

INTRODUCTION

INTERTWINING OF THREADS: RESOUNDING CONTEXTS

At the dawn of the history of the world and human beings, the existence of extraordinary and all-encompassing creations (the cosmos and logos) consisted in listening. The cosmo-logos called into existence was capable of hearing out the voice that created it by the word calling into existence. To exist and to listen meant the same, although they were not the same. A human being was also called into existence with a task of listening intently to the logos, to the world. The task of the human – listening out for the essence of listening itself – was named a contemplation of the world. And the human heard that they have begun to understand the world because while contemplating they were in the tempo, in the time of the cosmos, and the time was a voice. However, the human – contemplating themselves – began to crave for knowing the world, meaning to own it, to encompass it and to have it. And the logos enjoyed the wishes of the human because the logos knew that the human is in their own time to become a micro-cosmos. In this way, the world did not talk to itself but recognized the other kind of its own – in fact – voice. With time it turned out that the human, while comprehending the world, was still talking to themselves and stopped to listen out for the other logos. The more the human knew, the more the human raved about themselves, until the human finally convinced themselves that the logos had never existed, that it was a fairy tale good enough for the unconscious first human being.

Only did they still have to listen to the world in order to understand anything at all?

In his insightful book, Max van Manen states that “the phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive – sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak.”¹ Van Manen explains

¹ M. van Manen, *Research Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York 2016, p. 111.

that “This means that an authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way the things of the world speak to us.”² If it is so, to some extent and in a sense, this book can be read as an interpretation, and thus application, of such a standpoint. Van Manen follows the hermeneutic phenomenological writing as a method of description of the lived experience. It is all about being attentive to what language and things in it speak.

If one wants to look for a *methodos* of writing this book, it is clear enough that it can be described as a hermeneutic phenomenological way. It is hermeneutic because it is inspired by philosophical hermeneutics and its ontology. One of the most exciting concepts in contemporary hermeneutics is the experience of the speculative unity of language, thing and thinking (thought). It enables us to re-think the issue of the language of phenomena in the context of the phenomenon of language. That unity – quite enigmatic to our modern ears – opens up the possibility of interpreting language as the experience of the reality of things as well as their crucial way of existence. The paradox of the hermeneutic ontology is that – unexpectedly – the phenomenon is to be heard as much as (its) language demands to be seen and contemplated in order to be understood in the speculative experience hermeneutically understood. The hermeneutic dialectics is realized in a (dialogical and as we will see: acouological) search for a language of things by speaking from within language. The phenomenological way consists in the approach to the phenomenon: to let the phenomenon be as it appears to be in its presence in and in front of a researcher, understood here as a person who listens and thus sees things (Latin *res*) as they allow him or her to be seen,³ given, touched and felt. If *phainomenon* shares its root meaning with *phōs* – light, brightness,⁴ meaning something that appears – in the context of listening one can: firstly, emphasize the significance of a metaphor as a way in which language allows us to see something more clearly, in some light; secondly, discern in the act of appearing of something a movement that sounds and “speaks” as well. In this respect, thinking is a listening-speaking, or listening out for question(ing). Nonetheless, thinking can be considered as not being reduced to the operations on questions and answers but as the

² Ibid.

³ Paulina Sosnowska provides an interpretation of Heidegger’s understanding of phenomenology and *phainomenon* in: *Filozofia wychowania w perspektywie Heideggerowskiej różnicy ontologicznej* [Philosophy of education in the view of the Heideggerian ontological difference], Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2009, pp. 73–76.

⁴ Ibid.

experience of the movement of things in their (audible, although not always heard physically as sounds) relatedness.

This book aims at getting a little bit closer to the phenomenon of listening “as such.” In this sense, it resembles enterprises in sound studies being focused on the sound itself. Nevertheless, the focus on listening stems from the conviction that the phenomenon (or rather the acoumenon) is in a way an educational experience, so while trying to describe it, one learns something more than only about listening as a phenomenon/acoumenon. Describing listening here means letting a specific concept of education speak. Education means here not a part of our life spent at school, but the whole experience of life that shapes us dialogically (ontologically and existentially) in listening. This concept has been called *acouological education*.

The term acouological education can be quite easily associated with Michel Chion’s *acouological treatise* on sound. However, the analogy stops here.

Chion enlarges Pierre Schaeffer’s meaning of the term *acouology*. Schaeffer’s acouology “designates the study of the mechanisms of listening and of the properties of sound objects with respect to their potential for music within the perceptual field of the ear. In this sense, it voluntarily puts to the side anything that concerns modes of listening other than reduced.”⁵ Acouology revived by Chion is “a science of what one hears considered from every angle.”⁶ The aim of Chion’s acouology is knowledge in the sense of the art of understanding something, and not a reunion with music as in Schaeffer’s concept.⁷ Chion is convinced that acouology is “an undertaking that enriches, sheds light on, and feeds all of listening and thus, gradually, all of existence.”⁸

Acouological education is meant to express a logic (*logos*) of listening and the logic of being a hearer and listener that forms people. In this sense, it is a reverse of the “educative acouologic.” Greek *akouō* means at the same time “to hear” and “to listen,” that is why the Greek root appeared to be appropriate for the expression. Although it is connected with a perception of sounds, the *logos* root of logic points toward the notion of what is understood from sounds, and what as a whole speaks to the listener.

The very beginning of the idea to write on listening has originated from the interest in philosophical hermeneutics and its ontological assumptions. In the context of philosophical hermeneutics, listening

⁵ M. Chion, *Sound: An Acouological Treatise*, transl. J. A. Steintrager, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2016, p. 210.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 211.

⁸ Ibid.

appeared to be a phenomenon, or, even more precisely, an *acoumenon*, that precedes any question which has to be heard in order to get any answer to it. So, from the study of the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the hermeneutic dialectics of question and answer, after having realized that dialectics favors – though more implicitly – listening as the core experience of and in understanding (as the phenomenon that Gadamer wanted to interpret), the course of my investigations has been directed toward the phenomenon of listening. In the book, one can find references to the most significant hermeneutic figures of conversation (or dialogue) and text (its reading, understanding and translating) as a form of meaningful speaking that educates. Thus, one of the aims of the book is to discern – and describe – different *wor(l)ds* within listening, showing at the same time that the different forms do not annihilate the unity of the experience and phenomenon of listening.

Another aim is to see how the *acoumenon* “operates” within education. To be more precise, to see that *education* is a form of listening itself, and at the same time, it is listening in itself. In this sense, although the expression *acouological education* is in a sense a pleonasm, it is needed to explain the understanding of education proposed in the book. Nevertheless, one can speak about *education(al) listening* or *the acouologic* while considering the second part of the book. Similarly, chapters on translation are to be read as a description of a *translation(al) listening* or listening for translation that is educative as well, so it is in a way a sort of educational (or) pedagogical listening as well. As one can see, the book is written in a kind of attunement to the revealing work of the phenomenon of listening, as perceived and thus understood by the author. Subsequent forms of listening are listed up to the educational type which appears to be the most existentially diversified and complex one. That is why further discussion on philosophy and education is needed. In the book, only some aspects of the relationship between philosophy and education (pedagogy) are addressed. In this way, the issue of philosophical and educational listening is considered with an interlude on *mousikē* (treated metaphorically) in and as education.

The expression *acouological education* may, though not explicitly, suggest that there are *non-acouological education* trends. In fact, however, there are not. Whenever we speak about education, listening is already included. Nevertheless, one can speak of *anti-acouological approaches*, meaning that there are approaches in which listening in education takes the form of a destitute or deprived, degenerated kind of listening that indeed changes people and forms them, but in a way, and to the shape, that can be hardly considered *education(al)*. At any rate, these methods cannot be called *acouo-education* even

if obedience⁹ (understood as a form of listening) – and hearing of the other – takes place there. What these approaches lack, is the freedom which leads to responsibility based on the capacity to distinguish different kinds of things even if they seem to be similar or are covered under the same word. The point is that the expression *educational* means – at least intuitively and in the common imagination or expectation – something positive and valuable in the context of human being formation. To this extent, one can agree that education has a powerful ethical dimension not to be omitted or belittled. Even if it is not possible to address the issue of ethics here, the author certainly understands each ethical and moral obligation as a profound existential and educational experience demanding something of a recognizing (body-soul) listening.

Another thing is that this book is not aiming to deliver a history of (the notion of) listening. Some splendid examples of successful enterprises of the sort are *Listen: A History of Our Ears* (*Écoute. Une histoire de nos oreilles*) by Peter Szendy,¹⁰ *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* by Jonathan Sterne,¹¹ and *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* by Veit Erlmann.¹² Tom Rice presents succinctly different contemporary approaches to listening, including its technological dimensions and a category of hospital listening¹³ with the notion of auscultation. The historical aspect of auscultation as listening is analyzed by Peter Szendy in his text “The Auditory Re-Turn (The Point of Listening)” (with Martin Heidegger’s, Friedrich Nietzsche’s and Jacques Derrida’s contributions to listening studies also being discussed), published in a collection of critical articles on listening edited by Sander van Maas.¹⁴ The recently issued *Keywords in Sound* edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny can be treated as a useful

⁹ M. van Manen describes obedience as listening in *The Tone of Teaching: The Language of Pedagogy*, Routledge, London and New York 2002.

¹⁰ P. Szendy, *Écoute. Une histoire de nos oreilles*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2001 (English translation: P. Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, transl. Ch. Mandell, Fordham University Press, New York 2008).

¹¹ J. Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2003. See also J. Sterne, “Hearing,” [in:] *Keywords in Sound*, eds. D. Novak, M. Sakakeeny, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2015, pp. 65–77.

¹² V. Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*, Zone Books, New York 2010. See also: V. Erlmann, “Resonance,” [in:] *Keywords in Sound*, eds. D. Novak, M. Sakakeeny, pp. 175–182.

¹³ T. Rice, “Listening,” [in:] *Keywords in Sound*, eds. D. Novak, M. Sakakeeny, pp. 104–108.

¹⁴ P. Szendy, “The Auditory Re-Turn (The Point of Listening),” [in:] *Thresholds of Listening: Sound, Technics, Space*, ed. S. van Maas, Fordham University Press, New York 2015, pp. 18–29.

and informative collection of contemporary listening and sound studies from different angles of interest. Salomé Voegelin has contributed to the understanding of the listening phenomenon from the standpoint of sound art,¹⁵ paying a great deal of attention to listening to noise and silence as well as promoting the notion of sonic sensibility.¹⁶

In the context of musical experience, Jean-Luc Nancy, in turn, emphasizes the relationship between listening and feeling by juxtaposing the Italian music markings *ascoltando* and *sentendo*. “[T]o hear the score that is written so as to understand it, to examine it or *auscultate* it, taste it, then while playing it not stop listening and experiencing the music that resounds – one could say *sentire* or feel it [...]”¹⁷ According to Nancy, in any phenomenon of sensibility there is “the element of a formative repeat [*renvoi constitutive*], a resonance or a reverberation, a return to itself by which alone the ‘self’ in question can take place. [...] There is no subject that is not a sentient subject.”¹⁸ The subject is constituted by recursion (a loop) – the “self” is “a retour, a reminder, a relationship, a transfer, [...] an original, generative repetition [...]”¹⁹ Such a description has some musical components and allows us to recognize the musical in the human-subject. According to Nancy, “the subject who is constituted in resonance, the listening-subject, is nothing else, or is no one else, but the music itself, more precisely nothing else but the musical work” that consists in the referral to itself and sending itself away to the outside.²⁰ Nancy also analyzes listening to itself in the context of narcissism,²¹ which appears to be extremely important in our more and more narcissistic culture.

Peter Szendy in the book *Écoute. Une histoire de nos oreilles* focuses on the role of the listener (*le sujet-oeuvre*) in music, so listening is

¹⁵ S. Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Continuum, New York 2010.

¹⁶ S. Voegelin underlines the need for a change of position while hearing sounds: “Hearing does not offer a meta-position; there is no place where I am not simultaneous with the heard. However far its source, the sound sits in my ear. I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in its auditory object, which is not its source but sound as sound itself.” She argues that “a philosophy of sound art must have at its core the principle of sharing time and space with the object or event under consideration. It is a philosophical project that necessitates an involved participation, rather than enables a detached viewing position; and the object or event under consideration is by necessity considered not as an artefact but in its dynamic production” (*Listening to Noise and Silence*, p. xii).

¹⁷ J.-L. Nancy, “Ascoltando,” [in:] P. Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, transl. Ch. Mandell, Fordham University Press, New York 2008, p. ix.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. ix–x.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. x.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

interpreted in this context. Szendy asks what is the responsibility of the listener (and his rights) in the context of the listening to music. Szendy also notices the change in listening (from a passive to a more active one) thanks to technological development allowing one to listen more selectively and according to the listener's preferences in the very moment of listening to music from the electronic device. More generally, Szendy represents the critical approach of viewing listening as a tolerated thief and a constant exposure of our ears to the ears of the other which already haunts our ears. Moreover, the act of listening entails domination and power. Szendy is also interested in the overhearing phenomenon.

This French philosopher and musicologist states:

whereas the activity of the sense that is sight can take itself as object, whereas one can look at someone looking (another person or oneself in a mirror), in short, whereas sight can thus be *reflexive* or *reflective*, it seems impossible to listen to someone listening. [...] Listening as such is thus *silent*, it cannot be heard.²²

Listening (*écouter*) is not the same as hearing (*entendre*), because of an intentionality that is involved in listening. Szendy approaches the question of the reflexivity of listening (hear hearing, listen to listening) by shedding some light on the issue of the *responsibility of listening* and its *plasticity*.²³ “*To listen to oneself listening* (if that were possible) would in fact be the first condition required to open something like a critical listening.”²⁴ However, Szendy wonders whether the kind of listening, which means to “fold listening onto itself and onto oneself,” does not imply becoming deaf, that is to stop hearing totally.²⁵ Szendy continues:

It is, in any case, this improbable reflexivity that dogs my listening, that holds it in its attention. The listener I am is nothing, does not exist so long as you are not there. [...] The listener I am [*que je suis*] can happen only when I follow you [*je te suis*], when I pursue you. I could not listen without you, without this desire to listen to you listening to me, not being able, since I am unable to listen to me listening.²⁶

What summons us to listen is the work, and the work “is at work, only so long as it *is still yet to come*, only to the extent of this desire that it opens. The work is a work, that is to say an event or experience *to undergo*, only when, beyond itself and its boundaries, it *leaves something*

²² P. Szendy, *Listen*, p. 141.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

to be desired.”²⁷ Szendy states that work “*demands* our listening, it *summons* us to hear. But it asks us to hear it *plastically*, rather than according to one *type* of listening or another.”²⁸

Such a listener is a dissolute listener more than an expert who can listen in different typologies of listening. This dissolute listener “has above all espoused a form, a figure of listening.”²⁹ “We are not a community of listeners listening to one single object that joins us together, like that population with mute ears that Wagner seemed to dream of. We are an infinite addition of singularities that each wants to make itself heard hearing. Thus without any possible summing up. We do not listen *like one single body*: we are *two*, and (therefore) always one more.”³⁰

In “The Auditory Re-Turn” Szendy considers the effect of *egophony* by referring to listening as auscultation.³¹ He points out that his notion of overhearing relates to the aesthetics of spying. By this ascription, Szendy emphasizes “the active power of the ear, a power to which we are so oblivious today, since we conceive of hearing as a passive reception.”³²

To some extent Małgorzata Szyszkowska’s phenomenology of listening, based on the experience of listening to music,³³ can be placed in-between the musicologically philosophical investigations on listening conducted by Szendy, Nancy, as well as Schaeffer or Chion’s acousmatic listening, and more existential interpretations, such as the listening philosophy of Lisbeth Lipari. Szyszkowska introduces the notion of aspectual listening (Polish *aspektowe słuchanie*) and thinks of listening (*wsluchiwanie się*: listening-for) as a “*panaesthetical* category related to art in general.”³⁴ Dariusz Brzostek, in turn, speaks about an audioanthropology while discussing the listening experience and phenomenon as it appears in the context (and experience) of musical improvisation.³⁵

²⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 142–143.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 143.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ P. Szendy, “The Auditory Re-Turn,” pp. 19–21. In the article he refers to Nietzsche, Derrida and Heidegger, stemming from René Laënnec’s *Treatise on Mediate Auscultation* (1819) in which he pays his debt among others to Joseph Leopold Auenbrugger who invented a practice called “percussion.” “The physician, here, seems to be listening at the tip of his fingers.” It is a punctuation practice (P. Szendy, “The Auditory Re-Turn,” p. 21). Derrida criticized Heidegger’s ear for being monaural and in this way logocentric (pp. 27–28).

³² Ibid., p. 20.

³³ M. A. Szyszkowska, *Wsluchując się w muzykę. Studium z fenomenologii słuchania* [Listening to music: A study from the phenomenology of listening], Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, Warszawa 2017.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 276; unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Polish by M. P.

³⁵ D. Brzostek, *Nasłuchiwanie hałasu. Audioantropologia między ekspresją a doświadczeniem* [Listening for noise: Audioanthropology between expression and experience], Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2014.