

Chapter 1

In Praise of Sound

The beginning of man is in the midst of *word*.

And the center of word is in breath and sound, in listening and speaking. In the ancient mythologies the word for soul was often related to the word for breath. In the biblical myth of the creation, God breathes life into Adam, and that breath is both life and word.

Today mythical thought is still repeated in other ways. We know that we live immersed in a vast but invisible ocean of air that surrounds us and permeates us and without which our life must necessarily escape us. For even when we humans wander far from the surface of the earth to that of the moon or deep into the sea, we must take with us packaged envelopes of air that we inhale and exhale. But in the words about breath there lurk ancient significances by which we take in the haleness or health of the air that for the ancients was spirit. From breath and the submersion in air also comes *in-spire*, “to take in spirit,” and on a final *ex-halation* we ex-(s)pire, and the spirit leaves us without life. Thus still with us, hidden in our language, is something of the ontology of Anaximenes who, concerning the air, thought, “As our souls, being air, hold us together, so breath and air embrace the entire universe.”¹

But the air that is breathed is not neutral or lifeless, for it has its life in *sound* and *voice*. Its sound ranges from the barely or not-at-all noticed background of our own breathing to the noises of the world and the singing of word and song among humans. The silence of the invisible comes to life in

sound. For the human listener there is a multiplicity of senses in which *there is word in the wind*.

From a thoroughly contemporary source the importance of soundful significance may be discerned today as well. This new interest arises from various fronts of the contemporary sciences and philosophies. In philosophy there can be no doubt that questions of language and speech have been of great if not dominant importance in current philosophy. If, on the one side, that interest has been primarily in logic and syntax, as is the case with the Anglo-American philosophies, and, on the other side, the interest has been the birth of meaning in speech in Continental thought, the question of word has been a central concern of the twentieth century. There has also arisen and flourished a whole series of linguistic sciences that relate to the question of word: phonetics, semiology, structural and generative linguistics, and the diverse schools of semantics.

Yet after the critical thinker has studied and read through these disciplines with their admittedly brilliant advances, there can remain a doubt that everything essential has been noted. For there appears in the very proliferation of disciplines addressed to the question of word a division that leaves word disincarnate. On the one side, are the disciplines that address the structure, the form, the mechanics of language. Its surface and depth rules that produce significances are conceived of almost without the sense of enactment by a speaker in what may be termed a "mechanics of language." The philosopher, concerned with comprehensiveness, must eventually call for attention to the *word as soundful*. On the other side, the sciences that attend to the soundful, from phonetics to acoustics, do so as if the sound were bare and empty of significance in a physics of the soundful. And the philosopher, concerned with the roots of reflection in human experience, must eventually also listen to the *sounds as meaningful*.

There is a third source of the contemporary interest in sound and listening which, while so familiar as to be taken for granted, includes within it a subtle and profound transformation of experience itself as our capacities for listening are changed by technological culture. Its roots lie in the birth of the electronic communications revolution. Through this revolution we have learned to listen farther than any previous human generation. The telephone, the radio, and even the radio telescope have extended the range of our hearing as never before. It has also made technologically produced sound pervasive, as the Beatles and Beethoven alike blare forth from the living-room stereo.

But above all, the electronic communications revolution has made us aware that once silent realms are in fact realms of sound and noise. The ocean now resounds with whale songs and shrimp percussion made possi-

ble by the extension of listening through electronic amplification. The distant stars, which perhaps are not so thoroughly in a “harmony of the spheres” of the Pythagoreans, nevertheless sputter in the static of radio-astronomy. In our urban environments noise pollution threatens the peace of mind that we now wishfully dream of in terms of quieter eras.

It is not merely that the world has suddenly become noisier, or that we can hear farther, or even that sound is somehow demandingly pervasive in a technological culture. It is rather that by living with electronic instruments our experience of listening itself is being transformed, and included in this transformation are the ideas we have about the world and ourselves.

If we grant that the origins of science lie with the Greeks, aided by the sense of mastery implied in the human role of cocreator with the Hebrew God, there remains a distinct distance from both Greek science and Hebrew theology in the rise of technology. Contemporary science is *experienced* as embodied in and through instruments. Instruments are the “body” that extends and transforms the perceptions of the users of the instruments. This phenomenon may be considered apart from the usual considerations of the logic of the sciences, of the inner language of science in mathematics, and it may be investigated in terms of the experience through technology of the worlds, others, and myself.²

What is of special interest to the thoughtful listener is then the way instruments, particularly those of the electronic era, introduce ways of listening not previously available. If one playfully turns to a speculative consideration of the role of instrumentation as a means of embodied experience in relation to the rise of modern science, a hypothesis suggests itself. Whether by historical accident or a long-held and traditional preoccupation with vision, the new scientific *view* of the world began with equally new instrumental contexts made possible by the emerging technologies of lens grinding and a concern with optics. Galileo’s moons, never before seen, are *experienced through* the embodying and extending instrument of the telescope. The universe comes into view, is *observed* in its ever-extending macrocosm, through the instrument. It does not make any essential difference in the phenomenon of the transformed experience whether the discovery follows and confirms a speculation or initiates and inaugurates a new view of things. In either case what was previously unseen occurs within experience itself. The same occurs under the gaze of the microscope. A mini-world never before seen even if its existence had been suspected unfolds with a wealth and richness of animals, plants, cells, and microbes not dreamed of in the theoretical imagination that preceded the perception. Thus with increasingly passionate excitement humankind became more and more entranced with this extension of its vision.

Subtly, however, the extension of vision not only transformed but *reduced* humankind's experience of its newly found domains. For the picture of the world that began to unfold through the new instrumentation was essentially a *silent* world. The macrocosmic explosions of the stars and the microcosmic noise of insects and even of cells had not yet reached the human ear. If today we know that this silence was not a part of the extended but reduced world of early modern science, it is in part due to the later development of another means of embodiment through electronic instruments. What was first seen was later given *voice*.

In the gap between optics and electronics in this speculation, the sense of the world moved from the once silent Galilean and Newtonian universe to the noisy and demanding universe of today. But almost by rebound the intrusion of sound perhaps reveals something about our previous way of thinking, a thinking that was a viewing, a *worldview*. We have discovered a latent, presupposed, and dominant visualism to our understanding of experience. If on the popular front it has taken those concerned with media, such as Marshall McLuhan and Walter J. Ong, to point this out for contemporary consciousness, it is because this visualism has long been there for us to see had we but the reflective power to discern it.

This visualism may be taken as a symptomatology of the history of thought. The use and often metaphorical development of vision becomes a variable that can be traced through various periods and high points of intellectual history to show how thinking under the influence of this variable takes shape.

The visualism that has dominated our thinking about reality and experience, however, is not something intrinsically simple. As a tradition it contains at least two interwoven factors. The first is more ancient and may be thought of as an implicit *reduction to vision* whose roots stem from the classic period of Greek philosophical thought. Its source lies not so much in a purposeful reduction of experience to the visual as in the glory of vision that already lay at the center of the Greek experience of reality.

In contemporary philosophy it has been Martin Heidegger who has made us most aware of the deeper roots of the vision of the Greeks. Through his radical analysis of the question of Being, Greek thinking itself emerges as the process of allowing Being to "show forth" as the "shining" of *physis*, of the "manifestation" of Being as a "clearing," all of which recalls the vibrant *vision* of Being. Heidegger is not alone in this recognition of the intimacy between vision and the ultimately real for Greek thought. Theodor Thass-Thienemann notes, "The Greek thinking was conceived in the world of light, in the Apollonian visual world . . . The Greek language expresses this identification of 'seeing' and 'knowing' by a verb which means in the

present *eidomai*, 'appear,' 'shine,' and in the past *oida*, 'I know,' properly, 'I saw.' Thus the Greek 'knows' what he has 'seen.'"³ Even the Greek verb meaning "to live" is synonymous with "to behold light."⁴ Before philosophy and deep in the past of Greek experience the world is one of vision. In this sense visualism is as old as our own cultural heritage.

But with the development of philosophy, more with its *establishment* in the Academy and the Lyceum, the preference for vision expressed in the wider culture begins to become more explicit. Visualism arises with a gradual distinguishing of the senses. One of the earliest examples lies in the enigmatic claim of Heraclitus that "eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears."⁵ Not being given a context for the fragment, it is of course quite difficult to discern what Heraclitus meant. He could have meant that to see something happen in the flesh is more accurate than to hear of it through gossip. But even if this is not what he had in mind, the relation of sight and accuracy already appears to be established. Experientially it is not at all obvious that eyes are more discriminating than ears.

Even the ordinary listener performs countless auditory tasks that call for great accuracy and discrimination. In physical terms the mosquito buzzing outside the window produces only one-quadrillionth of a watt of power; yet one hears it with annoyance, even if one can't see it. And the moment trained listening is considered, feats of discrimination become more impressive. The expert auto mechanic can often detect the difficulties in an engine by sound, although when it has been taken apart the play in the bearings may be difficult to see. And in the paradigm of disciplined listening, the musician demonstrates feats of hearing that call for minute accuracy. The listener to the subtlety of Indian music with its multiple microtones discovers an order of extremely fine auditory embroidery.

But whether or not Heraclitus stated a preference for vision which may already conceal a latent inattentiveness to listening, Aristotle, at the peak of academic philosophy, notes, "Above all we value sight . . . because *sight is the principle source of knowledge* and reveals many differences between one object and another."⁶ Here is a clearer example of a preference for vision and emerging distinctions among the senses.

Several features of this text stand out. First, it is clear that Aristotle notes that the valuation of sight is already something common, taken for granted, a tradition already established. Second, there is again the association of sight with differences and distinctions that may be the clue to a latent inattentiveness to listening. But, third and most important, the main thrust of Aristotle's visualism lies in the relation between sight and *objects*. The preference for vision is tied to a metaphysics of objects. Vision already is on the way to being the "objective" sense.

Once attention to the latent visualist tradition of philosophy is made concerning the intimate relation between light imagery and knowledge, a flood of examples comes to mind. For visualism in this sense retains its force in English and in most related Indo-European languages. Only the briefest survey shows the presence of visual metaphors and meanings. When one solves a problem he has had the requisite *insight*. Reason is the *inner light*. There is a *mind's "eye."* We are *enlightened* when informed by an answer. Even the lightbulb going on in a cloud over the cartoon character's head continues the linkage of thought with vision.

Less obvious but equally pervasive are the terms which, while they have lost the immediacy of light imagery, retain it at the root meaning. "Intuition" comes from the Latin *in-tueri*, "to look at something." Even "perceive" is often implicitly restricted to a visual meaning. Vision becomes the root metaphor for thought, the paradigm that dominates our understanding of thinking in a reduction to vision.

Philosophy and its natural children, the sciences, have often blindly accepted this visualism and taken it for granted. It is not that this tradition has been unproductive: the praise of sight has indeed had a rich and varied history. The rationality of the West owes much to the *clarity* of its vision. But the simple preference for sight may also become, in its very richness, a source of the relative inattentiveness to the global fullness of experience and, in this case, to the equal richness of listening.

Even within the dominant traditions there have been warnings in the form of minority voices. Empedocles called for a democracy of the senses.

Come now, with all your powers discern how each thing manifests itself, trusting no more to sight than to hearing, and no more to the echoing ear than to the tongue's taste; rejecting none of the body's parts that might be a means to knowledge, but attending to each particular manifestation.⁷

And from the very earliest stratum of Greek philosophical thought Xenophanes voiced the note that experience in its deepest form is global: "It is the whole that sees, the whole that thinks, the whole that hears."⁸

Were, then, the dominant visualism which has accompanied the history of thought a mere inattention to listening, the praise of sound which may begin in its own way in the twentieth century would be but a corrective addition to the richness of philosophical vision. And that itself would be a worthwhile task. But the latent reduction *to* vision became complicated within the history of thought by a second reduction, a reduction *of* vision.

The roots of the second reduction lie almost indiscernibly intertwined with those arising from the preference for vision; the reduction *of* vision is

one which ultimately separates sense from significance, which arises out of doubt over perception itself. Its retrospective result, however, is to diminish the richness of every sense.

For the second reduction to occur there must be a division of experience itself. This division was anticipated by two of the Greeks, Plato and Democritus, who were opposed in substance but united formally in the origin of Western metaphysics. For both, the ultimately real was beyond sense, and thus for both, sense was diminished. Both “invented” metaphysics.

This invention was the invention of a perspective, a perspective which was ultimately *imaginative*, but which in its self-understanding was the creation of a “theoretical attitude,” a stance in which a constructed or hypothesized entity *apart from all perceptual experience* begins to assume the value of the ultimately “real.” With Democritus the occasion for the invention of metaphysics came with the idea of the *atom*. The atom is a thing reduced to an *object*. Rather than a thing that shows itself within experience in all its richness, the atom is an object which has ‘primary’ qualities to which are added as effects ‘secondary’ qualities that are ‘caused by’ the primary qualities. Thus, too, *is explanation* born. The task of metaphysics is to “explain” how the division it introduces into the thing is overcome by a theory of complex relations between the ‘primary’ and the ‘secondary’ qualities.

Democritus’s atoms are no longer things, they are “objects” which, while they may *seem* to possess the richness of things, at base are “known” to be poorer than things. Democritus’s atoms, according to Aristotle, possess only *shape, inclination* (direction of turning), and *arrangement*. But note what has happened to sense: “visually” the atoms are “really” colorless, and insofar as they are colorless in “reality” they are “beyond” sense *in principle*. This is a leap which propels Democritus onto a path prepared for but never taken by his predecessors. Anaxagoras’s “seeds,” which were the predecessors of atoms, were *in practice* invisible, because they were too small for our eyes to see. What was lacking was a means of bringing them into view. But even though our powers are limited, for Anaxagoras “appearances are a glimpse of the unseen.”⁹

But with the Democritean atom which is *essentially* colorless, what sense “gives” is placed under an ultimate suspicion. For Democritus it is “by convention that color exists, by convention sweet, by convention bitter.” Knowledge is divided into sense, and what is not yet named but which is essentially different from sense. “Of knowledge there are two types: the one genuine, the other obscure. Obscure knowledge includes everything that is given by sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch; whereas genuine knowledge is something quite distinct from this.”¹⁰ This momentous turning was not taken without some doubt. Democritus heard this doubt in a voice given to

the senses, "Ah, wretched intellect, you get your evidence only as we give it to you, and yet you try to overthrow us. That overthrow will be your downfall."¹¹ Nor is it ever clear that the "overthrow" succeeded completely. Even the atom retained one, though diminished, *visual* attribute in its *shape*. The preliminary result of the "invention" of metaphysics was the diminution of vision in its essential possibilities.

Plato in his own way made the same "invention." But Plato's version of the "invention" of metaphysics was, if anything, more complete than Democritus's. If Democritus's atoms retained one visible predicate, Plato's ultimate "reality," the Idea of the Good, in itself contained none but was presumably known only to the mind or intelligence. There does remain an *analogy* with the sensible, and that analogy is again visual. The Idea of the Good is "like" the sun in the visible realm. "It was the Sun, then, that I meant when I spoke of that offspring which the Good has created in the visible world, to stand there in the same relation to vision and visible things as that which the Good itself bears in the intelligible world to intelligence and intelligible objects."¹² But Plato steadfastly maintained that this was merely an analogy: "light and vision were thought to be as like the Sun, but not identical with it . . . to identify either with the Good is wrong,"¹³ because the distinction between the visible or sensible and the intelligible that founds the doctrine of forms of Ideas has already separated sense from reason. The sensible realm in its "likeness" or analogy to the purely intelligible realm of the Ideas becomes a "representation" that indicates what cannot be sensed. In the notion of imitation, mimesis, and representation lies the direction that is counter to that of the polymorphic embodiments of experience, and lays the antique basis for the more modern forms of the dualism of experience that pervade the contemporary era. The ancient sources of the double reduction of experience in visualism did not become clear or mature until the opening of the modern era. Modern visualism as a compounded reduction of experience is clearly notable in the work of Descartes where both the Democritean and Platonic anticipations meet to form the basis of modern visualism. Descartes unites and preserves the ambiguities of the diminution of the senses in his praise of the *geometrical method*. For Descartes the light and visual imagery has become metaphorical in a rather perfunctory sense: "Having now ascertained certain principles of material things, which were sought, not by the prejudices of the senses, but by the *light* of reason, and which thus possess so great evidence that we cannot doubt their truth, it remains for us to consider whether from these *alone* we can deduce the explication of all the phenomena of nature."¹⁴ Thus in the rise of modern metaphysics there is retained the echo of a distrust of the senses and a corresponding faith in reason as an invisible, imperceptible realm of truth.

With Descartes the progression of the diminution of sense continues, and the object is now reduced to its geometric attributes: he further reduces the Democritean atom. "The nature of the body consists not in weight, hardness, colour and the like, but in extension alone it is in its being a substance extended in length, breadth, and depth."¹⁵ Here the Democritean anticipations of a doctrine of "primary" and "secondary" qualities take the form of being defined in geometric terms. Extension is "primary" and all other qualities are "secondary" or derived.

But Descartes repeats the Democritean ambiguity. While claiming that "*by our senses* we know nothing of external objects beyond their figure, magnitude, and motion,"¹⁶ his ultimate aim is a total denial of sense.

But, since I assign determinate figures, magnitudes, and motions to the insensible particles of bodies, *as if I had seen them*, whereas I admit that they do not fall under the senses, some one will perhaps demand how I have come by my knowledge of them. To this I reply, that I first considered . . . all the clear and distinct notions of material things that are to be found in our *understanding* . . . which rules are the principles of geometry and mechanics, I judged that all the knowledge man can have of nature must of necessity be drawn from this source.¹⁷

In spite of this extrapolated claim the now geometrically reduced object even at its insensible level retains certain "abstract" visual properties. However, the "real" object is now thought to be a bare and reduced object distinctly different from the rich thing found in experience.

What Descartes accomplishes, here using what happens to vision as a symptom for what happens to experience overall, is a division of experience into two realms so that one region of experience is made to rule over all others. The reduced abstract object (extended object) becomes "objective" and its appearance within perceptual experience with the significant exception of those ghostly remaining visual qualities becomes "subjective." Simultaneously reason, understanding, the geometrical deductive process, become disembodied as "pure" acts of mind.

Descartes's counterpart, John Locke, disagreed that the source of clear and distinct ideas was the understanding—it was rather experience—but in formulating the grounds of empiricism Locke preserved the ancient distrust of perception in a new way. Seeming to take seriously and to take account of sense experience, Locke ended by reducing it to a sense automatism that again separated knowledge from things.

Locke, as did Descartes, perfunctorily maintained the metaphor between seeing and understanding. "The understanding, like the eye, whilst

it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance, and to make it its own object.”¹⁸ But in Locke’s case, if the metaphor was to be extended, it was not the eye but an outside influence which provided its own objects. Thus the classical empiricist thesis:

Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it to be that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word, from EXPERIENCE.¹⁹

The door is opened in this thesis to things and the richness of experience, but Locke so quickly borrowed from Descartes the notion of clear and simple ideas that mundane experience was immediately bypassed for what became empiricist atomism. Locke believed, in an echo of the analytic and geometric prejudice, that what was primitive in experience had to be the simple, and thus the simple and already analyzed idea was in effect the object that was immediately before the mind in experience, “that term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when man thinks.”²⁰ But such simples are better called *concepts* than perceptions, whereas perception for empiricism becomes the result of an unfelt and unexperienced pointillism of abstract qualities.

Locke paused only briefly before the things. “Though the qualities that affect our senses are, in the things themselves, so united and blended that there is no separation, no distance between them,”²¹ he did not hesitate to immediately conclude that “yet it is plain the ideas they produce in the mind enter by the senses *simple* and *unmixed*.”²² These ideas, which are simple and unmixed, are the “atoms” of sensory qualities, “abstract” qualities apart from any thing. “Thus we come by those *ideas* we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities.”²³ That no one has ever perceived a disembodied white did not seem to trouble Locke, and the empiricist tradition to this day debates the way we build up objects, and things from these simple ideas become “sense data.”

Nor is this the end of the Lockean version of the reduction of the thing. Locke specifically enunciated the previously implicit doctrine of primary and secondary qualities, that is, of the various atoms of qualities some are privileged and others are mere effects of the privileged qualities.

Primary qualities were thought by Locke to be qualities *of* the material object (the reduced object). “Qualities thus considered in bodies are. First,

such as are utterly inseparable from the body in what estate soever it be.”²⁴ And these qualities remain cartesian and visual, although they are more complex than those allowed by Descartes (and allowing one quality which Locke thought belonged to *tactile* perception as well): “These I call *original* or *primary qualities* of body, which I think we may observe to produce simple ideas in us, viz. solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number.”²⁵ Secondary qualities are those “which in truth are not in the object themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities.”²⁶ Thus Locke repeated in essential outline the metaphysical division of the thing that results in its reduction.

This division was already enough to establish the need for empiricism to face the problem of how the thing is built up from its simple atoms, but a second dimension to the division was also affirmed by Locke, the atomism of the senses. It is quite clear that in his interpretation of the already extant tradition of five senses, the senses had now become more “clear and distinct” so that some qualities enter experience from one sense only, and others enter from the other senses. Thus the thing remains, in itself, an object of primarily visual—spatial attributes to which in the mystery of experience are “added” the various simple and “subjective” ideas of other qualities. Both the thing and experience remain under the limitation of the double reduction.

This progressive march of reductionism in philosophy is more than a mere visualism which stands as its symptom. It is a tendency which lies more deeply in a certain self-understanding of philosophy. On a surface level, and again symptomatically, a visualism can be called into question by pointing up consequences that lead to the inattention to important dimensions of experience in other areas, here, in particular in an inattention to listening. Not only are sounds, in the metaphysical tradition, secondary, but the inattention to the sounding of things has led to the gradual loss of understanding whole ranges of phenomena that are there to be noted.

What is being called visualism here as a symptom is the whole reductionist tendency, which in seeking to purify experiences belies its richness at the source. A turn to the *auditory dimension* is thus potentially more than a simple changing of variables. It begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional double reduction of vision as the main variable and metaphor. This deliberate change of emphasis from the visual to the auditory dimension at first symbolizes a hope to find material for a recovery of the richness of primary experience that is now forgotten or covered over in the too tightly interpreted visualist traditions.

It might even be preliminarily suspected that precisely some of the range of phenomena at present most difficult for a visualist tradition might

yield more readily to an attention that is more concerned with listening. For example, symbolically, it is the *invisible* that poses a series of almost insurmountable problems for much contemporary philosophy. “Other minds” or persons who fail to disclose themselves in their “inner” invisibility; the “Gods” who remain hidden; my own “self,” which constantly eludes a simple visual appearance; the whole realm of spoken and heard language must remain unsolvable so long as our seeing is not also a listening. *It is to the invisible that listening may attend.*

If these are some of the hopes of a philosophy of listening and voice, there remains within philosophy a strong resistance to such a task. For philosophy has not only indicated a preference for the visual and then reduced its vision from the glowing, shining presence of *physis* to its present status as the seeing of surfaces as combinations of atomized qualities, but it has harbored from its classic times a suspicion of the *voice*, particularly the sonorous voice. Although there may be a certain touch of irony in the *Republic* of Plato (who could be a more subtle rhetorician than Socrates?), the intimation of danger in poetry, dramatic recitation, and even in certain music remains. There is in philosophy a secret tendency toward a morality of sparseness, which today is typified by a preference for desert landscapes. Socrates noted, “It strikes me, said I, that without noticing it, we have been purging our commonwealth of that luxurious excess we said it suffered from.”²⁷

In the wider Greek culture, however, the Apollonian love of light was balanced by the Marsyasian love of sound. The tragedies spoke in sonorous voices through the *persona*, or “masks,” which later are held to mean also *per-sona* or “by sound.” Nietzsche, who much later placed into a dialectic the Apollonian and the dark and furious Dionysian, affirmed that one must also accept a “god who dances” as well as the stability of Apollonian form. Yet in spite of the apparent domination of a new reduced Apollonian visualism, there is also another root of our Western culture that takes as primary a version of a “god who dances” with the movement and rhythm of sound.

That tradition is not that of philosophy but that of the Hebrew theology of the imagery of word and sound. The primary presence of the God of the West has been as the God of Word, YHWH. “And God *said*, let there be ———.” The creative power of the Hebrew God is *word*, which is spoken forth as power: *from word comes the world*. And although God may hide himself from the eyes, he reveals himself in word, which is also event in spite of the invisibility of his being. Human life, too, as the word-breath that unites the human with others and the gods is a life in sound. But if the world is devocalized, then what becomes of listening? Such has been a theological question that has also pervaded our culture.

A theology is not a philosophy, and what is needed is not a revival of theology, not even a secular theology. For so long as the gods remain silent—and if they are dead they have fallen into the ultimate silence—no amount of noise will revive them. But if they speak they will be heard only by ears attuned to full listening. For what is needed is a *philosophy* of listening. But is this a possibility? If philosophy has its very roots intertwined with a secret vision of Being that has resulted in the present state of visualism, can it listen with equal profundity? What is called for is an ontology of the auditory. And if any first expression is a “singing of the world,” as Merleau-Ponty puts it, then what begins here is a singing that begins in a turn to the auditory dimension.

But while such a symptomatology has its tactical uses, a deliberate de-centering of visualism in order to point up the overlooked and the unheard, its ultimate aim is not to replace vision as such with listening as such. Its more profound aim is to move from the present with all its taken-for-granted beliefs about vision and experience and step by step, to move toward a radically different understanding of experience, one which has its roots in a *phenomenology* of auditory experience.