

An Opening to Polyphony through Listening

“Listening and Polyphony: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Arts,” a special issue of *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, focuses on questions of listening and polyphony as unifying concepts to discover overlapping horizons between philosophical insights and aesthetical experience. Listening could be studied as an openness to others, a gesture, and an activity. With the mutual coexistence of one’s own and surrounding environments, polyphony provides new opportunities for transdisciplinarity, starting in philosophy, expanding through aesthetics and the arts, and insinuating into ethics, anthropology, and sociality.

Listening is an activity of the conscious auditory perception of sound stimuli. It is often marked by a touch of passivity, obedience, a state of subordination, and inferiority. However, on the other hand, it can be understood as a very active and intentional gesture of a subject who establishes a relationship with their environment through auditory perception. Listening includes a dual discourse: listening to oneself and listening to others, hearing one’s inner voice and the voice of the other, and listening to the world around us. In his echoing essay, *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) states that listening can be perceived as an opening to resonance, echoing, which simultaneously opens a person to oneself and another self while gaining and giving meaning. An opening in silence, where the ear stretches and its tension already carries its meaning, exposes the listener to sensual meaning and sense. Meaning(s) and sense(s) are co-created from listening to polyphony—being in the world is always polyphonic. The vibrations of polyphony keep meaning and sense dynamic, infinite, and intersubjective. Polyphony characterizes co-implications of multi-layered phenomena: literature, theatre, painting, or performance.

This issue of *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics* aims to deepen transdisciplinary approaches to listening and polyphony based on various disciplines like aesthetics, philosophy, ethics, and anthropology. It compiles both the findings of well-known philosophers and the philosophical reflections of recent

years, therefore confirming that a new field of philosophical thinking is emerging in the thematic coverage of listening and polyphony. As guest editors of this volume, we wanted to encourage researchers to seek original perspectives and offer resounding conceptualizations on listening and polyphony. We invited authors from various research areas to submit articles related to questions and aims such as exploring the importance of listening for the constitution of polyphonic surroundings, and thus provide new interpretations to humans and environments; observing how contemplative listening includes kinaesthetic perception and the experience of various elements (like the audible, visible, thinkable, et cetera) and how these elements manifest themselves in artworks and performances; addressing polyphony as a methodological tool that enables the opening up of the coexistence of different elements and that develops original artistic and philosophical interpretations; studying the “givenness” of polyphony and its immanent processes of perception, therefore leading to a more profound understanding of humanity, art, literature, society, nature, and the environment; examining the human voice and the sonority of language from philosophical, aesthetical, and anthropological approaches; investigating listening *qua* openness to others, as co-creation, and exploring polyphony as a mutual coexistence, or co-being; and finally, elaborating on listening in an ethical sense. As guest editors, we not only believe that the articles gathered in this issue address all these themes, but also, that they go beyond them and offer a transdisciplinary polylogue on the matters in question.

The idea to propose such a timely theme to *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics* grew out of the collaboration of guest editors in a shared bilateral research project (funded by the Slovenian Research Agency, ARRS) between the Science and Research Centre, Koper, Slovenia, and the University of Latvia, Riga,¹ focusing on exploring listening as a gesture and activity towards the sonority of the world, as well as exploring polyphony as “being in the world.” Commencing with the resonances of phenomenology, ethics, and musicology, this encounter of thoughts aimed to deepen the understanding of these notions, and designing a volume dedicated to them seemed a plausible option for disseminating our research and others’ through a transdisciplinary polylogue.

¹ This volume has been financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS), through the bilateral project *Listening and polyphony: echoes of phenomenology, ethics and anthropology* between the Science and Research Centre Koper and University of Latvia (BI-LV/20-22-006), as part of the research project *Surviving the Anthropocene through Inventing New Ecological Justice and Biosocial Philosophical Literacy* (J7-1824), implemented at ZRS Koper and AMEU-ECM.

The notions of listening and polyphony can be encountered in the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Phenomenological and hermeneutical aspects of the notions in question are addressed by the research of one of the guest editors, Ineta Kivle (2018), who explores polyphony as a methodological tool that opens the coexistence of different elements and gives an original interpretation of intersubjectivity. In the phenomenological tradition, there are, of course, different approaches to the study of polyphony. Roman Ingarden (1989), for example, investigates the ontological stratification of the polyphony of artwork and views the concretization of polyphony, in particular concerts and performances. His contribution to the development of the concept of polyphony is in the definition that polyphony includes several essential strata that simultaneously form the unity of the work of art. To identify polyphonic stratification of artworks, Ingarden employs the method of phenomenological reduction. Don Ihde (2007), another thinker from the tradition of phenomenology, opposes monophonic and polyphonic listening and binds them into perceptual and imaginative modes. The listener is primarily a “perceiver and receiver” in a monophonic situation. At the same time, polyphonic listening is formed by perception and imagination and is simultaneously directed to inner and outer speech, to sonority and silence, showing that polyphony comprises a full range of inner and outer experiences. In such a manner, Don Ihde develops a polyphony of experience that binds the human inner world with the surrounding environment.

Phenomenological listening contemplates such immanent processes as intentionality, direct experience, formation of meanings, sharing a common intersubjective world, etc. A phenomenologist of music, Joseph Smith, writes: “In seeking the full phenomenological spectrum we may have to do more than just *look* into things. We may have to *listen* to things” (Smith 1979, 28). Similarly, but more radically, Luce Irigaray (2008) proposes an inversion of the privilege of viewing over listening. Listening should be brought to the front, but not as listening to the absolute truth, but mainly as listening to the other and to the ways the truth of the other is being formed. The gesture of listening, which becomes an action through its repetition, can be revealed as fundamentally ethical and thus crucial for establishing intersubjective spaces for the emergence of mutual acceptance and affection. Listening can thus be understood as an “active action” directed towards the other, to whom, with this ethical gesture, one can offer attention and the opportunity to express themselves in their proper way. This aspect of listening is inherent to Lenart Škof’s ethics of care, in which, besides the elements of breath and silence, listening also has a central role:

Listening is unique among the elements of attentiveness: it is a part of a language, but also precedes language. It is active, but always already works in a milieu of attentiveness *qua* primordial passivity. It relates to hearing, but also works before there is anything to hear—as a mode of precognitive responsiveness-towards-other mode (Škof 2016, 906).

Listening as something preceding language is not only crucial for the realm of interhuman communication but also for the realm of interbeing on the level of the more-than-human world. Maja Bjelica (2021) explores listening as a possible path towards “letting things be,” concentrating on the possibility of including an awareness of the environment in our attentive listening. Recently, there has been a tendency to recognize listening as a vital attitude to cohabitating ethically in environmental studies, the humanities, and sound studies. One example of this is the recently published double issue of *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia*, entitled “A Sonic Anthropocene: Sound Practices in a Changing Environment,” where the editors and authors expose listening as allowing for “the emergence of ephemeral acoustic communities in which different sensibilities merge in an intersubjective space of fruition” (Louro *et al.* 2021, 11), which in our case, can be understood as a polyphony as well. This step towards environmental awareness is supported by understanding being in the world as always and already polyphonic, an idea that can be recognized through the ethics of listening.

Lisbeth Lipari (2014) argues that ethics is formed by listening that is committed to accepting difference. The author calls it “listening otherwise.” It is a listening that is purposefully dedicated to the unknown, the misunderstood, the foreign. The listening subject is constituted intersubjectively through listening and the listened to; therefore, the subjects encountered in listening are co-constituted. Listening can be understood as “the invention of sound,” as a “generative process that does not recognize or receive but creates the heard from what is there and even from what remains unheard,” as proposed by Salomé Voegelin (2019, 47). Her understanding of listening as a possibility of a shared experience allows to rethink the subject’s responsibility and their singularity. Accordingly, “the invention of listening is an inter-invention,” in-betweenness, co-relationality, going beyond the anthropocentric position. This kind of understanding can also be related to describing listening as fundamental for human listeners’ relations towards their environments and nature, which by listening, after all, co-creates them and simultaneously allows them *to be*.

The volume on Listening and Polyphony opens with a reflective essay by Salomé Voegelin and Mark Peter Wright. The authors present their co-convened project, *Points of Listening*, which takes the shape of a series of workshops and discussions experienced through collective, communal, and participative dimensions. Their research background allowed the authors in the present paper to offer a deep insight into the experience of listening as a collaboration, understanding “knowing in listening as ‘paying attention to and with.’” They point out that they are not “concluding,” nor do they “theorize” upon this experience. However, they mainly suggest modes of experiencing it, being aware of its potential: “participative sonic knowledge (...) is able to hold inexhaustibility and inclusivity of sound as a currency of doing together, as a being-otherwise, that leads to a knowing-otherwise of a bondless community in its polyphonic potential.”

Maja Bjelica’s article is marked by a tentative approach to connecting the field of ethics with sound studies in the realm of environmental awareness. As an element of connection, the author chose the artistic, compositional, and performative practice of Deep Listening, which Pauline Oliveros introduced. This avant-garde musician inspired many artists to include the participatory dimension and aleatoric elements in their musical expression. Bjelica proposes Deep Listening as a mode of experiencing the environment, a mode of co-habitation in the more-than-human world, that can support the development of an ethics of listening in which environmental awareness can be brought to the front.

“Listening to the Unsaid: Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Human Voice” is an article by Piotr Sawczyński who takes us on a journey to the early writings of Agamben on the human voice and, among others, offers us a perspective on listening as a unifying experience beyond particular languages: “listening to others, no matter what language they speak, may only be a universalizing, community-building experience if we first realize that underneath the surface of semiotic and semantic distinctions there is always the common ground of our voice.”

Sergio J. Aguilar Alcalá offers another reverberation to the human approach to the voice through the story of Michael, the main character of the animated movie *Anomalisa*, directed by Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson. On the one hand, Aguilar Alcalá concentrates on the concept of voice through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis and discusses the voice as a superego on the other. Through the notions of subjectivity, embodiment, otherness, and the uncanny, the author shows that “the voice is the leftover of our process of symbolic adaptation. It is something found outside of our body and reveals, at the same time, something so intimate to us.”

Moving forward in the aesthetical realm, the reader of this volume encounters an account of polyphony in the visual arts, namely, an insight into the polyphonicity of the artistic expression of the Polish painter Piotr Jargusz, offered by the scholar Rafał Solewski. The author, engaging with the philosophical thoughts of Roman Ingarden and Władysław Stróżewski, presents his tale, i.e., the interpretation of Jargusz artistic practice, relating it to the Mythos of the knowledge of art, translating it into a description, analysis, interpretation, and critique of the work of art. In doing so, he identifies various planes of polyphonicity, such as the congruence of aesthetic moments, the synaesthetic transcendence of the boundaries among senses and their characteristics, the dialogue between the artist and the interpreter, and “a harmonious congruence of aesthetic moments both in Piotr Jargusz’s artistic practices and in the literarily valuable tale of the interpreter invited to participate in the work.”

From the visual arts, we are brought to music. Specifically, Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Art of Fugue* presented by parallelizing it to Martin Heidegger’s philosophy, his “juncture of being.” The author, Andrzej Krawiec, listens to the fugue through a phenomenological reduction and reveals its essence and the essence of being as the event. He brings to the fore polyphony, manifested in the many voices of the fugue, of which, despite being autonomous, the unity of their dialogue can be recognized. “This unifying and differentiating essence of fugue does not contradict the fact that individual voices enter the dispute among them, and thanks to this dispute, a particular way of Being essentially occurs and is disclosed by *Dasein*.”

With Alistair Macaulay’s paper, we remain in the field of musicology. The author presents how sounds became musical throughout the history of Western music through the process of artistic expression becoming autonomous. Macaulay analyzes this becoming through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical account of the history of music, or as the author calls it, their musical cosmogony, using their system of stratification and notions such as epistrata and parastrata, assemblage, territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization. The author demonstrates “that music is founded in and maintains links to social formations and cultural norms,” but it “also exceeds them, linking with other interstratic milieux and effecting a becoming.”

Another account of (musical) polyphony is offered by Kritika Tandon, who claims that “polyphony is the condition that makes a soundscape exist,” allowing for a multitude of voices to coexist. The author explores this reverberance through an analysis of timbre, which is usually considered an ele-

ment of identification and has an intrinsic aspect of difference, contradiction, and dialogue. Tandon engages with the thoughts of Don Ihde, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Roman Ingarden, and Mikhail Bakhtin to show that timbre is not a closed, determined quality but a more complex possibility. As this possibility, she turns our attention to darkness, to which one should listen to approach “what has not been achieved in thinking yet, without falling prey to the illumination of light as a conclusive plane for all there is.”

Raivis Bičevskis’ article “Paradoxical Monotony” introduces us to the thought of Georg Hamann, an Enlightenment-era thinker and a contemporary of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder. The article deals with Hamann’s text “Aesthetica in nuce” from 1762, in which Latvian folk songs are discussed in their meter and tonality. Bičevskis identifies Hamann’s critical concept of monotony to be paradoxical, being in a way grounded in the world’s polyphony, as he argues that “the unity of the world is linked to the diversity of the world’s sounds and colors, languages, and times: *the world itself is a paradoxical monotony*.” The article also guides us towards listening to nature since the experience of the speaking of nature was lost in the era of scientific objectivations of nature and our surroundings. In this, a fascinating link to the linguist Johann Georg Wachter (1663-1757) is made in which it is argued that we need to return to the language of nature, the nature that speaks sensuously.

The volume is rounded up by an article by Anne Sauka, who introduces the timely notion of *tuning into* as an experiential, embodied reflection of one’s enfleshment. Sauka takes us on a journey that offers insight into the possibility of understanding the body-environment bond as preceding to the conscious differentiation of the I from the environment. She does this through the conceptual and methodological grounds of new materialism, processual ontologies, embodied critical thinking and thinking at the edge. The author presents listening “both metaphorically and literally as *tuning into* the rhythms of the embedded enfleshment and *tuning into* the environmental embeddedness amid which the self is in perpetual *becoming*.” Sauka advocates the turn towards sensing and experiencing, and she does so through her method of *instancing* that allows recognizing the universal in the personal.

Anne Sauka’s thought-provoking paper on *tuning into* the body-environment beautifully winds up the accounts of listening and polyphony in this issue because it appeals to readers to turn to listening not only with the aim to recognize the world’s polyphonies but also to replace the tendency of

inspecting them, moving towards an encounter with the world beyond the ocularcentric paradigm, which in a way is also the path the other papers are encouraging towards, taking listening as cohabitation. Starting with the presentation of the embodied experience of *Points of Listening* by Salomé Voegelin and Mark Peter Wright, followed by an account of Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening by Maja Bjelica, we are already in the realm of *tuning into* the environment, the more-than-human world's polyphonies collectively, through the artistic practices of attentive listening, allowing for enfolded (mutual) awareness. The following two articles by Piotr Sawczyński and Sergio J. Aguilar Alcalá concerning the (human) voice expose a specifically embodied polyphony that we encounter and experience every day. This is the case also with the succeeding accounts that are mainly grounded in aesthetics. However, the transdisciplinary intertwinement with various fields of philosophy and arts presents a variety of modes as instances of polyphony: Piotr Jargusz's artistic practices contemplated by Rafał Solewski, J. S. Bach's *Art of Fugue* extended by Andrzej Krawiec, musicality throughout the history of Western music by Alistair Macaulay, the specificity and potentiality of (musical) timbre by Kritika Tandon, and the polyphonic relationality present in Latvian folklore reflecting the natural environment by Raivis Bičevskis. In one way or another, all of these contributions combine theoretical and practical approaches to research that furnish us with a variety of possible experiential approaches to listening to various polyphonies as possible embodied encounters. As editors, we firmly believe that these articles can offer inspiration for further widening and opening the reflection on listening and polyphony.

We want to conclude these opening lines by expressing sincere gratitude to the editorial board of *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, who welcomed our theme "Listening and Polyphony: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Arts" and allowed us to present it to the journal's readers. We are especially indebted to the deputy editor Natalia Anna Michna, whose invaluable support was crucial for an untroubled editorial process, and the associate editors Adrian Mróz and Marcin Lubecki for their precious help in finalizing the volume. Moreover, we extend our gratitude to all anonymous reviewers who significantly improved the texts presented in this volume. Foremost, we would like to thank all contributing authors, who, with their thoughtful insights, patience, and responsiveness, proved to be attentive listeners to the polyphonies in academic writing. With your presence, this editorial process was an excellent opportunity to develop a collaborative practice that hopefully will result in an ongoing debate on these critical themes. Last, but not least, we would

like to thank you, readers, for your attention and dedication, hoping that you will also engage in disseminating our work through a continuation of reflecting and debating on listening and polyphony.

Maja Bjelica, Ineta Kivle, and Lenart Škof

Bibliography

1. Bjelica Maja (2021), "Listening: An Interdisciplinary Path towards Letting Things Be", *Horizon: Studies in Phenomenology*, 10 (1), pp. 212-231.
2. Ihde Don (2007), *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, State University of New York: Albany.
3. Ingarden Roman (1989), *Ontology of the Work of Art: The Musical Work; The Picture; The Architectural Work; The Film*, Ohio University Press: Athens.
4. Irigaray Luce (2008a), "Listening, Thinking, Teaching", [in:], L. Irigaray and M. Green (eds.), *Teaching*, Continuum: London, pp. 231-240.
5. Kivle Ineta (2018), "Auditory Phenomena and Human Life: Phenomenological Experience", [in:] W. S. Smith *et al.* (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Life, Human Life, Post-Human Life in the Harmony of the Cosmos*, Springer: Cham, pp. 367-373.
6. Lipari Lisbeth (2014), *Listening, Thinking, Being: Towards and Ethics of Attunement*, Pennsylvania University Press: University Park, Pennsylvania.
7. Louro Ivo *et al.* (2021), "A Sonic Anthropocene: Sound Practices in a Changing Environment", special issue of *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia*, 10 (1 & 2).
8. Nancy Jean-Luc (2007), *Listening*, trans. C. Mandell, Fordham University Press: New York.
9. Smith Joseph F. (1979), *Experiencing of Musical Sound: Prelude to a Phenomenology of Music*, Routledge: London.
10. Škof Lenart (2016), "Breath of Hospitality: Silence, Listening, Care", *Nursing Ethics*, 23 (8), pp. 902-909.
11. Voegelin Salomé (2019), *The Political Possibilities of Sound: Fragments of Listening*, Bloomsbury: New York and London.

