appear to mortals.

It will benefit us momentarily here to listen more closely to what Sartre says about the rustling of bushes. In the section of *Being and Nothingness* on "The Look" evoked above the rustling of branches "represents" the eye and embodies in itself the look which surprises me as subject and agent. This is to say that the look, in itself, is not "any figure in particular"⁴⁰. Even though it most often manifests itself in the form of "two eyeballs" converging in my direction, the eye, in this instance the eyes, is/are merely the "the look's support":

Doubtless, a look is manifested most often by the convergence of two eyeballs towards me. But it can show itself just as well in a rustling of branches [*un froissement de branches*], a sound of steps followed by silence, a half-open shutter, a slight movement of a curtain⁴¹.

While the look operates "essential modifications"⁴² of the structures of my being, and thus dislodges the purity of unreflective consciousness, Sartre's account remains

⁴⁰ SARTRE, 2018, p. 353 [1943, p. 297].

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 357.

“visualist”⁴³ insofar as the rustling of the bushes is immediately subsumed under the possibility of the look, which is an eye:

Now, the bush and the farm are not the look; they only represent the eye, because the eye is not grasped in the first instance as a visual sensory organ, but as the look's support. They never refer, therefore, to the eyes made of flesh of the person watching, lying in wait behind the curtain, behind a window of the farm: taken in themselves, *they are already eyes*⁴⁴.

The look of the other, although usually given as a pair of eyes directed upon me, is not “in the eyes”, and can just as well be manifested by a sound or a movement, instances which “represent” the look, and which are “already eyes”. We see here how Sartre, having first dislodged the look from the eye, collapses it back onto the eye and thus subsumes the auditory under the ocular. In effect, he anthropologizes and visualizes the sound of leaves, which betray the presence or the potentiality of a human agent who may challenge my executive action with regard to the world. The leaves, in other words, will never rustle “by themselves”, or as a signal of nature.

It is the anthropologization of the rustling of leaves which is disrupted by the schema of *kledon*, in which the rustling signals the intervention of the gods, or of nature “in itself”. The same structure supports the proposition that the truth of the *kledon* is guaranteed by the absence of human intention, the removal of any suspicion of the agency of the human subject or other. Or at least, the other has to have no intentionality in my regard, in my direction. They must be more radically other, a displacement of the face to face of anthropological hermeneutics by the strangeness of the signifier in its auditory materiality.

It is this with the contingency and materiality of sense that we are confronted with the rustling of leaves, and with the *kledon*. As I outlined above, the *kledon* is a figure of

⁴³ In the sense proposed by Don Ihde, suggesting a double reduction, not only of all the senses to that of vision, but of vision to signification. I am grateful to Igor Reyner for suggesting this observation. See IHDE, 2007.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 354 (my emphasis).

the split subject, of the tragic dimension of the subjection of the human to forces beyond its agency and outside its province⁴⁵.

4 COCKING AN EAR

In addition to the tragic dimension of cledonomanacy, however, we must also consider the erotic dimension of listening, evoked above. Here we return to the material discussed earlier around Freud's Wolf Man and the pricked-up ears of the wolves. Cledonomanacy, as both Hegel and Barthes imply, is an active listening rather than a passive reception. Listening to the rustle of leaves, or listening out for the event of the chance utterance, involves the paradox of an active receptivity. This paradox is manifest in the expressions "tendre l'oreille", "dresser l'oreille", or in the more colloquial English expressions "prick up your ears" or "cocking an ear". The human ear, of course, cannot be physically directed or pointed; except in the case of those fortunate individuals who have the ability to twitch their own ears, the ear is not susceptible to the control of the muscular apparatus. We thus understand pricking up one's ears or cocking an ear as a metaphorical transposition from the animal to the human; the dog or the wolf, for example, cocks its ears (though more often it cocks its leg). The aporia of "listening out for" might then be understood as an archaic residue of evolutionary prehistory. Or (but it may amount to the same thing), a transposition of the erectile capacity of the (male) sexual organs, and this would be actualised in the idioms by which the paradox of directed listening is expressed: cocking an ear, pricking up one's ears, *avoir les oreilles dressés*. Lacan makes use of this in reference to reading Freud: "One must never read Freud without one's ears cocked [*sans avoir les oreilles dressés*]. When one reads such things, one really ought to prick up one's ears" [*ça doit tout de même les faire bouger un peu*]⁴⁶. We find here then the hypothesis of the erotogeneity of the auditory apparatus which we encountered before in Barthes' proposition that the ear listens out, with passion, for the *frisson* of sense. And we can find support for this idea in Freud; following his discussion of erogenous zones in the *Three Essays on Sexuality* Freud famously remarks in the essay

⁴⁵ Among the many other critical interventions which bear upon the question of the "affective subjectification of humans of nonhuman sound", see BORN, 2019; a compelling essay from which quotation is drawn (p. 187). Thank you to Igor Reyner for drawing it to my attention.

⁴⁶ LACAN, 1977, p. 168 [1973, p. 153].

on narcissism that the excitability and carnal plasticity of the sexual organ is extended “by analogy” to other parts of the body:

Now the familiar prototype of an organ that is painfully tender, that is in some way changed and that is yet not diseased in the ordinary sense, is the genital organ in its states of excitation. In that condition it becomes congested with blood, swollen and humected, and is the seat of a multiplicity of sensations. Let us now, taking any part of the body, describe its activity of sending sexually exciting stimuli to the mind as its 'erotogenicity', and let us further reflect that the considerations on which our theory of sexuality was based have long accustomed us to the notion that certain other parts of the body-the 'erotogenic' zones-may act as substitutes for the genitals and behave analogously to them⁴⁷.

Of course the metaphor of the ear's erectile capacity betrays a specifically phallogentric bias. The idea that one must listen out for the cledonomantic signal, or for the *frisson* of sense, or that one should read Freud with one's ears *cocked* is only one side of the aporia of active listening, the one associated with the extraneous organ, the tumescent side, so to speak. According to this dubious gendering of the paradox of active listening, the other “feminine” side or slope of the ear would be metaphorically embodied in the ear's resemblance to the female sexual organ. If we seem to be held here to a phallogentric structuring of listening – the idea being that active auditory attention is modelled, “by analogy” to the capacity of the organ to “point the way”, as it were, the paradox, and the gendered paradigm of active/passive may be resolved by what Lacan says about the “circuit of the drive”, which “goes round its object” (*la pulsion en fait le tour*) and is encapsulated in the reflexive proposition of “making oneself heard” (“about which Freud says nothing”)⁴⁸.

From this perspective (again we are held to visual metaphors) the ear will hear what it wants to hear. The “trick” (*tour*) of cledonomancy is that the ear listens out for what will confirm its desire, or rather give it satisfaction. It listens out for what will give it satisfaction in the register of the drive. What thus appears to have been left out in our consideration is the *invocation* or the *interrogation* to which the oracle responds. With the introduction of the invocation, that is the dimension of vocality in the register of the drive we may establish a more complete circuit for the invocatory drive at work in the

⁴⁷ FREUD, 1957, p. 84.

⁴⁸ LACAN, 1977, p. 195.

phenomena of cledonomanicy. The rustle of leaves, the omen heard in passing in the speech of the other has the place of the *objet petit a* in the circuit formed by the invocation on its way out and around and back to the ear. To this extent the sound itself is irrelevant; what matters is that one makes oneself heard, such that, to recall Hegel's terms, what the subject hears is "not the objective meaning of the fountain, but the subjective – that of the subject itself"⁴⁹.

We arrive back where we began, or nearly. If in Hegel the Ancient Greek "subjectivizes" the sounds of Nature that s/he interrogates, in the more contemporary accounts of listening the subject is split; the echo comes back not from within, but through the other scene or stage of desire and the drive, and through the circuitous paths of language. To have one's ears cocked is to be subject to the tragic and erotic dimensions of listening.

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⁴⁹ Hegel, *op. cit.*

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